

# **The Mystery of Christ Revealed:**

## **The Key to Understanding Predestination**

**by George E. (Jed) Smock**

(Published on this Website by Permission of the Author)

Copyright 2000 by George E. (Jed) Smock, all rights reserved.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since my conversion to Christianity in 1972, I have been preaching the gospel to skeptical college students. Their skepticism is supported in the classroom where many anti-Christian professors emphasize the worst in Church history--the Crusades and the Inquisition--in order to discredit the church in particular and Christianity in general.

When I am defending the faith, sometimes, I am confronted by a student, who with a snide air of sophistication questions, "Do you believe in predestination?" He is not a truth seeker, but comes to me with the same spirit that the Pharisees confronted Jesus; the students intention is to confuse me and make me appear like their stereotype of the ignorant fundamentalist preacher. The arrogant scoffer has been fueled in the classroom, where the professor has chosen to stress predestination, one of the most controversial doctrinal disputes in Christian history, to make not only Christianity look bad, but to make God appear to be the worst imaginable tyrant. A crowd of 100 wait intently for my answer, because they have also been convinced that Christianity is a religion of fools. "Now let's watch the preacher squirm."

"Yes, I believe in predestination, but not according to the way that you have been taught or the definition of John Calvin, who believed that God predetermined before Creation that a certain number of individuals were predestined by God to eternal life, and the rest of humanity reprobated to eternal damnation. The Bible does teach that God always planned to have a people conformed to the image of Christ, but he did not chose which individuals would be a part of his Kingdom and which would be damned. If God has already determined certain individuals for

Heaven and others for Hell, then he would be unjust and my preaching would be in vain. Nor do I believe that history is fixed, or inevitably set by God, like the fatalism of Islam. God is not the author of evil."

Typically, this answer surprises and silences the students. Had I answered yes without an explanation, they would have attacked the justice of the God whom I profess to serve. Had I answered no, they would have accused me of not believing the Bible. Unfortunately, Calvin's understanding of predestination is the only definition with which most students are familiar. Some of their professors may have been intellectually honest enough to have taught James Arminius' view of predestination, who taught that God's choice of salvation or damnation is based on God foreseeing who would or would not respond to the gospel. Even the Arminian view of predestination creates a problem, which is explaining how God could foreknow man's response without it being predetermined.

Perhaps, I should not be too hard on these professors, because it is a fact that at certain times in Christian history the Calvinists' view has been the predominate teaching within the Church. However, there are so many other doctrines like, "love your neighbor," that they could choose to teach if they were inclined to put the Church and its divine Founder in a favorable light. Professors, who endlessly dwell on the Crusades and Inquisition, refuse to acknowledge that most of the world's greatest universities, hospitals and charities were founded by the Church.

It is even more distressing that teaching on predestination, when addressed, within the Church is as bad, if not worse, than in academia. I say, when addressed, because in most churches today theological issues, especially controversial ones, tend to be ignored. The inclination is to "Just preach Jesus," and avoid doctrine as much as possible. Hence, church people are not challenged to think nor do they learn Christian history. Therefore, they are woefully unprepared to defend the faith in the academic setting among professors who love controversy and who claim to despise blind faith (however, usually only when the credulity is directed toward God). Hence, the need for a book on predestination which interprets the term in a Biblical context, in the historical setting of the Jew-Gentile conflict and in the light of God's ultimate plan in history.

Rightly understood, the term predestination should never have caused all the controversy that it has. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language destination means, "1. the place or point to which someone or something is going or directed. 2. The ultimate goal or purpose for which anything is created or intended." Pre simply means an earlier or prior time. It is better to break down the word in this manner when defining it because dictionaries tend to follow the theological definition of predestination as defined by the Calvinists. The term, by its connection with the word destiny, conveys an unfortunate implication, as if predestination had to do with fate.

The noun predestination is not found in the King James Bible. Indeed, one will read through the complete Old Testament, the Gospels, early church history as recorded in Acts before he encounters the verb predestinate referred to in Romans chapter 8:29-30 and there is no other reference to the term except in Ephesians 1:5,11.

Romans 8:29-30 reads: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Paul was not referring to particular individuals or a select number whom God willed to be eternally saved as the Calvinists teach, nor was he speaking of particular persons whom God foresaw would respond to the gospel as the Arminians teach. Paul was simply teaching that God knew long before the gospel was proclaimed to the nations of the world, that he was going to have a group of people (the Elect or the Church), who would be conformed to the image of his Son, that is he would have a people who were Christ-like in character.

Jesus was the first-born among many brethren, that is, believers who responded to the gospel from the many nations of the earth, not just Israel. The Gentiles coming into what Jesus called the Kingdom and what Paul called the Church was no accident of history, but was according to God's ages long plan and purpose, which was finally coming to fruition. God had from the beginning been determined to have a people, a corporate group, a family, after his moral likeness. He wills, "that none should perish," and will receive all who would meet the condition of an obedient faith. But most are not willing to be conformed to the character of Christ, so they are disqualified by their own choice, not according to some mysterious or hidden choice of God made in eternity past. God's decree has always been: "He that believeth shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned."

Look back at Roman 8:29-30 and notice the divine order: 1. He foreknew or knew before that he was going to have a people. But he did not choose particular individuals as both Arminians and Calvinists teach. Calvinists say that the choice was made in eternity past by an arbitrary will; Arminians teach that it was made based upon knowing which individuals would respond in faith. The fact is no individual was chosen at all for eternal life or damnation. This verse must be interpreted in the context of verse 28 where Paul referred to those who "love God who are the called according to his purpose." 2. He predestined, planned or purposed to have a people who would love him. 3. He called Israel in history, not in eternity past, to establish a nation. He called the many from all nations, not just the few from Israel; although of the many called, few actually responded with faith and were hence chosen to eternal life. 4. Those who responded were effectually called, because they responded with "the faith which works by love."

(Gal 5:6) Consequently, they were justified. 5. Those that were justified, he glorified (partially now, completely at their resurrection).

Predestination as a Biblical idea refers to God's general plan to have a holy people. Election refers to God's method of choosing particular groups and individuals to carry out his plans. Biblically these terms are primarily associated with the call of the Jews and Gentiles to join together, "to make in himself of twain one new man (the Church), so making peace," between these two estranged people. (Eph 2:15) These terms should not be associated with some fictitious Calvinistic notion, that God unconditionally elected before Creation certain individuals to eternal salvation and reprobated the rest of humanity to eternal destruction.

Two chapters of the Bible that have been a stronghold for the Calvinist doctrine of predestination are Ephesians Chapter 1 and Romans Chapter 9. Unfortunately, too often these chapters have been read independently of their immediate context. Chapter 1 of Ephesians does not give any credibility to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, when read in the context of the rest of the letter, especially chapters 2 and 3. Likewise Calvinism falls when Romans 9 is studied in the context of the whole letter, notably chapters 10-11. It is a purpose of this book to meet Calvinism in what most consider their strongest fortress, and push down its walls for good. For when these chapters are not only studied in their relationship to the other mentioned chapters, but in the historical context of the Jew-Gentile conflict, no trace of the Calvinist's castle can be found.

To correctly understand the term predestination we must appreciate the historical context in which Paul wrote his epistles and also God's original purpose in Creation. First let us consider God's ultimate intention for creating man in order to understand Paul's usage of the term as it affected God's strategy in human history.

## **God's Purpose**

God created man in his own image; that is, man, like his Creator, is a sentient and rational being with the capacity to make moral choices. Although God wanted holy and loving beings, he could not create virtuous beings by fiat, because virtue by its nature is a matter of personal choice. Therefore, it was impossible for God to make Adam a morally good being. Adam was created in a state of innocence with the potential to be good or evil.

God created man for his own pleasure. (Rev 4:11) God is a creative being and creative persons obviously want to produce. Artists take pleasure in painting, authors want to write, architects desire to build. What could be more creative for the Creator than to make beings after his own image? Not only beings with God-

like attributes of intelligence, will, imagination, memory, emotions, etc., but beings that would be conformed to the character of his Son. (Rom 8:29) The former was achieved in a day, but the latter takes a life-time for God to accomplish, and then is only possible with man's cooperation. Developing a body of people that will glorify God by reflecting the image of his holy character is a task for God which has been millenniums in development.

God did not merely create man for the sake of exerting his creative powers. He created man, because pure love yearns for an object. Just as a loving husband and wife want children with whom they can share their love, so God desired children with whom he could have a Father-Son relationship.

God, like any loving Father, would want his children to love and honor him. God could not cause Adam to love him since love is a choice. However, God through his example could teach and influence Adam to walk in love. God's intention was to have a holy family with whom he could have a loving relationship. To accomplish his purpose God allowed for two factors which could frustrate his will: first, the freedom of man to choose right or wrong; and, second, the subtle power of evil represented by the Serpent (Satan).

Adam and Eve from the beginning had a natural affection for God which over the days as they exercised their freedom developed into a virtuous and obedient love. But God's plan for the first family was frustrated when they abused their freedom. Eve succumbed to the temptations of the Serpent; and Adam quickly followed his wife into rebellion. Sadly, it became necessary for God to cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. After their treasonous action, God withdrew from man's immediate presence. God began to work through mediators--angels, the patriarchs, priests, and prophets to draw man back into his intimate fellowship and sonship. Despite the fall, God remained firm in his plan to have a people with a pure heart who would serve him. In each generation since Adam, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (2 Chr 16:9) The Father's purpose is to win man back to conformity to his good, perfect and loving will. He is constantly searching for men whom he may use to accomplish his noble intent.

The Bible only records God discovering in his search a few men in primitive history, who had a pure heart and diligently sought their Maker. Hopefully, there were more but the Scriptures only name a few who understood "that the just shall live by faith." (Hab 2:4) By faith Abel obtained witness that he was righteous by offering a blood sacrifice; by faith Enoch walked with and pleased God; by faith Noah prepared an ark to the saving of his household by which he condemned the world and also became an heir of the righteousness that is by faith. God found in his search these few virtuous men who appreciated that, "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb 11:6) These men

were God's elect. We have no evidence that God singled out these men before Creation, but he chose them in their time because they pleased him with their pure hearts and with an obedient faith.

## Who is Elected?

So we have learned that God predestined a purpose and a plan to have a people, but he did not predetermine before Creation or even after the Fall which individuals would be a part of his family. Closely associated with the Biblical doctrine of predestination is the doctrine of election--both of which are two of the most misunderstood teachings of the Bible. Election has never been God's choice to grant eternal life unconditionally to any groups or individuals. Election is closely related to the word--foreknow. The Greek word for know is ginosko, which according to Vine's Dictionary, "indicated a relation between the person knowing and the object known...and hence the establishment of a relationship." Fore simply means before, so foreknowledge means to know something before the event. God always knew that he was going to have a people, but he did not know before, which individuals would respond to his universal call.

The word election itself is derived from the Greek word, eklegomai, which means, literally, "to choose something for oneself." The Bible uses words such as choose, predestinate, foreordain, foreknow, determine, and call to indicate that God has entered into a special relationship with groups and /or individuals through whom he has decided to fulfill his purpose.

The doctrine of election is rooted in the revelation that out of all the peoples on earth God has chosen to reveal himself in a special, unique way to one particular people, the Jews. This idea thunders throughout the pages of the Bible from the early awareness of Israel as the people of God through the Psalms and the prophets. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation." (Isa 14:1) "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob." (Psalm 47:19-20)

Abraham was God's man to lead the chosen people. God promised to bless his descendants and all peoples on earth through him. "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. {2} And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." (Gen 17:1-2) God appointed circumcision as a token of the certainty and perpetuity of this covenant. Abraham responded to this call in obedience and faith.

God called Abraham in order that he might birth a people, and through that particular people another people of still greater significance. Abraham's election was for the sake of Israel; Israel's election was for the sake of all mankind. The choice of the one was for the good of the many, and the many will come from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. (Rev. 5:9, 7:9, Gal. 3:26-29). It is not that God chose one and rejected others, but he chose one that all others might be chosen.

Within the covenant community of Israel, God elected or selected certain individuals to fulfill specific functions, including the patriarchs, the prophets, kings, and priests. To be called chosen or elected to serve God's ongoing purpose is not of itself a predestination to eternal salvation. Nor was it ever intended to be a pretense for arrogance, but rather an opportunity for service. "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, ... for a light of the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6). Israel tended to presume upon God's gracious favor, to assume, for example, that because the Lord had placed his temple at Jerusalem, they were exempt from judgment. Again and again the prophets tried to dissuade them of this false notion of security by pointing out the true meaning of the covenant and their mission among the Gentiles (Jer. 7:1-14; Amos 3:2; Jonah). But they refused to listen.

God renewed his covenant by the choice of Moses to lead Israel into Caanan. As he did with Abraham, God also made clear to Moses that his covenant was conditioned upon obedience: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: For all the earth is mine:" (Exo 19:5)

All the earth is God's! God has always "so loved the world!" The Lord was particularly concerned for the one nation on account of the many in order to reach all men, everywhere. "The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down." (Psa 146:9) A stranger was anyone who was not of the Jewish nation. "The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. {14} From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. {15} He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works." (Psa 33:13-15) Many other scriptures could be cited that reveal the divine care and goodness for all peoples; but he bestowed a particular and extraordinary providence towards the nation of Israel, so that they could be a light to the world.

We find in the case of Israel that each generation failed miserably to keep God's law and establish a loving relationship with him, so, ultimately, God judged and dispersed the Jews throughout the nations of the world.

## **The Dreadful Decree**

This subject of predestination and election has been completely distorted by the system of theology called Calvinism. This scheme has made the mistake of assuming that because God's general purpose to have a family conformed to his character was predetermined before Creation, that therefore everything was predetermined. It also errs in assuming that because in exceptional circumstances God might seem to usurp man's will and virtually cause men to act, then God is the cause of all events, or that he predetermines everything that happens in history. It is also wrong in teaching that because God foreknows certain things which he intends to bring to pass, that he therefore foreknows all of the future. The fact is that man's future moral choices are not knowable to God in the absolute sense, because these choices do not yet exist. God knows all that is knowable (omniscience, correctly understood), but since the future does not exist, it is not definitely knowable, except in the sense that God in his wisdom can predict it, based on his intentions and by his complete knowledge of man's past and present behavior.

John Calvin's (1509-1564) Institutes of the Christian Religion was first published in 1536 and later went through several editings and enlargements until the final edition in 1559. The doctrine of predestination as taught in the Institutes by Calvin, was also taught by Martin Luther, and by Augustine a millennium earlier. But primarily because of the widespread acceptance of the Institutes, predestination is associated with John Calvin more than any of his predecessors or any that have followed him in what has become known as Reformed Theology.

So let us allow the man to speak for himself concerning this strange doctrine that has had such an impact on Christianity in particular and western thought in general:

"The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny; but it is greatly caviled at, especially by those [Arminians] who make prescience [foreknowledge] its cause. We, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former...By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death. Book III, Chapter 21, Paragraph 5

" Although it is sufficiently plain that God, by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others, his gratuitous election has only been partially explained until we come to the case of single individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but so assigns it, that the certainty of the result remains not dubious or suspended...We say, then, that Scripture clearly prove this much, that

God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life, by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment." III, 21, 7

"Many controvert all the positions which we have laid down, especially the gratuitous election of believers, which however cannot be overthrown. For they [Arminians] commonly imagine that God distinguishes between men according to the merits which he foresees that each individual is to have, giving the adoption of sons to those whom he foreknows will not be unworthy of his grace, and dooming those to destruction whose dispositions he perceives will be prone to mischief and wickedness. Thus by interposing foreknowledge as a veil, they not only obscure election, but pretend to give it a different origin." III, 22, 1

"The decree, I admit, is dreadful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before he made him, and foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree...Nor ought it to seem absurd when I say, that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at his own pleasure arranged it. For as it belongs to his wisdom to foreknow all future events, so it belongs to his power to rule, and govern them by his hand." III, 23, 7

"We cannot assign any reason for his bestowing mercy on his people, but just that it so pleases him, neither can we have any reason for his reprobating others but his will. When God is said to visit in mercy or harden whom he will, men are reminded that they are not to seek for any cause beyond his will." III, 22, 11

"Here they [Arminians] recur to the distinction between will and permission, the object being to prove that the wicked perish only by the permission, but not by the will of God. But why do we say that he permits, but just because he wills? Nor, indeed, is there any probability in the thing itself--viz that man brought death upon himself, merely by the permission, and not the ordination of God; as if God had not determined what he wished the chief of his creatures to be. I will not hesitate, therefore, simply to confess with Augustine that the will of God is necessity, and that everything is necessary which he has willed; just as those things will certainly happen which he has foreseen...The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should: why he deemed it meet, we know not. It is certain, however, that it was just, because he saw that his own glory would thereby be displayed." III, 23, 8

"Many professing a desire to defend the Deity from an invidious charge admit the doctrine of election, but deny that any one is reprobated. This they do ignorantly and childishly, since there could be no election without its opposite, reprobation.

God is said to set apart those whom he adopts for salvation. It were most absurd to say, that he admits others fortuitously, or that they by their industry acquire what election also confers on a few. Those, therefore, whom God passes by he reprobates, and that for no other cause but because he is pleased to exclude them for the inheritance which he predestines to his children." III, 23, 1

"Since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to him belongs the disposal of life and death, individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction. If any one alleges that no necessity is laid upon them by the providence of God, but rather that they are created by him in that condition, because he foresaw their future depravity, he says something, but does not say enough...Since he foresees the things which are to happen, simply because he had decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, which it is clear that all events take place by his sovereign appointment." III, 23, 6

"As the Lord by the efficacy of his calling accomplishes toward his elect the salvation to which he had by his eternal counsel destined them, so he had judgments against the reprobate, by which he executes his counsel concerning them. Those, therefore, whom he has created for dishonor during life and destruction at death, that they may be vessels of wrath and examples of severity, in bringing to their doom he at one time deprives of the means of hearing his work, at another by the preaching of it blinds and stupefies them the more." III, 24, 12

"Creatures are so governed by the secret counsel of God, that nothing happens but what he has knowingly and willingly decreed." I, 16, 3.

"We maintain that, by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined." I, 16, 8

"I Concede more--that thieves and murderers, and other evil-doers, are instruments of divine Providence, being employed by the Lord himself to execute the judgments which he has resolved to inflict." I, 17, 5

"The devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how muchsoever they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as he permits, nay, unless in so far as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters but are even forced to do him service,--when the godly think of all these things they have ample sources of consolation." I, 17, 11

Augustus Toplady, an 18th Century Anglican priest in his popular tract, *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted*, said, "The sum of all is

this: One in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will: the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can. Reader, believe this, or be damned." Toplady's view that rejection of the Calvinist's position on predestination is sure evidence that one is damned may be too strong for more moderate Calvinists, but even Calvin stated that only the impious would dare deny the doctrine. Does one deny the faith in denying Calvinism? This book will answer that question.

## **Does Calvinism Really Glorify God?**

The Calvinist's doctrine makes God out to be tyrannical, despotic, inscrutable, arbitrary, capricious, and rigid. One who is not primarily moved by love but simply "the good pleasure of his will." Certainly a person might fear such an entity, but how could anyone be attracted to such an offensive God, who would damn most of the human race merely "for the good pleasure of his will," independently of any good or evil that these pitiful creatures have done. This God is not good and benevolent, but cruel and malicious.

The God of the Bible is represented as a Moral Governor with benevolence towards all and malice towards none, who sacrificed his Son to provide a way in which he might wisely and justly offer forgiveness and mercy to all, and at the same time uphold his holy law and satisfy the claims of public justice. Where is the mercy or the compassion in the Calvinistic system? The God of this system did not choose to elect or reprobate because men were miserable or evil, virtuous or remorseful, but simply because he was pleased to save some and damn others.

How came the reprobate to their miserable damned condition? By the decree of God! He put them all in the consequences of the Fall, that he might have an occasion to display his grace, in saving some, and to glorify his justice in damning others! He made them sinners, that he might have a pretense to torment them for ever, to the glory of his sovereign justice!

Calvinism makes God the author of sin, he chose its existence when it did not exist. He becomes the most unholy being in the universe--the cause and source of all wickedness and misery. Adam did not fall, he was shoved, was not deceived by the devil, but by the bully God of Calvinism.

The sinner is damned through no fault of his own. He is held guilty for Adam's sin thousands of years before he was born. Are infants damned? They are if they are reprobate.

There is nothing the elect can do to endanger his soul. Why exhort the elect when there is no peril to the elect? If it be alleged, that warnings are designed to

stimulate to duty, then a deception is attempted to be played off upon the elect, to promote the fruits of the Spirit!

God deals with men according to their character and conduct, the Calvinist system excludes such an idea entirely. Calvinism removes moral quality from human actions and volition--renders man incapable of vice or virtue. It destroys the accountability of man.

Good men stand against tyranny,--arbitrary rule, rule above law. If anyone in a position of authority acted like the God of Calvinism, he would be universally condemned. Everything our conscience tells us is good and right, the God of Calvinism violates. They call evil good, and good evil. It violates all civilized rules of conduct and behavior, law and justice.

If true, on the day of judgment the conscience and intelligence of the universe must be on the side of the condemned. Hell would be a refuge from such a being--its woes a relief from the deeper alarms of his hated and dreaded relations. This system makes the devil out to be better than God. Now we can understand why he rebelled. Which is worse Heaven or Hell?

He commands one thing, but decrees precisely the contrary. He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," when in fact they die for his pleasure. He pleads with man to change his direction, but in fact he urges them on to sin and ruin. Suppose the sinner could obey his command when it is not so ordained, then he could be damned for violating his will. God has made us conscious that we might do otherwise than we do, but he knows we cannot because he has determined we shall not. What hypocrisy, duplicity, trickery! If true, no wonder men turn to Atheism.

This scheme promotes recklessness and indifference to virtue. Why should a sinner choose to change when he knows that he can't? Why should he regret his course of conduct when he knows that it is inevitable? Why should he want to affect the future when it is fixed? Why pray?

Reprobates are called to return to God, but they can't obey the call, and yet for not obeying every time they refuse, their damnation is increased. Could Satan himself have devised a more awful system? Every call of mercy is so arranged as necessarily to sink the poor, miserable victim deeper into the quenchless flames of eternal damnation.

We might ask the devil, "Thou fool, why dost thou roar about any longer? Thy lying in wait for souls is as needless and useless as our preaching. God is doing your work for you, he is dragging the reprobate into Hell."

No one can escape from the road to Hell! The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The decree is passed who shall disannul it? Why even have a Judgment Day?

God acts irresistibly on the elect and Satan on the reprobate. It is impossible for one or the other to help acting as they do; or rather help being acted upon, in the manner wherein they are. Man doesn't act at all in this system, he is merely acted upon.

Calvinism claims that God is good to the reprobate in the world by giving him common grace. But in fact God is just fattening the ox for the slaughter. The man's birth was a curse. It would have been better for that man not to have been born. What Calvinism calls common grace might be better called damning grace.

Calvinists accuse those who disagree of robbing God of his glory. But where is the glory in this system, if man's will cannot resist God? However, the Bible and human experience confirm that man can resist God's will, but in some God is able to overcome their resistance. This gives glory to God!

How does Calvinism manifest the glorious attributes of God--his justice, mercy, wisdom and love? How does it glorify God's wisdom to create a creature and then entreat him only to insure his damnation? Where is the love, the mercy? Why will he only have mercy on the elect? Why not save all? Why will the reprobate for destruction? The Calvinist can only answer, "He will because he wills."

Calvinists assert that their system humbles men and exalts God. But are Calvinists really more humble than other men? The truth is no opinion humbles man, it is the love of God that humbles man. Nor is God glorified by men's opinion. God is glorified by displays of his moral character in his children. He is glorified through our righteousness. Calvinists idea of jealousy is that if we do anything right, God is jealous.

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: {24} But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." (Jere 9:23-24)

## **Calvinists and Arminians Are Both Wrong**

Arminians believe in a conditional rather than an absolute election. The cardinal point of the predestination controversy between Calvinists and Arminians rests upon this question: Are the decrees by which certain individuals are elected to eternal life and others destined to everlasting damnation dependent on or independent of human conduct--that is, were these decrees based upon God's foreknowledge of the different use individuals would make of their moral agency, or were they not?

Although Arminianism presents a kinder and gentler God, their doctrine is illogical. How can they reconcile absolute foreknowledge with man's free-will? How could God know man's future choices unless they are determined? If their choices are determined, then man really has no choice to exercise. The Arminians have been storming the Calvinist castle for hundreds of years with their wet powder of a foreknowledge or prescient election. Most of them fell into the moat long ago and are merely swimming for their life.

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination is more demeaning of God's character. Both sides on this issue promote a false notion of God existing in some existential "eternal now," where the past, present and future to him are all the same, which results in an unscriptural idea of God's nature. Thus God is removed so far from man's reality, that it becomes exceedingly difficult to relate to such a remote being.

It is one of the great ironies of history, that Paul's doctrine of predestination which was intended to promote unity in a church torn by dissension between Jews and Gentiles has since the Reformation divided Christians into two warring camps, which will often not even recognize the other's salvation. Satan himself must have predestined this plot by redefining a few scriptural words to confuse and divide Christians for centuries, and neutralize the Church as a witness to the world. The purpose of the book is to expose the Calvinistic view of predestination as the mythical monster that it is; and to show the Arminians, that they need not bow to logical inconsistencies in order to defend the Biblical doctrine of free-will. May men from both camps finally lay down their dull swords with which they have been cutting each other. May they take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and come into the fellowship of the mystery of Christ, which Paul revealed in his Epistles of Ephesians and Romans.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE SECRET IS REVEALED

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim 3:16)

Mystery in its New Testament usage is a revealed secret. The word is used to denote anything which is hidden or concealed, doctrines which the Jews and the world did not understand until they were revealed by Christ and his apostles. The

mystery of godliness, or of true religion, consisted in the several particulars here mentioned by the apostles. Particulars, indeed, which it would never have entered in the heart of man to conceive, (1 Cor. 2:9) had not God accomplished them in fact, and published them by the preaching of his gospel; but which being thus manifested, are intelligible as fact to the simplest understanding.

The apostles are called stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Cor 4:1) These mysteries could not mean what was, as facts, unknown to them, because to them it was given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. (Matt 13:11) They not only knew these mysteries themselves, but as faithful stewards they were to make them known to others.

An unscriptural and dangerous sense is too often put upon the word mystery, as if it meant something absolutely unintelligible and incomprehensible. But in the Bible it is mentioned as something which is revealed, declared, shown, spoken or which may be known or understood.

1 Timothy 3:16 is one of the most revealing scriptures and doctrinal statements of the Bible. It summarizes our Lord's ministry from his incarnation to his resurrection. A particular mystery revealed in this verse has not since the apostolic era been given the attention that the Bible devotes to it, that Christ "was preached unto the Gentiles and believed on in the world." In other words the Gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews.

This particular mystery is the predominant theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, {2} If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: {3} How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery;...{5} Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; {6} That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: {7} Whereof I was made a minister,... {8}..., that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; {9} And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." (Eph 3:1-9)

Before the Incarnation the kingdom of God was confined to Israel, except for Gentile proselytes, who were incorporated into the nation of Israel by circumcision and keeping the whole law of Moses, or for the few Gentiles who may have obeyed the light of their conscience.

But when Jesus came, the mystery of God which had been concealed from both Jews and Gentiles was revealed, namely, that the Gentiles, people of all nations, were to be freely admitted into the Kingdom on the condition of faith in Christ. The unfolding of this mystery was a rich and glorious example of God's grace,

considering the darkness, idolatry, and wickedness into which the heathen world had sunk.

Jesus commissioned his disciples, and particularly Paul to broadcast a general pardon to all nations. Those who repented and believed the gospel were to be received into the kingdom with all of its blessings and privileges on an equal basis with believing Jews. God confirmed his acceptance of the Gentiles by filling them with the Holy Spirit and working miracles among them.

Unbelieving Jews could not accept that the Gentiles were to be a part of God's kingdom. Even believing Jews had great difficulty accepting the Gentiles without them first becoming Jews through submitting to Jewish rites such as circumcision. The line of division between the Jews and Gentiles ran through the whole Roman empire, and indeed predated the Empire. Though they lived side by side, they were separated from one another by deep-rooted feelings of aversion and contempt. The "middle wall of partition" had been generations in the building. The Jews interpretation of their law sanctioned the principle and enforced the practice of national isolation. Jews could not believe that their law associated with all the glorious passages of their history was not to endure forever.

Jewish ceremonial observances even prohibited their eating with the Gentiles. The distinctions between animals and foods were supposed to be but an emblem and type, a mere object lesson of the difference between the Jews and other nations. The Gentiles ate every kind of animal and creeping thing. The differences which the law of Moses compelled the Jew to make in the matter of food were simply the type of the difference and separation, which God had made between his covenant people and those outside the covenant. However, the ceremonial law, with its dietary restrictions, circumcision, holy days, animal sacrifice, etc., which was supposed to be a means to an end, had become an end in itself; Jewish rites and rituals had become the essence of their religion.

When Jesus said to Jews, "God so loved the world," it was a revolutionary thought to the Jewish mindset. Yes, God loved Israel. Of course, God loved his chosen people, the elect of God. But did God love the Gentiles, the heathen, the pagan? No way! The proud Jews scarcely recognized their manhood, preferring to call them "creatures." Nor would they listen when Jesus attempted to reveal the mystery of God's will concerning the Gentile, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

Even Jews who believed in Jesus had difficulty accepting that the Gentiles were part of God's plan, when Jesus commissioned his disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15-16) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I

have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Mat 28:19-20)

The Great Commission to "all the world," "all nations," "to the end of the world," and "everywhere" is taken for granted today in evangelical Christianity, but to the Jew of the time this was a revolutionary order. "Go to the Gentiles? the nations? the heathen? surely not!" thought the Jew.

The Jewish mindset should have been prepared for "The Great Commission." The historical allegory of Jonah taught that God was interested in the Gentiles at Nineveh. But the apostles were very slow like Jonah in responding to the commission to go to the nations. Even after mass conversion of the Gentiles, many believers were reluctant to accept it, just as Jonah seemed to resent the conversion of the Ninevites.

Jesus' parables were clues that should have unlocked the mystery of God's purpose to the Jews. The parable of the prodigal son is typically applied as a story illustrating personal salvation, and certainly it may be applied in this fashion. However, it is more likely that Jesus had in mind illustrating the contrasting reaction of the Gentile as opposed to the typical reaction of the Jew to the gospel. The younger profligate son represents the Gentile who takes his journey into a far country and wasted his substance on riotous living. He is soon associated with swine, which symbolizes the Gentile world. But he comes to his senses and returns to his father, who saw him afar off and runs to him and lovingly receives him back into his household.

But the elder son who represents the Jews is envious, resentful and angry that his father bestows all the blessings of sonship on his prodigal brother. He complains that he always served and obeyed his father, yet he never gave him a fatted calf and a party with the family and his friends. He was like Israel, "which followed after the law of righteousness, but obtained it not. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." (Roman 9: 31-32) His indignation is an illustration of the Jews anger that the Gentiles were being received into God's favor, and made, with them, fellow heirs of the Father.

The kingdom parables furnished more clues that God was to bring the Gentiles into the Kingdom on an equal footing with the Jews, especially the parable of the vineyard. In the end the owner of the vineyard pays the same amount to those who had been hired the last hour as he does to those who had worked all day in the vineyard.

Jesus spoke of his Church as the Kingdom. Jesus established his Kingdom or Church, which was the spiritual completion of the Jewish Church, for the Jewish polity was destroyed a generation later by Titus' armies. The Christian Church was empowered by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Before the disciples had been individual followers of Jesus, but in the upper room the 120 became his

corporate, mystical body, animated by his Spirit. By the end of the day the Church would have 3000 new members, all of them Jews.

## **The Gentile Mission**

The Church remained essentially Jewish until God supernaturally intervened to tear down the Jew-Gentile barrier. The Holy Spirit prepared both sides by laying his right hand on the Gentile, Cornelius, in Caesarea, and his left on Peter, the Jew, in Joppa, and drove them to each other through a double vision. Peter's visit to Cornelius' house, which resulted in his conversion, marked the beginning of the end of the exclusively Jewish phase of the Church. (Acts 10)

It had required a wonderful combination of natural and supernatural evidence to convince Peter that God is "no respecter of persons," but "in every nation" he accepts him that "feareth him and worketh righteousness"--that all such distinctions as depend on "meat and drink," on "holydays, new moons, and sabbaths," were to pass away,--that these things were only "a shadow of things to come,"--that "the body is of Christ,"--and that "in him we are complete...circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands..buried with him in baptism, and risen with him through faith."

The Lord put his own stamp of approval on the deed which marked so great an expansion of the Church by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius' house even as he had Peter and the rest on Pentecost. The cleft between Jew and Gentile was so wide that God's hand had to be applied on both sides to press the separated parts together. God had plainly done it, and that was Peter's defense before his critics. For no sooner had Peter returned to Jerusalem after ministering to Cornelius at Caesarea than his Jewish brethren accused him, "Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." (Acts 11:3)

Thus they did not attack Peter for preaching to the Roman centurion and his men, but for eating with them. In their mind that eating not only was a breach of the law, but it implied the reception of Cornelius and his company in the household of God, and so destroyed the whole fabric of Jewish exclusiveness. The whole distinction between Jew and Gentile was threatened to be pulled up by the roots.

Although Peter's defense is initially accepted by his critics, the prejudices of the Jewish Christians against their Gentile brethren were so strong, that they would later regard the vision at Joppa as applying, not as a general rule, but as a mere personal matter, authorizing the reception of Cornelius and his party alone. They would not see nor understand that it authorized the active evangelization of the Gentile world and prosecution of aggressive Christian efforts among the heathen.

Meanwhile, the disciples in Jerusalem had been scattered abroad by the persecution of Saul of Tarsus. The persecution brings the Church over the border into the Gentile world. Some of these emigrant and fugitive disciples preached to the Greeks at Antioch in Syria, "and a great number believed." (Acts 11:20-21)

Later Paul and Barnabas also came to Antioch to consolidate and fully organize the congregation. The work of Gentile conversion proceeded from Antioch, which thereafter may be regarded as the mother Church of Gentile Christendom. Paul and Barnabas are commissioned as missionaries into Asia Minor by the Antioch Church.

At Antioch [note this is a different Antioch] in Asia Minor, Paul, as his manner was, preached to the Jews first. But when they refused to hear, the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear Paul preach the word. "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. {46} Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. {47} For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. {48} And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. {49} And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. {50} But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts." (Acts 13:45-50)

Paul and Barnabas go to other cities in Asia Minor and despite much persecution they have great success among Jews and Gentiles, but especially the Gentiles. Thus begins the universal aspect of the Church. Considering the magnitude of this change, and the problems of training and prejudice which it had to encounter within the Church itself, we should not be surprised at the abundance of miracles which attended it. Including Paul being raised after being stoned. Without divine intervention, it is difficult to conceive the Gentile mission could have been accomplished.

The battle of Christian freedom and of universal truth was not won in a moment. Old prejudices do not easily die. New principles were not immediately assimilated and applied. Year after year Paul had to fight the same battles and to proclaim the same fundamental truths and to maintain what seemed at times a losing conflict with the forces of irrational discrimination.

In general outline, the course of events in Asia Minor, with which the Acts 13 passage is concerned, was the same. It was only too faithful a prediction of what was to be Paul's experience everywhere. The stages are: Preaching in the

synagogue, rejection there, appeal to the Gentiles, reception by them, a little group of believers formed; disturbances fomented by the Jews, who swallow their hatred of Gentiles by reason of their greater hatred of the apostles, and will riot with heathens, though they will not pray nor eat with them; and finally the apostles' departure to carry the gospel elsewhere.

The Hellenists Jews opposed Paul for the same reason the Jews in Palestine had delivered Jesus to be crucified--driven by envy. "What had this uncircumcised rabble of Antioch to do with 'the promises made to the fathers?'" It was not the first nor the last time that religious men have taken offence at crowds gathering to hear God's word.

The Jewish party who opposed Peter in the Cornelius affair had only been silenced for a time, but they were not destroyed. They took up a new position. Cornelius' case merely decided that a man might be baptized without having been previously circumcised; but it decided nothing in their opinion about the subsequent necessity for circumcision and admission into the ranks of the Jewish nation. Their view, in fact, was the same as of old: Salvation belonged exclusively to the Jewish nation, and therefore if the converted Gentiles were to be saved it must be by incorporation into that body to which salvation alone belonged. The strict Jewish section of the Church insisted the more upon this point, because they saw rising up in Antioch, and Asia Minor a grave social danger threatening the existence of their nation as a separate people. There were just then two classes of disciples; there were the circumcised, who lived after the Jewish fashion, abstaining from unlawful foods, using food slain by Jewish butchers, and scrupulous in washings and purification ceremonies; and there were the uncircumcised who lived after the Gentile fashion, and ate pork and things strangled. The strict Jews knew the tendency of a majority to swallow up a minority, especially when they were all members of the same religious community, enjoying the same privileges and partakers of the same hope. They were concerned that the center or power base of Christianity was shifting from Jerusalem to Antioch and from the Jews to the Gentiles.

These Judaizers were determined to stop Paul, so they traveled to Antioch from Jerusalem and taught Paul's converts, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them. (Acts 15:1-2)

### **The Synod at Jerusalem**

So in 50 A.D. to settle the dispute the first church council is called at Jerusalem. Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church wrote, "It was the first and in some respects the most important council or synod held in the history of Christendom." (V. 1, p. 340) Our greatest church historian, Luke, described the

scene: "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. {6} And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. {7} And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. {8} And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; {9} And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. {10} Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? {11} But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

{12} Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. {13} And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: {14} Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. [This is predestination! James here affirmed God's ultimate purpose to have a people who glorify his name by being conformed unto his character.] {15} And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, {16} After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: [The Church is the antitype of the tabernacle of David which God was now rebuilding with a residue of Jews and of Gentiles who would respond to the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God.] {17} That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ({18} Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. [The Church is God's work. He has been determined to build it from the beginning. God's problem has been to find the people who are willing to be part of the building.]{19} Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: {20} But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. [Some restrictions from the law were put on the Gentiles so as to not unnecessarily offend the Jews. Everywhere the apostles go they will have to contend with Jews, so James is willing to compromise, but not concerning the way of salvation.] {21} For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. {22} Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren. These representatives carried letters which stated the apostolic ruling in the controversy, which were read to the Antioch church, who rejoiced at the decision. (Acts 15:5-41)

So this great crisis was settled, or so it seemed, in a peaceful and amiable manner. This internal conflict had threatened to precipitate a division in the body of Christ that might never have been healed. Would Christianity merely become a liberal sect of Judaism, or would God's purpose of having a world-wide universal church be accomplished? Should the Judaizers be successful in enforcing the whole Mosaic Law on the Gentiles, the whole Christian Church would eventually become of little or no consequence in the world.

Adam Clarke, (1760-1832), the great Methodist theologian, explained the issues in his commentary on Romans, "Had this notion of the Judaizers prevailed, the extensive scheme of the gospel would have been ruined, and the gracious design of freeing the Church from the embarrassments of the law of Moses would have been defeated. The Gospel, or glad tidings of salvation, must not only have been confined to the narrow limits of the Jewish peculiarity, and clogged with all the ceremonial observances belonging to it, which to the greatest part of mankind would have been either impracticable, or excessively incommodious, but, which is still worse, must have sunk and fallen with that peculiarity. Had the Gospel been built upon the foundation of the Jewish polity, it must have been destroyed when that was demolished, and the whole kingdom of God in the world would have been overthrown and extinct at the same time; and so all the noble principles it was intended to inspire, to animate and comfort our hearts, would have been lost; and all the light it was calculated to diffuse throughout the world would have been quite extinguished."

Unfortunately, although the Judaizers had been seriously wounded by the decision of the synod, their movement was not dead. The "certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed" continued their opposition to Paul. They were scarcely a party as yet, but the rift they caused was destined to grow. Later, they became Paul's bitterest opponents, throughout all his life, dogging him with false and malicious accusations attempting to counterwork his toil. They may well have been Paul's thorn in the flesh, at times even more difficult to deal with than the unbelieving Jews. They insisted that there was no way into God's kingdom but through the synagogue. By all means, said they, "Let Gentiles come, but they must first become Jews, by submitting to circumcision and living as Jews do."

## **Galatians**

The fact that the conflict between Paul and the Judaizers had not been settled by the Synod at Jerusalem is evident from Paul's letters. The Epistle to the Galatians was written about a decade after the Council at Jerusalem. The letter appears to have been called forth by the plot of Judaizing teachers, who, shortly before the date of its composition, had endeavored to seduce the churches of this province into a recognition of the continued validity of the ceremonial law, especially circumcision (Gal. 5:2, 11; 6:12) and Jewish holy days (Gal 4:10). In

Galatians chapter 2 Paul referred to the Judaizers as "false brethren" who had insisted at the Jerusalem Council that Titus, who was a Gentile, be circumcised, but Paul would not allow it. Paul considered the Judaizers' doctrine as heretical, tantamount to preaching "another gospel" (Gal 1:6). Paul was so adamant against these agitators of the circumcision that he wished that "they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (Gal 5:12 NIV)

Galatians informs us that sometime between the Council at Jerusalem and the writing of this epistle, even Peter had weakened in his opposition to the Judaizers. For when he is ministering in Antioch, initially Peter ate with the Gentile converts, treating them as equal with the Jewish brethren. But certain members of the Church at Jerusalem

(where the church was still predominantly Jewish) came from James. These men had for a time been silenced by the decision of the Council, but they evidently had not been convinced by at least the spirit of its conclusions. When they came in contact with a church which was predominantly Gentile, their old prejudices came forth. They withdrew from the society of and perhaps even from worship with the Gentile Christians. Even Peter out of fear of the Judaizers withdrew from the Gentiles. Other Jews at Antioch including Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy, treating the Gentiles on a lower level than Jewish believers.

Paul recognized that the real unity of the church was at stake, so he publicly rebuked Peter and used this incident to expound on his favorite theme, justification by faith: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal 2:16)

Keeping of the ceremonial law as a condition of justification in Pauline terminology is called practicing "works of the law" (Gal 2:16; 3:2,5,10). The phrase, "deeds of the law" is found twice in chapter three of Romans. In Galatians and Romans the context is primarily dealing with the subject of circumcision, in particular, and the ceremonial law in general.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, whose *A History of Christianity* (p. 114) remains a standard text in seminaries, wrote, "The first generation Church was deeply and bitterly divided between those who held that to become Christians, Gentiles must adhere to Judaism through the symbolic act of circumcision, and those who maintained, with Paul, that this was completely to misunderstand and pervert the Gospel."

This issue concerning the continued obligation of believers to keep the rites and rituals and traditions of Judaism was the primary dividing issue within the early church as the Book of Acts and the Epistles reveal. It is difficult for modern day Christians who are predominantly Gentile to appreciate the seriousness of this

problem. After all concerning the question of infant circumcision we are just talking about a minor surgical operation, the mere clipping of the foreskin, which to believers today is a medical decision, not a decision of faith. Circumcision is fully accepted if not practiced in much of Christendom. But Christians would not argue that it is a requirement for salvation. The controversy is a difficult one for us to appreciate, so it is typically overlooked in Biblical exegesis of our time.

But had Paul given in to the Judaizers on the issue of circumcision it would have set a terrible precedent and been destructive to the Gentile mission. Philip Schaff in *History of Christianity* wrote (V. 1, p. 336) "With circumcision, as a necessary condition of church membership, Christianity would forever have been confined to the Jewish race with a small minority of proselytes of the gate, or half-Christians; while the abrogation of circumcision and the declaration of the supremacy and sufficiency of faith in Christ ensured the conversion of the heathen and the catholicity of Christianity. The progress of Paul's mission among the Gentiles forced the question to a solution and resulted in a grand act of emancipation, yet not without great struggle and temporary reactions."

Other issues related to the ceremonial law which constantly dogged Paul were the Jewish dietary laws, holidays and animal sacrifices. Although some Christians of our times for religious reasons might not eat pork, few would consider this to be a question of fellowship or salvation as did the Jews of the Apostolic era. "A little skin, a simple meal, animal sacrifices, what's the big deal?" Few Christians are even aware of Jewish holidays, let alone are they concerned about their observation. Of course, neither Jews or Gentiles are even offering animal sacrifices today, nor have they for almost two thousand years. But remember, Paul wrote in a day when the temple was still standing and sacrifices were still being offered on the altar. These questions were considered critical in that day.

Jewish legalism was seriously wounded by the Synod at Jerusalem and struck a death blow by Paul's letters. But it took the awful persecution under Nero and the terrible destruction of Jerusalem by Titus' armies in 70 A.D. to finally bury the issue. Persecution forces Christians to concern themselves with the things that really matter in the eternal scheme of things and ignore the "weak and beggarly elements" that divide. (Gal 4:9) Jerusalem was the center of Judaizing tendencies and with the destruction of the temple, these agitators lost their power base and went into virtual oblivion, except for surviving into the second century through the sect of the Ebionites.

However, there is a small movement of Jewish Christians and even Gentile Christians, who today are pressing believers to return to celebrating the Jewish Sabbath and other Jewish holidays as well as keep the dietary laws of Moses. They say, "Touch not; taste not; handle not," the unclean things forbidden by the law of Moses, but these foods all perish when they are consumed, so ultimately what difference does it make? Oh, yes, they put on a good show of denying the

flesh through their self-imposed worship, which has an appearance of wisdom, but such asceticism is not profitable in promoting purity of heart, which is true religion. (Col 2:21-23)

Although the issue of keeping of the ceremonial law has been only a minor issue, the moral law has remained a burning question throughout church history. Gnostics and antinomians rejected its continued validity as a standard for Christians; the popular view claimed it was a standard to which we ought to strive, but it cannot be reached; and finally the holiness groups, who believed that the true Christian, not only ought to, but is able to and does consistently keep the law of love.

Professor Latourette expounds upon the moral law as point of division in the Apostolic era: "Morally the Church was far from perfect. Some of those who wished to be regarded as Christians were adopting the attitude, technically called antinomianism, which was drawn from a misconception of man's response to God's grace and which was to recur again and again through the centuries, that the Christian need not be bound by any moral law." (History p.114)

Antinomians claim that Paul taught that those who are justified by faith have no relationship to any expression of the law, and that obedience to even the moral law has nothing to do with our final justification before God. Although the Judaizers did not make any distinction between the ceremonial and moral law, some of the Galatians were abusing Paul's teaching on Christian freedom by not living up to the moral standards of the law, as many "believers" continue to do even in our day. But Paul warned the Galatians, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. {14} For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Gal 5:13-14)

Unfortunately, some were using Paul's teaching as a license to sin. Peter and the Jewish brethren at Antioch had not demonstrated love for their Gentile brothers, so they deserved a stern rebuke from Paul. He knew that because of their arrogant attitude not only was the unity of the church at stake, but their eternal salvation was in danger because of their dissimulation. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." (Gal 5:6) The moral law calls for supreme love to God and an equal love to one's neighbor as oneself. Without this love, faith is dead.

Obviously, Paul considered the moral law still in effect because he warned the Galatians that "works of the flesh," including all manner of sexual sins, "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, etc.," deny anyone an inheritance in the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:19-20) Paul exhorted the Galatians, "The fruit of the Spirit" includes love and temperance. (Gal 5:22) Where there is no fruit there is no life.

Paul again affirmed the validity of the moral law to the Corinthians, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." (1 Cor 7:19)

Reader, the Judeo-Gentile controversies are the issues that set the stage for not only the Galatian letter but also Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Romans, significant portions of which will be commented upon in the light of these disputes. Regrettably, too often these books have been interpreted in the light of controversies which divided the Church centuries later in the Augustinian-Pelagian contention of the fourth and fifth centuries, and the Calvinistic-Arminian debates of the Reformation era, which have continued into our day. The early Church Fathers did not see any conflict between justification by faith and doing good works. Good works during the early Patristic age was not associated with keeping the ceremonial law, but acts of charity. As a result of removing New Testament writings from their historical context, serious errors have weakened Christians from both the Calvinist and Arminian camps, and have seriously hindered the advancement of the Church.

The Judeo-Gentile division was the primary motivation for a major portion of Paul's writings. It is conceivable that many of Paul's letters would not even have been written had not there been the great controversies with the Judaizers. At the very least his letters would have been much different in content.

Fundamentalists tend to read the Bible as if it were a daily newspaper, and Paul's epistles as love letters written directly to them; but the Bible was not addressed to people living at the turn of the 21st Century. It was written to churches with specific problems and confronting particular issues in a unique historical situation. It could be argued that the Jew-Gentile difference was the primary issue in the New Testament Church. Today it is practically a non-issue. The Church has since the New Testament times been mostly an exclusively Gentile institution, so obviously no one is going to question Gentile entry. Christians welcome Jews into the Church upon their acceptance of Christ and some actively evangelize Jews. Of course, it is possible and helpful to apply Paul's polemics to more modern controversies, but to do so without knowledge of the historical context of Paul's arguments results in serious doctrinal error, if not downright heresy.

## CHAPTER 2

# ELECTING A PEOPLE, NOT THE PEOPLE

## EPHESIANS COMMENTARY

For the letter to the Ephesians to be properly understood it must be considered in the historical light of the Judeo-Gentile controversy. Paul wrote his epistle to convince the Ephesians, that the admission of the Gentiles into the Church was not an incidental occurrence, but purposed of God before he called Abraham and separated his descendants from other peoples of the world. He wanted the Ephesians to understand that his call for the Jews to be a separate people had only been for a time. Since the coming of Jesus the Messiah, those who were formerly divided into Jews and Gentiles, were now unified by faith in Christ into his Church.

Adam Clarke commented that the Epistle to the Ephesians "is a vindication of the providence and mercy of God, in admitting the Gentiles into his Church, and forming one flock of them and the converted Jews, giving them the same privileges which his peculiar people had enjoyed almost exclusively for 2000 years."

The Church at Ephesus was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Paul opened his letter by referring to these two groups with the first person plural pronoun us. He stressed what God had done for them as a corporate body made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. From the beginning God was determined to have a race of people like himself, that would be holy and without blame before him in love. He did not determine at that time which individuals would be a part of this exclusive family; that decision would be a matter of man's choice. However, he did determine that the obedience of faith was a prerequisite for individual entry into this corporate body, which the New Testament calls the Church of Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Saints was the ordinary name that Paul used to address those who had professed faith in Christ as the promised Messiah and Savior of the world, even as the term Christian is used today. Saint properly signifies a holy person in heart and life. Not everyone who had the label, however, had the character. The term faithful would properly imply those who had received God's grace and continued therein.

These saints and faithful ones were made up of Jews and Gentiles, who were converted primarily as a result of the labors of Paul. He listed what God had done for both Jews and Gentiles, using the first person plural pronoun us in verses 3-9. Paul reminded these two groups, now united in Christ, that God had blessed us (verse 3), predestinated us (verse 5), redeemed us (verse 7), abounded toward us (verse 8), and revealed to us the mystery of his will (verse 9).

In verse 10, Paul described how God has also gathered in him things in heaven and earth [which includes beings in heaven, that is angels and glorified saints, and beings on earth, believing Jews and Gentiles] together in one.

In verse 11, Paul spoke of the common inheritance of both Jews and Gentiles.

Verse 12 Paul wrote specifically to the Jews, who were the ones that first trusted in Christ.

Finally, in verse 13 Paul addressed the Gentiles, who also believed and were sealed with the Holy Spirit, which is (verse 14) the security deposit of the final redemption of the purchased possession, which is the Church.

Eph 1:2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

This would not have been saving grace, (they already had that), but simply continued divine favor.

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us [Jew and Gentile] with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

The elect was now made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. Many Jews would not accept that Gentiles were now leading the way in ushering in the Messianic age. They were envious of the Gentiles. The unbelieving Jews did not want intimate fellowship with God, but they resented the Gentiles having it. "But his citizens [the Jews] hated him [Jesus the Messiah], and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." (Luke 19:14)

Paul was set to prove that it was not merely his idea that the Gentiles were now part of the chosen people, but that this plan had been predetermined by God ages before Paul had preached unto the Gentiles, even before the giving of the law, or circumcision, or the promises given to Abraham.

Eph 1:4 According as he hath chosen us [Jew and Gentile] in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

God had planned before he created man, that he was going to have beings in his own image with a morally upright character, who would lovingly respond to his favor. He must have expected Adam and his offspring to lovingly serve their Heavenly Father, for he delighted and rejoiced for a time over his "very good" Creation. But suddenly and surprisingly, all of his wonderful planning and work received a devastating blow, Adam sinned. Man was cast out of the Garden of Eden; sin separated Adam and his descendants from their Father and alienated them from their fellow family members.

Within 1500 years after Creation, the wickedness of man became so great that God repented that he had ever created man; and thus he determined to destroy man and beast from the face of the earth and start anew with Noah and his sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth. But the sin of Ham was a setback for God's plan of reuniting the human family and drawing it unto himself. God pronounced judgment upon Canaan and chose that the Messiah should come through Shem: "He said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. {27} God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." (Gen 9:26-27) The Jews are descendants of Shem and the Gentiles are the descendants of Japheth and Canaan.

The phrase "before the foundation of the world," refers to the time from the fall of Adam, through the Flood and the Tower of Babel incident, to the call of Abraham.

Halley's Bible Handbook says concerning Abraham's call (Gen 12:1-3), "Here starts the story of Redemption. . . Now, 2000 years after the Creation and the Fall of man, 400 years after the Flood, in a world lapsed into Idolatry and Wickedness, God called Abraham to become the founder of a movement having for its object the RECLAMATION and REDEMPTION of MANKIND."

Genesis 4-11 formed an introduction to God's redemptive purpose, dealing with universal history. Redemption had been hinted at in Genesis 3:15 and in God's covenant with Noah. With Genesis 12 the historical narrative passes from universal history to the beginnings of the chosen people and their subsequent fortunes. Abraham forms the connecting link from before the foundation of the world to the foundation of the nation of Israel.

In Abraham God found the perfect man to build the foundation of a nation: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: {2} And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: {3} And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3)

God divided the nations into two groups: Jew and Gentile, and segregated one small nation, the Jews, that through them the Messiah should come. A great

nation was established and given a land of its own for the purpose that it might be a blessing to the world; and that through these people the Messiah might come and bless the world.

The Jews proved to be a major disappointment to God; they failed to fulfil their divine purpose by enlightening the descendants of Japheth and Canaan, who had become gross idolaters. Actually, the Canaanites adversely influenced the Jews more towards idolatry, than the Jews positively influenced the Canaanites towards the true God.

But in the fullness of time God's predestined purpose came to a wonderful completion when Christ came; and the world was immeasurably blessed through Abraham's Seed. "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Gal 3:8) "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal 3:16)

Racially, the Messiah was to have been a Jew and yet the prophet said that the Gentiles would seek after Him: "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." (Isa 11:10) No wonder Paul called this a mystery [Eph 1:11], since there had been for ages an animosity between Jews and Gentiles; but this enmity was to be eliminated in Christ (Eph 2:14,15).

Isaiah prophesied that the veil over the hearts of the Gentiles would be destroyed for multitudes of believing Gentiles (Isa. 25:7), and a veil of unbelief would form over the hearts of many (not all) Jews, because they despised and rejected their Messiah. Nevertheless, God maintained his purpose in sending the Messiah who would restore a remnant of Israel and provide a light to the Gentiles that his salvation might go over the whole earth: "And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." (Isa 49:6)

When Israel crucified and rejected their Messiah, a veil of unbelief settled over the nation; and, though some believed in the Lord and were saved, as a people blindness fell over their hearts and minds. (2 Cor 3:14-15) The gospel was then given to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28), and the glorious gospel of John 3:16 was preached unto the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike.

That the Gentiles should trust in a Jew for salvation was most unlikely, but true. That the very nation he came to bless turned from him seemed incredible, but it happened (John 1:11-12); and that the Gentiles who were not the people of God should become the people of God, through faith in the Jewish Messiah, seemed fantastic--but that is the way it occurred. No wonder it was a mystery to the Jews!

No wonder Paul had to be so careful to explain these things to both Jews and Gentiles.

The blessings of the gospel so abundantly bestowed upon the Gentiles was evidence that God had also elected them as he had the Jew. Indeed, he had always had them in mind, as much as the Jew. Old Simeon pronounced in the temple when he beheld the eight-day old Messiah, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, {31} Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; {32} A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32)

The Gentiles' time had now come through the administration of the gospel. His purpose in extending the gospel was the same which he had in calling Abraham and giving the law to the Jews; that he would have a people who would be holy, blameless and loving and in his fellowship.

John Fletcher, the great Methodist theologian of the 18th Century wrote, "Election consists in God's choosing, from the beginning of the world, that the Gentiles should now share, through faith, the blessings of the Gospel of Christ, together with the believing Jews, who before were alone the chosen nation and peculiar people of God--It is an election from the obscure dispensation of the heathen to the luminous dispensation of the Christians; and not an election from a state of absolute ruin, to a state of finished salvation."

In other words, election never assured any certain individual of personal salvation; but election assured or ascertained that there would be a group (multitudes) from all nations, kindreds and tongues who would be saved. The Jews could not see the inclusiveness and universality of the gospel in their day; the Calvinists cannot see it today.

God's general plan to have a people has never changed. He has adapted and changed his means for carrying out this predetermined purpose according to man's response or lack of response throughout his various dispensations. He has kept his purpose in view despite man's rebellion in the Garden, his wickedness at the time of the flood, his idolatry at the Tower of Babel, and his disappointments with national Israel. God's purpose could not be defeated by man or devil. It was, and still is, predestined to happen!

Paul's point to the Church was that God had predestined ages before to separate a particular people [Israel], in order that he might later receive a holy and united people from all the nations of the earth. God conceptualized this plan and then put it into action at points in human history. Paul wanted to convince both Jew and Gentile that they were no longer to be divided. The division was to have been only for a time, in order to prepare the world for redemption through the Messiah. The Jews should have understood and been pleased.

## Predestination, Rightly Understood

Eph 1:5 Having predestinated us [Jew and Gentile] unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Predestinated simply means that God planned before he established the Jewish nation, that he was going to adopt the Gentiles as his children, just as he had before chosen the Jews to be his children. He determined this sometime before he actually called Abraham. God intended to bring the Gentiles into his kingdom long before their conversion under Paul's ministry to the Greek world. What God had planned even before the Mosaic law, before circumcision, was now coming to pass as multitudes of Gentiles were coming into God's Kingdom. The Father was drawing them into his Church through faith in Christ, just as he had drawn the Jews under the ministry of Jesus and the apostles in Palestine. God had received both Jew and Gentile out of the world and from the condemnation of the law into his family.

All this was done "according to the good pleasure of God's will." This expression which Calvinists are so fond of quoting in order to defend their decrees simply means that it pleases God to fulfil his original intent in having a people (the Church) with whom he may have intimate fellowship. This is not a selfish pleasure, but a will that seeks the highest good of universal being. Just as the Jews were chosen to be his special people not on account of any goodness or greatness of their own, but because God loved them (Deut 7:6-7). So the Gentiles were called according to his "good pleasure," or in other words his eternal benevolence, not because there was anything in their behavior to merit God's good will towards them. But he fully intended to mold their character that both Jew and Gentile would be "holy and without blame before him in love."

Eph 1:6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us [Jews and Gentiles] accepted in the beloved [Son].

Thus it is according to God's favor that he has called us Jews and Gentiles unto himself. We are accepted in his beloved Son. Because Christ has made an atonement for sin, God is now able to righteously accept by his mercy all men who repent and believe the Gospel. Not because men deserve his goodness, but that God may be glorified. God desires to magnify his grace and mercy even over his law. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) The offer of universal salvation, despite universal sin, through the atonement of Jesus Christ gave God his greatest opportunity to reveal to man his love and merciful character. A love that surpasses all human understanding and previous divine revelation. A love in which the Creator condescends to the creation and gives his life for his enemies.

Eph 1:7 In whom we [Jew and Gentile] have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Both Jew and Gentile have been set free from the power and dominion of sin by the atonement of Christ, because he is so generous in extending his favor upon us while we were yet his enemies.

Eph 1:8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us [Jew and Gentile] in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: 10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

What is the mystery of his will? Calvinists claim that it is the decrees in which God has elected some to eternal life, and reprobated the rest of humanity to eternal damnation. When challenged concerning both the justice and mercy of such dreadful decrees in light of the love of God, they claim that it is a mystery. But Calvinists have the mysterious confused with the absurd. Paul in Ephesians revealed the mystery, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times" (when it was the most opportune time to do so) he might gather together in unity with him angels and already glorified saints [things in heaven], and believing Jews and Gentiles still on earth. The Church, Triumphant, and the Church Militant, is the revealed mystery.

The predetermined relationship between Jew and Gentile was obscure to the Jews throughout history because as a people they did not understand the clues in their own scriptures which foretold of the conversion of the Gentiles and the formation of the Church made up of only a remnant of Jews and believing Gentiles. Selfishness blinds men to truth. The Jews were interested in receiving God's blessings, but not sharing them with the Gentiles.

"The dispensation of the fullness of time," meant that the time was ripe to take the Gospel to all the world so that God might have a people out of all nations. The universal peace in the Roman Empire at the time and the famous Roman roads facilitated travel. Israel lying on the borders of three continents Asia, Europe and Africa, was very convenient to carrying out God's purpose. The universality of the Greek language simplified the communication of the message. The Jews had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. "Moses had in every city them that preached him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." (Acts 15:21) So that the Gentiles had already had the opportunity to hear of the one true God and his moral law and his miraculous power in delivering the Jews from Egyptian bondage.

Eph 1:11 In whom also we [Jews and Gentiles] have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

Jews and Gentiles have obtained through faith a common inheritance being equally predestined to share the Christian dispensation according to God's purpose to have a family from all the peoples of the earth.

Calvinists refer frequently to the "secret counsel of God" as something fixed in eternity past when he decreed the eternal salvation of the elect and damned the masses of humanity. But the Father with the advice of his Son and the Holy Spirit is still counseling, observing, making decisions, planning, even occasionally changing his plans to bring to pass his unchanging eternal purpose.

"According to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," simply means that the development of the Christian Church was working out according to God's ultimate purpose to have a people with pure hearts to serve him. The Godhead consulted no one in formulating his purpose, but he did use men, notably from Abraham through Peter and Paul to bring to pass his will.

Despite the wonderful work of the afore mentioned saints, the church would never have come to pass without the work of the our Lord Jesus Christ. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal 3:16) Only in Christ are the promises made to Abraham fulfilled. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. {27} For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. {28} There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. {29} And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:26-29)

Since all, whether Jew or Gentile, may embrace Christ by faith, it follows that Abraham is not merely the father of historical Israel, but the "father of all them that believe," whatever their national origin. (Rom 4:11)

Eph 1:12 That we [Jews] should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Here Paul addressed only the Jews, who were the original disciples of Christ. Abraham had two seeds, a natural and a spiritual. His natural descendants were not necessarily saved, but his spiritual seed, those who had the faith of Abraham

whether Jew or Gentile were saved. The first Gospel offer was made to the Jews, and the mother Church at Jerusalem was composed almost exclusively of Jews, compare Acts 2:5, and 3:26 with Acts 13:46.

Eph 1:13 In whom ye [Gentiles] also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Now he speaks specifically to the Gentiles, who were now also believing in Christ. Historical Israel was no longer exclusively the elect of God. Paul's opponents, the Judaizers, argued, that the coming of the Messiah meant no change whatsoever in the preexisting state of affairs. To them the Jews were still the exclusive people of God, so Gentile converts must join Israel by circumcision as well as through faith in Christ. But Paul taught that through simple belief in the truth and trust in Christ one became part of the elect. This election was then sealed by the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Cornelius' house received the Holy Spirit without circumcision (without even baptism) as Peter preached to them, in the same manner as the Jews had on the day of Pentecost. Circumcision was the emblem or sign of the Old Covenant, the infilling of the Spirit of God, or "Christ in you the hope of glory" was the stamp of the new.

Eph 1:14 Which is the earnest of our [Jew and Gentile] inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit was given as an indication or assurance of something that is yet to come, which will be our glorification when the bride is presented to Christ "as a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:27). In the end God's justice and mercy will be glorified and praised in the Church, for his wisdom will be justified in his children.

Eph 1:15 Wherefore I [Paul] also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you [Jews and Gentiles] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye [Jews and Gentiles] may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what is the

exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward [Jews and Gentiles] who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Jesus is the head his body, the Church. The Church is the fulfilment of all the prophecies and promises made to Abraham and his descendants. Christ completed and fulfilled all that the Father had sent him to do and has left the Church, filled with the Holy Spirit, as his witness on the earth. Before Christ, the Church was incomplete, but the gospel of Christ opened the Church to the Gentiles, thus making the Church whole. The Church is the revelation of the mystery of Christ. The Church has been given the power to subdue all the nations under Christ's headship. God intends to use the Church, not physical, national Israel, to evangelize the world until his Second Advent.

### **Faith Which Works**

Eph 2:1 And you [Gentiles] hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:

2 Wherein in time past ye [Gentiles] walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all [Jew and Gentile] had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. [Nature according to Webster is "the essential character of a thing; essence; not necessarily innate or inherited; state of man unredeemed by grace." 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us [Jew and Gentile], 5 Even when we [Jew and Gentile] were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us [Jew and Gentile] up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us [Jew and Gentile] through Christ Jesus.

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye [Gentiles, as well as we Jews] saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Paul warned the Jews that salvation is, "not of yourselves." The Jews boasted in the flesh. They said to Jesus, "We are Abraham's seed." In saying this they were claiming that salvation was of themselves. "After all," they reasoned, "Had not Jesus said, 'Salvation is of the Jews.'" But Jesus rebuked them for not having the faith of Abraham.

Paul had to deal with the Judaizer problem in many of the churches including Rome, Corinth, Colosse, Galatia and Philippi. When Paul warned the Philippians concerning "the concision," he explained, {3} "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. {4} Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: {5} Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; {6} Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Phil 3:2-6) Paul, until his conversion, had trusted in himself for salvation and not the Lord.

However, the Judaizers gloried in such fleshly things. They were a people who gloried in the flesh and in the fact that they were different from other men. They were like the proud Pharisees who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." (Luke 18:9)

The Jews would have liked to have succeeded in convincing the Gentiles that they must come into salvation through the synagogue by the rite of circumcision that they might glory in the growth of their traditions and cultural religion. But God had planned that Gentile and Jew alike be saved by faith, not the works of the law.

Salvation (reconciliation to God) is God's gift. If it were by works, it would not be a gift. Circumcision was a work that the Judaizers were claiming was necessary before the Gentiles could be saved; unbelieving Jews thought they were saved of themselves (of their birth or through the works of circumcision and Jewish rites and ceremonies).

It is evident that the Judaizers were also a problem at Rome where Paul addressed the question of circumcision: "Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? {27} And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? {28} For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: {29} But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Rom 2:26-29)

Converted Gentiles, who were keeping the righteousness of the law through faith in Jesus Christ, had their hearts circumcised. The prideful and arrogant Jews at

Rome transgressed the moral law by stealing, committing adultery, and sacrilege. (Rom 2) Yet, they considered themselves leaders and teachers of the law, but Jesus had called them blind leaders of the blind.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Paul distinguished between dead works (the rites and rituals of Judaism) and good works. We must not confound the morally pure works of the Christian's faith with the filthy, partial, external works of the hypocritical formalist. Paul made clear that good works follow salvation as he explained to the church at Corinth, "Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. {19} Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." (1 Cor 7:18-19)

The moral law of God (loving God supremely and one's neighbor equally) is forever the abiding definition of sin and righteousness (Rom 3:20, 7:7, and 1 John 3:4). But circumcision seemed to be everything to the Judaizers, while keeping the moral law seemed to be of little consequence.

Ezekiel commanded men of Israel to circumcise their own hearts 18:31: "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" But later the prophet promised God would circumcise their hearts 36:26: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Circumcision of the flesh was strictly man's work, but God creates in the believer a new heart as a result of man's repentance and faith. Salvation is not solely the work of God or man, but man cooperating with God.

God had "before ordained" or predestinated or elected that he would have a people who would walk in good works, works of faith, not the dead works of the law as epitomized in circumcision. He had predestined that we should walk before him "holy and without blame in love."

When Paul wrote to the Romans that we are "justified by faith without the deeds of the law," he is referring primarily to the ceremonial law, but could include the moral law because at the point of conversion we have no good works to offer. Repentance and faith are conditions for salvation, not works that merit salvation. After conversion "we are his workmanship." The works are the evidence of our salvation, when they are rooted in a living faith and abiding love of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Eph 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

The Gentiles were regarded as inferiors by the party of the circumcision, but Paul showed them that they were now joint-heirs with Christ on an equal footing with the Jews. There is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ Jesus. The true circumcision are those who "worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

Eph 2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Like the prodigal son the Gentiles were in the past far off, but are now made near by the blood of Christ, not the blood that runs after circumcision.

Peter preached to the multitude of Jews, who gathered to observe the fulfillment of Joel's promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon "all flesh" in the upper room, "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39)

Who was God calling? Paul made it clear in his message to the Greeks in Athens, "And the times of this ignorance [the long history of Gentile idolatry] God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:" (Acts 17:30) This was a new era. God's call was no longer limited primarily to the Jews. Jesus had sent forth his disciples everywhere (Mark 16:20). According to Paul's gospel the potential elect are all men every where, no one is to be excluded from the opportunity to be saved. The Church is not any longer merely historical Israel. It is universal! The veil of the temple has been rent! The mystery has been revealed! Any man through faith in Christ may approach the Almighty.

Furthermore, Paul had announced to the Athenians that God, "hath made of one blood all nations of men." (Acts 17:26) Indeed, Paul was a man far ahead of his times. The ages long wall of separation of the two main divisions of men, Jew and Gentile, was falling by the unity produced through faith in the blood of Christ. No natural descent, whether traced backed to Adam or Abraham, could truly unify men, but the blood of Christ was breaking all barriers. No man has ever done more to promote racial and religious unity than St. Paul. Under his ministry ancient walls were crumbling and the unbelieving Jews despised him for it. And

even believing Jews [the Judaizers] could be just as hateful against Paul's ministry, because they loved the traditions of men more than God.

Eph 2:14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Christ came to bring peace between Jews and Gentiles and to break down the generations of animosity between Jew and Gentile, that had been erected as a result of their ceremonial rituals which centered around circumcision. This wall was only designed to be a temporary wall in order that God might prepare the Jews to be a light to the world. God had always wanted Israel to be a city on a hill, but alas, they had put their candle under a bushel of petty ordinances that neither they nor their fathers could keep, not because the ordinances as originally given were impossible, but because of the additions of the rabbis over the centuries had made them unnecessarily exacting. They had gloried in the shadow and the emblems instead of the substance. They had gloried in the flesh and not the Spirit.

Eph 2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

Through Christ's body torn on the Cross broken for the sins of all men, he had abolished the rites and rituals of Judaism to make a new man [the church] and making peace between Jew and Gentile. The Jew would not so much as eat with a Gentile which made for mistrust and enmity between the two. They failed to understand "that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom 14:17).

Paul was not suggesting that the commandments to love God and neighbor were abolished or that Christians had no objective standard that they were required to keep under the New Covenant.

Popular religion teaches that works or anything we do have nothing to do with our eternal salvation. But Jesus said, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29)."

Paul affirmed to the Romans that doing good was required in order to ultimately be saved: "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; {10} But glory, honour, and peace, to every

man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: {11} For there is no respect of persons with God." (Rom 2:9-11)

The Galatian letter also revealed that it was the ceremonial law which had been abolished. Christ had fulfilled its types and shadows. Now there was no longer the need for these rites and rituals, because the substance of things hoped for had come and died and rose again. But the Galatians had been "entangled again by the yoke of bondage," carried back to the symbols ["the weak and beggarly elements"], by the teachings of the Judaizers, who insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised and "observe days, and months, and times, and years." (Gal 4:10) But Christ through his blood atonement had made a "new man" or "new creature" [the Church,"the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16)], thus making peace between Jew and Gentile.

The mark of circumcision of the foreskin was nothing in comparison to true "marks" of persecution, which for Jesus' sake Paul bore in his own body. Circumcision had become merely a rite of passage in Israel, something any good Jewish family would have done to their sons. But it represented no choice on the part of the eight-day old baby. No choice to stand for God's purpose, which would inevitably result in persecution and rejection from the society of Jews. Hence, it had become simply the fair show of the Judaizers. "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. {13} For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. {14} But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. {15} For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. {16} And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. {17} From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. {18} Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." (Gal 6:12-18)

Yes, my friends, there is a rule Paul taught that believers must walk by in order to have the mercy and peace of God: "In love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Gal 5:13-14). It is this rule of love that makes faith work, without it faith is dead. (Gal 5:6) When Paul spoke critically of the works of the law, he did not have in mind the law of love, which he always promoted, which will never be abolished in this life or the one to come. He was criticizing the dead works of the Jewish ritualist.

Eph 2:16 And that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: [The hatred between Jew and Gentile was to be accounted as dead by those who worshipped the Lord Jesus in

spirit and truth.] 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off [Gentiles], and to them that were nigh [Jews]. 18 For through him we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father. [This access comes not through the circumcision of the flesh, but the circumcision of the heart by the Spirit.] 19 Now therefore ye [Gentiles] are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints [the Jews who first trusted in Christ], and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [not the ceremonial law], Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; [Where there was formerly a partition, Jesus Christ is the now the Cornerstone, which unites the Gentile wall and Jewish wall into one great wall.] 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: [Not the physical building in Jerusalem where the Jews gloried in the flesh and where they celebrated their feast and holy days and offered their sacrifices, but a temple made by God, eternal in the heavens.] 22 In whom ye [Jews and Gentiles] also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

### **The Fellowship of the Mystery**

Eph 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians from his imprisonment in Rome. This imprisonment was a result of his determination to preach to the Gentiles. (Acts 22:21)

Eph 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: Dispensation means economy or administration. Under God's administration and plan he had sent Paul to be his chief instrument in taking the message of God's gift of salvation to the Gentiles.

Eph 3:3-4 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words. [Eph 1: 9-10], Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

Paul explained how God had elected him, "to reveal his Son and to preach him among the heathen. {13} Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. {14} And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. {15} This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. {16} Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show

forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Tim 1:12-17)

Saul of Tarsus had no righteous works to make himself acceptable to God. He had wasted the Church and persecuted its Almighty founder beyond measure. But the Lord revealed himself unto Paul on the Damascus road and said, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, ... {17} Delivering thee from the people [Jews], and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, {18} To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." (Acts 26:16-20)

Paul was told from the beginning that all men, especially the Gentiles, were sanctified (separated to be "holy and without blame before him in love)," by faith in Christ.

Eph 3:5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

The law had made a provision for strangers outside the commonwealth of Israel to enter into fellowship with the Jews, but it had to come through circumcision. Also the prophets had some knowledge that there was a place for the Gentiles in God's purpose for there are numerous allusions to this fact in their writings. But what the Jews did not seem to understand was that the Gentiles would come into God's kingdom without going through Judaism, and that they would be welcomed on an equal basis with the Jew.

Eph 3:6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

The mystery was revealed! The secret was that the promise of the Messiah is not just to the Jews, but to all nations. The magnificent climax of God's ancient purpose: the redemption, adoption, forgiveness, and sealing of a people from all the world for God's possession, was now being brought to pass through the effective exercise of God's will and grace.

Eph 3:7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

Because of Paul's faithfulness, God put him into the ministry of testifying to the grace of God: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." (1 Tim 1:12)

Eph 3:8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Now the mystery was revealed by Paul, that the Jews and the Gentiles so long divided would come into fellowship through the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ and form the unified and universal Church. Centuries earlier David had spoken prophetically, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. {23} This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes." (Psa 118:22-23)

### **Jesus Gave the Clues**

The marvellous mystery had been revealed in Christ's ministry. On the way to Jerusalem Jesus "saw a fig tree, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. 20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!" (Matt 21:19-20)

The fig tree represented what Paul called the "Jews' religion." (Gal 1:13-14) It was passing away. Jesus had cursed it, because it merely produced leaves, outwardly it still looked impressive, but it had not produced the fruit of the Spirit in its adherents. Because of the Jew's rebellion, their religion had not produced "a holy people before him without blame and in love." It had not produced the justice, mercy, faith, humility and truth which God valued. It had only influenced the nations of the world to blaspheme the name of God. It had produced nothing but dead works.

The clues which could have solved the mystery for the Jews, if they had had ears to hear, were found in our Lord's parables: When Jesus was come into the temple, he asked the chief priests and the elders of the people, "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. 29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. 30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. 31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before

you. 32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. (Matt. 21:28-32)

The Gentiles refused to do any work in God's vineyard and for millenniums God "winked" at their ignorance, but he was now through Paul, "commanding all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17) The Gentiles were now changing their mind and laboring for God. The Jews, who said they would serve and obey, in actuality never worked for God. They worked only for themselves, in the name of God, giving the heathen opportunity to blaspheme the name of God.

Jesus challenged the Jews to hear another parable: "There was a certain householder [God], which planted a vineyard [Israel], and hedged it [Providential protection] round about, and digged a winepress [the law with its sacrificial rites] in it, and built a tower [the temple], and let it out to husbandmen [the priests and rabbis], and went into a far country [God's heavenly throne]: 34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants [prophets] to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35 And the husbandmen [leaders of the Jews] took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son [Jesus]. 38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. 39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him [Calvary]. 40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen [Gentiles], which shall render him the fruits in their seasons [will fulfill his predestined purpose]. 42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone [Jesus] which the builders [Jews] rejected, the same is become the head of the corner [Church]: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you [Jews], and given to a nation [Gentiles] bringing forth the fruits [fruit of the Spirit] thereof. 44 And whosoever [Jew or Gentile] shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 45 And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them." (Matt 21:33-45)

The stone had fallen upon Judaism and was grinding it to powder. Judaism was suddenly to be destroyed in the blaze of Titus' power, who was God's agent in judging the Jews for their rejection of their Savior and Messiah. But the Gentiles had thrown themselves upon the stone of God's mercy with broken and contrite hearts.

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king [God], which made a marriage for his son, 3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. 4 Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: 6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. 7 But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." [Once again Jesus foretold of the destruction of Jerusalem by God's armies led by the Roman commander, Titus] 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy [Jews]. 9 Go ye therefore into the highways [to all nations], and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. 11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: 12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matt 22:1-13)

The wedding garment symbolizes purity of heart. The choice that God made is that he is determined to have a people from every nation, who will be holy and blameless in love. (Eph 1:4) The chosen to eternal life are those that have put off the former self-centered life [the old man] and hath "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Remember, "grace is with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Eph 6:24) So many are called unto the wedding and sit down expecting to eat of the feast of eternal bliss, but in the end are cast into Hell. They are not chosen because they refused to wear the wedding garment. The chosen ones are "imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved..." (Eph 5:1-2).

The chosen are the ones God points to and says, "They are mine because they love me." All of Israel was called to be God's special people, but only a remnant actually responded in faith and were hence chosen. Since the resurrection of Christ all the world is called, but few respond any better than the Jews of old, and so few are actually among the chosen.

Eph 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

These principalities and powers refer to angels which Peter taught desire to look into the things concerning God's grace and the salvation of man. The Church is

God's revelation to the angelic hosts of the many sides of God's wisdom in revealing his purpose.

Eph 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

God's purpose has always been to have a relationship with people from all the nations of the world, who are conformed to the image of God's beloved Son. A Family who are tried and tested whom he can trust to live in union with him for eternity in a holy marriage, which Paul referred to as a "great mystery." (Eph 5:32)

Eph 3:12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

Faith that he will perform that which he has promised encourages us to boldly and with confidence approach the throne of grace.

Eph 3:13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. 14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

The glory of God is essentially his character. Character is the glory of any being, be he man or God. The Scriptures speak of God's concern for protecting his good name or reputation. For men to have confidence in God, and thus love God, they must believe that he is good, just and loving. If men lose confidence in God, it makes his task of governing more difficult. Everything God has ever done reveals his goodness, which is his glory.

It is not God's natural endowments of eternity of being, omniscience, omnipotence, or omnipresence that is his essential glory, but his glorious and

unselfish use of these attributes that makes God so great. The essence of God's greatness is not his Sovereignty, but his goodness. God is great because God is good. Both the Father and the Son are glorified in the church. God is glorified when his character and Spirit is revealed in us, who are conformed to his image. The saints use their natural endowments and spiritual gifts in loving service unto him and their fellows, even as he lives to serve his creation. Many seek the fullness of God's power through the gifts of the Spirit. They covet the authority of God, but neglect conformity to his character. Should not the power of the Holy Spirit that is in us strengthen us to live a life worthy of the one who died for us and rose again? After all, what is the seal or stamp of the Holy Spirit on the life of any believer, but a pure and blameless heart? Sin breaks the seal. Holiness strengthens the seal and keeps us fit to be his vessels fulfilling his eternal purpose.

God is glorified in his Church as it reveals his spotless and blameless character. Let us not blaspheme his holy name, by calling ourselves Christians without imitating his character. The mystery of Christ, which was revealed in and through the teaching and lives of Jesus and the apostles, is the whole family of God in Heaven and Earth. It is the Holy Catholic Church, not the Roman Catholic Church headed by a man, but the Universal Church made up of all the nations, kindreds, peoples and tongues.

### **Chapter 3**

## **The Uniting of the Nations**

### **Commentary on Romans 9**

The book of Romans, like Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, has been misused by Calvinists to promote a false notion of predestination. John Calvin wrote in the Institutes, "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death." Book III, Chapter 21, Paragraph 5

Calvin, himself, admitted, that this was a "dreadful decree." Followers of Calvin appeal to Romans Chapter 9 to support their terrible doctrine. They make a grave error in assuming, that the election of individuals to salvation or damnation is the predominate theme of this chapter. However, Paul, in Romans 9, dealt mainly with God's selection of nations and individuals to spiritual functions and

responsibilities, not with the eternal destinies of individual souls. There is nothing in Romans 9, or anywhere else in the Bible, which teaches that any individual is preordained or predestined before his birth for Heaven or Hell.

When Paul wrote to the Church at Rome from Corinth about 59-60 A.D., it was becoming progressively obvious that the Church was becoming a largely Gentile institution. The Jews for the most part were refusing to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. In their mind if the Christian Church was really the fulfilment of the promised Messianic Kingdom, and the Jews were being shut out from it, then God's promises to the Jews in the law and the prophets had been broken which they could not imagine.

Paul's aim in Romans 9, which must be read in the context of Romans Chapters 10 and 11, was to vindicate God's judgment in switching his emphasis from working primarily through the Jewish nation to the Gentiles, by casting off the nation of Israel and adopting the Gentiles. Paul wrote to convince the Jews, that the calling of the Gentiles was no casual or unexpected event, but a firm purpose in the divine mind, that it was preordained even before the Jewish race was founded by Abraham. God providentially had set the Jews apart for a predetermined purpose, so that through them he might reveal himself to the whole world and unite all men under the rule of King Jesus. With the calling of the Gentiles, the nation of Israel no longer stood in a privileged relationship with God.

Paul taught in Romans Chapters 9-11, that God was only finished with the Jews as a nation, not as individuals. In Romans 10, Paul wrote that any individual, whether Jew or Gentile, can be saved if he will turn in personal faith to God. Both Jew and Gentile alike must enter into the Kingdom or the Church, through repentance and faith in Jesus the Messiah. There is no longer any difference between the two groups in relationship to their opportunities as individuals to relate to God. The offer of eternal salvation to individual souls included all Jews and Gentiles potentially, but no man unconditionally.

Many fail to understand that the Biblical concepts of predestination and election are primarily a corporate choice to special privilege and service. Of course, these terms do encompass the souls of individual men, if and when they identify and associate with the elect body [the Church made up of Jews and Gentiles] through faith in Jesus the Messiah. However, as a privileged nation the Jews had fallen away, except for a remnant.

At the time Paul wrote, the Gentiles were being favored over the Jews. As nations the Jews and Gentiles were not founded on equal terms, nor did they now stand equally in relationship to being used for the divine plan. Paul cautioned in Romans 11, that the Gentiles could also fall from favor, if they became prideful of their new found significance.

## What is a Jew?

(Rom 9:1-5) I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, {2} That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. {3} For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: {4} Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; {5} Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Paul's compassion for his own people, the Jews, who were chosen to be God's privileged and special people was evident. God chose that through them he would reveal himself to all the nations of the world. Jesus is Lord over all, both Jew and Gentile. This choosing was not to assured individual salvation. Paul will prove in Roman 9 that God's use of Israel in their long national history was not based on their merit, but on God's will and call.

Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Jewish opponents argued that the privileges listed in verses four and five were guaranteed to them as a nation, unless God broke his word. Paul responded that God is not unconditionally bound to the whole nation. Since Abraham there had been a process of selection by which some had been rejected. The Jews should not have been surprised that God was now selecting the Gentiles and bypassing the Jews. The apparent exclusion of Israel does not involve any breach of promise on God's part for he always made a selection, even among the members of the chosen family, Abraham, Issac and Jacob. The same process of selection and rejection might be expected now as the Gentiles were being selected and the Jews rejected.

Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Paul illustrated verse 6 by appealing to the case of Abraham. Ishmael was his first born son, yet God selected Isaac to be the father of the chosen race. So, the privileges do not come merely from natural decent as the Jews believed.

The Jews, who sat under the ministry of Jesus, some of whom professed to believe in him, justified themselves by appealing to the fact that they were descendants of Abraham; but "Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. . . Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. . . And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." (John 8:39, 43, 44-45)

Jesus could see through the hypocrisy of these vipers. They were trusting in their lineage back to Abraham for their salvation, but they had not the faith of Abraham, so they were not in truth of Abraham. They refused to truly believe in Jesus because he was the Truth; they despised the Truth.

These Jews could not hear Jesus' words, because, "they received not the love of the truth." (2 Th 2:10) They hated the Truth so much, that they delivered Jesus up to be crucified.

Fellow Jews were Paul's most steadfast opponents. They were still trusting in their lineage to Abraham, whether than a love for the Truth, so that God was finally passing over their nation to favor the Gentile nations.

Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

The choice of Isaac showed that a position of privilege with God was not a matter of genealogy, but of special promise and choice. When God makes a promise, man must choose to believe and act upon it. To be children of God a people must have faith in God's promises, which the Jews consistently lacked. On the other hand, the Gentiles were expressing faith, and they were being spiritually begotten by God into the kingdom.

Earlier in this epistle Paul had taught that Abraham was accounted as righteous or justified, not as a Jew, but as a Gentile, an uncircumcised person; and that Jews as well as Gentiles are justified by faith in God, like the faith of the uncircumcised Abraham. "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. {10} How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. {11} And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: {12} And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. {13} For the promise, that he

should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." (Rom 4:9-13)

So Abraham was justified by faith, even before there was a distinction between Jews and Gentiles!

Paul taught that God was the father of all men who believed in him, Jew and Gentile alike, as we have already seen. This angered the Jews for they could not accept God being the father of the Gentiles. Even some Jews who had become Christians taught that Gentiles must become Jewish proselytes in order to be part of the Church. They were basing their claims for the necessity that Gentiles be circumcised on the promise made to Abraham, that the promise was to his seed. These "Judaziers" argued that since Gentiles were not of Abraham's seed by nature, they would have to become so by circumcision. Paul responded that the promise was given on Abraham's faith, before he was circumcised; and that Abraham's children are those who possess the same faith, not those who are circumcised. Abraham was God's man, because of his faith, not his circumcision: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: {29} But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Rom 2: 28-29)

In Roman 2:28-29 and 9:6-9, Paul established a foundation by defining the true Jew, who is not from a line of flesh genealogy, but rather one that has been circumcised in the heart, in the spirit. This means then that any person (Jew or Gentile) that comes through Jesus Christ into his spiritual kingdom is the real Jew, showing then that the natural Jew is no longer special apart from Christ. This teaching was anathema to the phoney Jews, who opposed Paul and yet still had great dreams and expectation for their nation.

Rom 9:9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

God moved supernaturally in bringing about the choice of Isaac instead of Ishmael to bring about the nation through which he would reveal himself to all nations, "Through faith Sara received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, and Abraham was as good as dead because she judged him faithful who had promised. (Heb 11:11)

## **The General Election to Service**

(Rom 9:10-13) And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; {11} (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) {12} It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. {13} As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

It is important that we consider these verses in the light of what God had said to the mother of these two brothers after their conception, "The LORD said to Rebekah, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." (Gen 25:23) God explained to Rebecca that Jacob and Esau headed two nations; Jacob was to be the father of the chosen people, the Jews, the stronger people; Esau was the father of the Edomites, the weaker people. God showed that he carried out his plans by selecting whom he pleased, for before their birth he destined Jacob's line for greater privilege (not personal salvation) than Esau.

The traditional selection would have been Esau, the first-born, to be the head of the original family of God, the Jews. But God sidestepped the traditional, or natural method, and introduced his own spiritual selection, Jacob, to be the head of the Jewish people. God's call of Jacob over Esau is a call to service, not a determination that Jacob will necessarily possess eternal salvation and Esau necessarily be damned. In speaking of Jacob and Esau, either as men or nations, neither the author of Genesis nor St. Paul had eternal salvation in mind; the matter in question is the part they play in the history of God's redemptive plan as it was progressing according to God's eternal purpose.

Before the birth of the twins, prior to either one making moral choices, God was said to have chosen Jacob over Esau. Their task and service to the Lord had been planned before their birth and had nothing to do with their future moral choices. God loved both of the boys from the womb, but they did not have the same service to perform. Comparatively speaking Jacob was to be a vessel of honor, but Esau was to have a less honorable calling.

"The purpose of God according to election" referred to the method by which God carried out his purposes in the selection of nations and individuals to be his vessels. The Jews were selected to preserve the knowledge of God, to bring forth the promised Messiah, and to prepare for the call of the Gentiles. The selection was not to assured salvation, but to the privilege of helping to carry out God's plan of salvation. Thus, it was to be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not Abraham, Ishmael, and Esau. This did not mean that Jacob was unconditionally saved or Esau unconditionally lost, as the Calvinists teach. Nor does it mean that Jacob would be saved because God knew that he would respond to the promises of the Messiah, and that Esau would be damned because he knew that Esau would not have faith, as the Arminians teach.

God chose a certain nation [Israel] and individuals [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] within that nation, independent of their merit, to be his vessels. We must not mistake God's choice of instruments, as an assured choice to be saved unconditionally. Sometimes God's means and his end are so intertwined, that it is easy to get the means and the end confused. The end is the personal salvation of the souls of all men. The means God uses to accomplish this end include revealing himself through chosen nations, the Jews first, then the Gentiles. Unfortunately, God's means and his end are often confused in interpreting Roman 9.

God expected Abraham, Isaac and Jacob not merely to be vessels--but to be effective vessels for the salvation of the human race. In order to be effective vessels, they must be saved from the power and dominion of sin; they must be holy; and they must be in intimate fellowship with God in order to perform God's plan and purpose for their calling. God's chosen vessels were to set examples, not just to the Jews, but to the Gentiles.

Paul quoted from God's prophesy to Rebecca, "the elder shall serve the younger." However, Esau, the firstborn twin, never actually served Jacob his younger brother (Gen 32:4,13), but Esau's descendants, the Edomites, did serve the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites, under David's kingdom. Symbolically, Esau represented the Jews who were God's firstborn and exclusive people, but they sold their birthright to the Gentiles [Jacob] for a pot of porridge [the praises of men]. The Jews by Paul's time were positionally lower than the Gentiles, which seemed to be a fulfilment of the words of the Lord to Rebecca. (Gen 25:23)

In Romans 9:13, Paul also quoted from Malachi, "The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. {4} Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever." (Mal 1:1-4)

It was fifteen hundred years after the birth of the twins when God said through the prophet Malachi that he loved Jacob over Esau. Verse 4, clarified that God did not hate (righteous indignation, not malice) Esau as an individual, but the Edomites who were Esau descendants. Jacob is Israel and Esau is Edom. Although Isaac also had given a blessing to Esau (although not the blessing of the firstborn), the Edomites, Esau's descendants, had failed to make peace with Jacob as Esau had done. The Edomites, motivated by loss of their birthright, hated Israel and constantly fought against it, thus giving God good reason to at the time of Malachi say that he had a righteous indignation (hatred) against these God haters and haters of God's people.

The Edomites had refused passage of the Israelites en-route from the Exodus. Generation after generation, bloody battles were fought between Israel and Edom. The prophets consistently pronounced doom on Edom for holding Israelites slaves, mistreating innocent travellers, and for their pride and vindictiveness. They were an exceedingly wicked people. According to Josephus (Ant. 14:1, Sec. 3), Herod, who had the male infants of Bethlehem slain in his zeal to destroy the Christ child, was of Esau's race. Therefore, instead of getting God's blessing, in the end they were wasted as a people. No wonder Malachi used such strong language in saying that God hated the people of Esau. Paul applied Malachi's language to make his point that God preferred Jacob over Esau to be his instrument to help establish the nation of Israel.

The election in Roman 9:10-13 is not election for eternal salvation or damnation. Rather, it is selection for the roles God has called individuals and nations to play in their earthly life. Of course, the historical situation of both individuals and peoples certainly affects their eternal destiny; but it does not determine it.

Rom 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

Was God unrighteous in choosing Issac over Ishmael or Jacob over Esau for his special purposes? Paul anticipated that the Jews, who resented that the privileges which were once exclusively theirs, would question God's righteousness in extending these privileges to the Gentiles. But any objective person, knowledgeable of the history of Esau [Edom] and the history of the Jews, would see God's justice in casting them both away. If Israel approved the principle of God's election, when it was followed in a way so strikingly in their favor, how could the Jews repudiate it, when it was now turning against them in the election of the Gentiles?

The student of history would also appreciate the longsuffering and justice of God in his dealings with Edomites and the Jews. Nothing blinds men to righteousness more than bitterness and envy, which the Edomites had against the Jews and the Jews had against the Edomites.

### **Is God Arbitrary?**

Rom 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

God said this to Moses after the golden calf incident when God had threatened to destroy the people, but Moses interceded and succeeded in changing God's

mind. Nevertheless, the Lord still promised to visit their sin upon them, and he plagued the people. Next God threatened to withdraw his presence from Israel, lest he consumed the people in their journey. If God continued leading the Israelites in their trek into the promised land, he knew they would provoke him to wrath and hasten their own destruction. But once again Moses interceded on behalf of Israel pleading that God would preserve them as his peculiar and separated people from the nations of the earth. God agreed to show mercy as Moses requested, because Moses had found grace in God's sight.

Moses finally requested to see God's glory. And the LORD replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." (Exo 33:19) So, God extended mercy to Israel by promising to preserve them as a nation and to keep his covenant with them although the generation of rebels perished in the wilderness before he lead the next generation into the promise land. From this, we should not assume that God arbitrarily extends mercy or compassion independently of man's attitudes and actions in matters of personal salvation. But God may show mercy by continuing a nation's privileges and blessings, even in their rebellion.

Certainly, Israel deserved judgment, not mercy, but perhaps because of Moses' willingness to atone for their sin by requesting to be blotted out of the book of life in their stead, God saved the nation. Moses typified Christ's intercession in dying for the sins of the people. Indeed, Paul, himself, represented the same spirit when he wished himself "accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." But despite Paul's wishes, God's longsuffering with the nation had come to an end by Paul's time. Their unique national standing as the people of God was doomed. God had chosen the Gentiles in their stead.

The Psalmist also explained a reason for God extending mercy and for his longsuffering with the Jews: God knew that "their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." (Psa 78:37-39)

Of course, this decision did not mean that as individuals they were granted forgiveness unto eternal life, but that God was going to continue to suffer with them as his unique people, through whom he would reveal the Messiah, despite their rebellion. Yet, as a people they continued to take advantage of God's mercy and compassion and do "despite unto the spirit of grace."

Rom 9:16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

When it comes to the call of individuals to a special purpose or particular service, such as the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, chosen to father a nation, this choice was not based upon any works on the part of the persons, but God's election. Abraham in his impatience, ignorantly willed that in Ishmael his seed might be blessed, but this was not God's choice. Isaac was determined to give the blessing to Esau, who ran after the venison to please his father, still hoping to receive the blessing of the first-born, but God overrode Isaac's will and gave the blessing to Jacob. God chooses the best means of carrying out his plans. His choices and decisions may seem mysterious unto men; especially, since even few God-fearing men understand as Paul did, that, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:25)

Despite the fact that God granted Israel a number of reprieves on account of Moses' intercession, ultimately he withdrew his presence from them, despite their protests, and turned to the Gentiles. The Israelites willed to be God's people; they ran in the race, but they did not run in order to please God and serve their fellows. Therefore, they did not receive the "prize" (the Messiah), they were finally disqualified, because they did not run according to the rule of love. (1 Cor 9:24) From the Exodus until Paul's time, they merely willed and ran for selfish reasons. Therefore, the mercy that had for so long been extended to them was now nationally being lifted, and bestowed upon a people who had not sought God.

God makes his initial choices of nations and individuals according to his mercy and love and wisdom, independent of their works. However, to say that God does not ever take into consideration human merit or choices in maintaining these relationships would go beyond what Paul or the Scriptures, in general, teach.

Jesus said unto the Jews, who sought to kill him after he healed on the Sabbath and claimed that God was his Father, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." (John 5:4) The Jews claimed to have trusted in Moses, but they never really believed Moses. Had they believed Moses they would have believed Jesus. No wonder they did not accept Jesus' words, considering they never actually believed Moses' writings. Hence, they fully deserved to be cut off as a nation. Their iniquity was full.

Rom 9:17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Prov 16:4 teaches, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." God reserves the prerogative to use the wicked to carry out his eternal purposes, and to demonstrate that good triumphs over evil. We must understand that God did not cause or create Pharaoh to be wicked.

Pharaoh was already by choice an incorrigible sinner before God hardened his heart. How did God harden Pharaoh? God did not by fiat reach into Pharaoh's being and somehow force him to be so stubborn. But God's judgments resulted in strengthening Pharaoh in his rebellion, instead of softening his heart, as they could have done had not Pharaoh been so obstinate. The hearts of some Egyptians were softened, for a mixed multitude including some Egyptians left with the Jews in their Exodus. By nature, hardening follows persistent disobedience, and likewise softening follows persistent obedience.

God raised up Pharaoh as an illustration of his power over the idols of the Gentiles and that his name "might be declared throughout all the earth." God's purpose, contrary to Jewish understanding, always had concerned all nations. God did not intend to make the Gentiles into Jews, but to spread the knowledge of him "into all the world," and to make all men Christ-like in character. His strategy went far beyond the limits of the Jewish ghetto. God wanted to benefit all mankind through the Jews. "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them." (Ex 7:5)

Knowledge of God's power against Pharaoh had preceded the Jew's entry into the promised land. The Gentile prostitute, Rahab, said unto the Jewish spies which she had hidden, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. {10} For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. {11} And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." (Josh 2:8-11) Pharaoh's fate had finally been settled at the Red sea, when God drowned his armies, which was enough to have convinced Rahab to enter into covenant with the Jews; and she "perished not with them that believed not." (Heb 11) Indeed, this was a woman of faith who had greater understanding of the vastness of God's kingdom than most Jews. No wonder she is recognized in the New Testament as a heroin of the faith.

"The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." The Gentiles 40 years after God's judgment of Pharaoh were still in awe of the demonstration of God's wrath against him. This helped to prepare the way for the Jews conquering Canaan land and demonstrated the superiority of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob over the Gentiles' heathen idols.

God demonstrated his mercy and compassion in liberating the Jews from Egyptian bondage. He demonstrated his wrath on Pharaoh, thus revealing his holiness and righteousness throughout the earth. "And of some have compassion,

making a difference: {23} And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." (Jude 1:22-23)

Pharaoh was God's instrument in revealing his power and fame throughout the whole world. God raised up Pharaoh for a purpose, but when he was finished with him, he put him back down. Pharaoh may or may not have been beyond hope as to his eternal destiny even after the destruction of his armies in the Red Sea. Paul was not addressing the issue of personal salvation in his illustration of Pharaoh.

Rom 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

When it comes to dealing with nations or individuals for special privilege, service, or to be instruments in carrying out his will, it was strictly God's choice as to whom he would bestow mercy and to whom he would harden. He showed mercy to Israel in continuing to use the nation, despite their long history of rebellion. He hardened Pharaoh for the purpose of driving the Jews out of Egypt and revealing his power to the whole world.

### **Irresistible Grace?**

Rom 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

Paul anticipated another false and frivolous objection coming from the Jews: "Why should God blame us if everything is happening according to God's will?" But certainly Paul was not denying that the Jews were responsible and accountable beings, or that God's will is irresistible.

The Jews worshipped the true God, but rarely in their history did they worship him in spirit and truth. They did not love him; in their selfish works they denied him and caused his name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. So, God hardened their heart by withdrawing his spirit and bringing judgments which tended to make them more obdurate and rebellious. Yet they still claimed to be God's people. Thus any Jewish hypocrite might ask, "Why does he find fault? Our rebellion is according to God's will."

At the close of Paul's life when he was under house arrest in Rome some of the Jewish leaders came to visit him where he was "lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. {24} And

some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. {25} And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, {26} Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: {27} For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. {28} Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. {29} And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. (Act 28:23-29)

Some have falsely interpreted Isaiah's words, which Paul quoted to mean that God did not intend the Jews to hear or understand. One might get that understanding if one took Isaiah's original words at face value and out of the context of general Biblical teaching. Paul did not exactly quote the words of the old prophet, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed (Isaiah 1:10)

One might think that God did not want the Jews to have a conversion of the heart. But we know that God is not willing that any should perish. So that cannot be Isaiah's true meaning. Paul clarified Isaiah's words by explaining that the problem was that the Jews did not want to believe, because it would have required them to give up their religion and humble themselves. They were intentionally stubborn, refused to listen and shut their own eyes (understanding) to truth. Plainly their problem was an unwillingness to believe, not lack of evidence for the truths Paul proclaimed. Some simply chose to believe and others chose not to believe. No wonder Paul was determined to go to the Gentiles, who would listen. No wonder God was rejecting the Jews as his special people. They had rejected him!

Rom 9:20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

When Calvinists are questioned concerning the reasonableness of their alleged divine decrees, that God arbitrarily saves a minority and damns the majority of men before their birth, they will eventually quote Roman 9:20 to silence their opponent. But opponents to Calvinism should not be intimidated by such a harsh reply. Remember, Paul was not addressing the issue of personal salvation, or whether or not man has the ability of contrary choice. He was anticipating a Jewish argument that God should not find fault with them, because everything was unfolding according to God's plan and purpose despite the failure of Israel to do God's will in being a light to the Gentiles.

Paul gave a severe retort to this Jewish gainsayer, because he did not have an honest question. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to provide answers to sincere questions and even objections. But this hypocrite did not deserve a reply to such an absurd notion that God's will was irresistible. Actually in verse 31 of this chapter and in Romans 10, Paul does explain why God found fault with the Jews. But this was not the place to get off his point, especially since the one questioning Paul had an attitude to blame God and justify the Jewish people in their rebellion.

This temperament was typical of the Jews throughout their history. Generations before while Israel was in Babylonian captivity and it seemed that God had forsaken his people, God answered a critic who accused him of injustice, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." (Ezek 18:23-24)

" Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?" The hypocritical and caviling Jew objected to Ezekiel's claim that all the alleged righteousness of Israel's past would not be regarded by God.

"When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

"Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" (Ezek 18:25-29) Again the Jew had the audacity to question the fairness of God in his dealings with Israel.

But Ezekiel continued, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." (Ezek 18:30-32)

Who was Israel, considering its track record, to ever question God's wise choices and decisions? Who was Israel to question God's wisdom in receiving Gentiles and seemingly casting off the Jews?

Since it was Paul's practice to go to the Jew first, they could have repented at any time had they have searched the Scriptures diligently to confirm Paul's teaching, but instead they quibbled with Paul, rejecting the truth.

## **The Call of the Gentiles**

Rom 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? 22 What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to [ripe for, Amplified] destruction: 23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, 24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Jews and Gentiles had been formed out of the same lump of clay. Jews were the descendants of Noah through his son Shem. The Gentiles were Noah's descendants from Japheth and Ham. God's original purpose was always to have one family, or one lump. God had chosen Abraham, Issac, and Jacob to places of greater honor (as leaders of the nation), and Ishmael and Esau lesser honor. Moses was a vessel of honor, but Pharaoh dishonor. God providentially used them all to bring about his plan to have one "vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work," formed from all the nations of the earth.

Paul must have had in mind Jeremiah's illustration of the potter when he used the parable of the potter and the clay: "The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD;

Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity." (Jer 18-1-17)

God had not originally made the nation of Israel for the purpose of destroying her. No potter will take pains to make a vessel merely to show he has power to dash it to pieces. God does not engage himself in vanity. But Israel through obstinance had become marred in his hands, so now the nation had become a vessel of wrath fit or ripe for destruction. Israel was no longer fit to be considered as God's family. Especially, since God had found a people, the Gentiles, who were more responsive to his grace. But, alas, as Jeremiah prophesied, God would scatter the Jews among the nations. Their day of calamity was upon them, as Titus was about to move against Jerusalem and utterly destroy their polity.

God in his goodness was still calling Israel to repentance through Paul, even as he did through Jeremiah; but as a nation the people were saying, "There is no hope." Yet there was a remnant of Jews, who recognized that Jesus Christ was the "Hope of Israel" and they were responding to the Gospel.

Before God had ever called Abraham, he had planned to have vessels of mercy made up of all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, upon whom he might make known the riches of his glory. God providentially moved in history to have a people molded in his image after his character; for the essence of God's glory is his good character, which he longs to reproduce in his children.

Rom 9:25 As he saith also in Osee , I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. [Hosea 2:23, 1 Pet 2:10] 26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they [the Gentiles] be called the children of the living God. [Hosea 1:10]

Paul, as his practice was, when addressing Jews, appealed to the prophets to support his doctrine, that the calling of the Gentiles was not incidental, but a firm purpose in the LORD'S mind. The Jews were fighting against God and renouncing their prophets by opposing the call of the Gentiles.

## The Particular Election to Salvation

Rom 9:27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: [Isaiah 10:22-23]

Finally, Paul brings the issue of personal salvation into the forefront of his picture. A remnant out of the whole multitude of Jews will actually be saved from sin and Hell. Paul applied Isaiah's teaching concerning the remnant to further establish his point to the Jews, that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Since the before foundation of the Jewish world there has only been a remnant in each generation that faithfully serves God. Paul could have related a considerable amount of historical evidence to prove his point. For the sake of brevity he only quotes Isaiah, but Paul's point was the theme of the prophets before, during, and after their exile. George Herbert Livingston in the Holman Dictionary gives powerful support to Paul's argument:

"Noah and his family may be understood as survivors, or a remnant, of a divine judgment in the flood. The same could be said of Lot when Sodom was destroyed. Jacob's family in Egypt; Elijah and the 7,000 faithful followers of the Lord; and Israelites going into captivity (Ezek. 12:1-16). They were survivors because the Lord chose to show mercy to those who had believed steadfastly in Him and had been righteous in their lives.

About 750 B.C. Amos found that many people in Israel believed that God would protect all of them and their institutions. With strong language he tore down their mistaken ideas (3:12-15; 5:2-3,18-20; 6:1-7; 9:1-6). Divine judgment would be poured out on all Israel. He corrected the tenet that everyone would live happily and prosper (9:10) with the doctrine that only a few would survive and rebuild the nation (9:8-9,11-15). This new life could be realized if one and all would repent, turn to the Lord, and be saved (5:4-6,14-15).

Hosea's book does not use the remnant terminology, but the concept of the Lord's mercy extended to those experiencing judgment is present in several places (2:14-23; 3:4-5; 6:1-3; 11:8-11; 13:14; 14:1-9) including calls to repentance and descriptions of what the remnant may enjoy in life.

The Book of Micah has much the same emphasis. After announcements of judgment, the Lord proclaimed that people would be assembled like sheep and led by the Lord (2:12-13) as their king (4:6-8). The Messiah would give special attention to them (5:2-5,7-9). The climax of the book is an exaltation of God as the one who pardons and removes sin from their lives after the judgment had passed (7:7-20).

The remnant doctrine was so important to Isaiah that he named one of his sons Shear-Jashub, meaning "A Remnant Shall Return" (7:3). The faithful would

survive the onslaughts of the Assyrian army (4:2-6; 12:1-6) as illustrated by the remarkable deliverance of the few people in Jerusalem from the siege of the city by the Assyrians (chs. 36-38).

Many remnant passages are closely tied with the future king, the Messiah, who would be the majestic ruler of those who seek his mercies (9:1-7; 11:1-16; 32:1-8; 33:17-24). These passages have a strong eschatological thrust, expecting future generations to be the remnant. Other passages looked to the generation of Isaiah's day to provide the remnant. Numerous statements in the latter part of the book have an evident futuristic orientation. In that future, there would be a new people, a new community, a new nation, and a strong faith in one God. This remnant would be personified in the Suffering Servant (ch. 53).

Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah thus raised a chorus. Only a few would survive judgment events, basically because they repented and rested their future on the compassion of their Lord. An important segment of the remnant would be those who were afflicted (Isa. 14:32). Later, Zephaniah spoke of the humble and the lowly as the ones who would find refuge among the remnant (2:3; 3:12-13).

Jeremiah announced that Judah would be destroyed for rebelling against the Lord of the covenant. The political, religious, and social institutions of the state would be eliminated; many would lose their lives; others would be taken into Exile for seventy years. In the Exile, those who believed in the one true God would be gathered for a return to the Promised Land. God would create a new community. Statements of hope and promise for the remnant are concentrated in chapters 30-33.

Ezekiel agreed with Jeremiah that the remnant of Judah taken to Babylon would be the source of people fit for the Lord's new community. These few would participate in a new Exodus and settle in the Promised Land around a new Temple (chs. 40-48).

Zechariah spoke in glowing terms of how the remnant, the returned exiles to Jerusalem, would prosper (8:6-17; 9:9-17; 14:1-21). Ezra recognized the people who had returned to Jerusalem as members of the remnant, but in danger of re-enacting the sins of the past (9:7-15).

In the New Testament, Paul quoted (Rom 9:25-33) from Hosea and from Isaiah to demonstrate that the saving of a remnant from among the Jewish people was still part of the Lord's method of redeeming His people. There would always be a future for anyone among the covenant people who would truly turn to the Lord for salvation (9-11)."

Paul still hoped for the redemption of individual Jews in the new universal religion whose elect were the redeemed of every nation, who would make up the Church of Jesus Christ.

Rom 9:28 For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

The Lord did a short work within a generation through the apostles, that utterly changed the complexion of the people of God. The Church of God was transformed from being exclusively Jewish to predominantly Gentile. A generation of devoted men of God did more in a generation to introduce the world to the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, than the nation of Israel did in their 1500 years of existence.

Rom 9:29 And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha. [Isaiah 1:9]

There was a remnant of Jews, especially Jesus' disciples and other Jews like Silas and Barnabas, who became the Jewish seed of the church, which brought about the conversion of the Gentiles. They changed the provincial religion of Moses and the prophets into the faith that spanned the world.

Rom 9:30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

The Gentiles did not will, they did not run. Nevertheless, God showed them mercy. They had not the law, nor the promises. But in the fullness of time God revealed himself to them and they readily accepted the truth. But the people of the law and prophets rejected the Gospel.

Rom 9:31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

The Jews thought they were justified because they were Abraham's children, and sons of the patriarchs. They had been given the law, the promises, and the kingdom was their unique possession. But they had not the faith of Abraham, who was justified by works when he offered Issac on the altar. They certainly had not the faith of the Gentile, Rahab, who demonstrated her love for her enemies by receiving the Jewish spies and was justified by her good works. (James 2)

Israel did not attain to the law of righteousness, because the people did not have faith and therefore please God. They claimed to have a relationship with God because they were Abraham's seed, born Jews, but they had no friendship with God. They had a form of godliness, but denied the power of God.

## **The Stumblingstone**

Rom 9:32 Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

Israel claimed to follow after the law of righteousness, but they did not find it because they were determined to do it their way instead of God's. Israel had the spirit of Cain, whose works were wicked, although he was apparently as zealous to offer his offering as Abel. Israel offered a multitude of blood sacrifices. They were zealous to assemble and "observe days, and months, and times, and years." They were devoted to the ceremonial law with all of its rites and rituals, but they refused to "cease to do evil." They loved to call on his name. They were circumcised for sure, but not "with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." (Col 2:11) Nor did they have the love which makes faith work. They willed, they ran, but they did not obey the truth. They were hearers of the word, but not doers.

They did not from their hearts observe the "law of righteousness." What is "the law of righteousness?" Why, it is the moral law, which requires love of God and love of neighbor. It is what James called the royal law or the law of liberty. Oh, the Jews claimed to have faith, but they did not have living works. Therefore, their faith was dead. God wanted them simply to "cease to do evil" and "learn to do well." (Isaiah 1). To learn what James called, "pure religion," which included "visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction." Plainly, God wanted them to do good works out of a pure heart and "keep themselves unspotted from the world."

Rom 9:33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Paul combined these two Messianic passages from Isaiah: "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (Isa 8:14) "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa 28:16)

The Father sent the Messiah to be a sanctuary, a strong foundation for their faith, a cornerstone to unite Jew and Gentile. He was to be the one whom the Jews were to fear and trust, and to bless his holy name. The Jews boasted of their knowledge of God and claimed to be "a guide to the blind, and a light,...a teacher of babes." (Rom 2) But they stumbled and fell over an obstacle--the Messiah! whom they claimed to have been seeking.

They were offended at their own Savior! They accused him of blasphemy and of contempt for the law. They had expected a deliverer, who would establish a worldly kingdom, who with a show of force would set them free from their Roman captors. But he came instead as a carpenter's son, a man of sorrows, who suffered and was shamefully crucified with two thieves. They were offended at his apparent weakness. They despised the reproach of the Christ. They could not glory in the cross. They were ashamed of the Gospel.

"Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? {21} For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. {22} For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: {23} But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; {24} But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. {25} Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. {26} For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: {27} But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; [the foolish and weak things would have been Jesus' disciples] {28} And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: [the base and despised things would have been the Gentiles] {29} That no flesh should glory in his presence. {30} But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: {31} That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:20-31)

How did God blind the Jews? He blinded them by the foolishness of preaching. Why did they not believe? Not because they could not, but they would not. They refused to humble themselves and go the way of the cross. They despised the shame of the cross.

But the old prophet and the apostle taught, that whosoever [Jew or Gentile] believeth in him shall not be ashamed."

Paul later wrote young Timothy from a Roman prison shortly before his martyrdom, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of

me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; {9} Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, {10} But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: {11} Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles." (2 Tim 1:8-11)

To the world, whether Jew or Gentile, it is a shame to be associated with the one who was crucified as a malefactor. The Jews gloried in their lineage, their sacrifices, their law, etc. The Greeks gloried in their wisdom. But whosoever understands that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation glories in the sufferings of Christ, and chooses to partake in his shame and passion. To suffer with and for Christ is the highest glory one can obtain in this life. He has "called us with a holy calling...according to his own purpose and grace." This purpose is that he would have a people from both the Jewish and Gentile world which "would be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph 1:4) Suffering is the most effective means to bring about his eternal purpose, because "he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." (1 Pet 4:1) There is no better means of morally perfecting men than to suffer for the sake of truth and righteousness.

"I will cling to the old rugged Cross, and exchange it someday for a Crown."

## CHAPTER 4

# WHY HAVE NOT THE JEWS BELIEVED?

## COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 10

In painting artists use a technique called relief, which makes for the appearance of projection, or solidity of objects, obtained by modeling and gradation in color and lighting, thus giving a three-dimensional effect on the canvas. In Romans 9:1-30, the election of nations for special service and privilege (independent of their works) was in the foreground and personal salvation from sin and eternal death was in the background. Romans 9:31-33, formed a transition to Romans 10, where Paul placed the means to individual salvation in the forefront of the picture and the call of the nations to special service in the background.

Self-righteous Jews prided themselves as being the chosen people but their religion was ceremonial and not spiritual. In Romans 9:32-33, Paul explained that

Israel stumbled and fell as a nation, because they broke the spirit of the law, although they could be exact at observing the outward forms of the law.

Augustus Toplady, summed up the Calvinist doctrine of predestination by claiming, "One in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will: the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can. Reader, believe this, or be damned." However, Paul made clear in Romans 10 that personal salvation is conditional on men responding to God's universal call with faith, the faith that produces a life of obedience to the law of love.

Rom 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

A man came to Jesus asking, "Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, {24} Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. {25} When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: {26} Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. {27} But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. {28} There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. {29} And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. {30} And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." (Luke 13:23-30)

The strait gate is the gate of faith. The Jews sought to enter through the wide gate of what Paul called "dead works" [rites and ceremonies]. (Heb 6:1; 9:14) The Master of the House, the Lord, was closing the door to Israel because of their unbelief. On Judgment Day many of these same Jews will claim that Jesus was one of them and they ought to be allowed in the Kingdom. But since they never had the faith that turned them from their sin, they shall be cast into outer darkness. But from all directions Gentiles shall come and sit down in the kingdom. The Gentiles shall be first, and the Jews shall be last.

There is an personal election (those actually saved as a result of submission to the will of God) within the general election (those chosen to fulfil God's plan). Obviously, the Jews were God's chosen people, but most of them chose not to serve. It is conceivable that a man might be elected to serve in public office by the people, but then refuse to take the oath of office and serve. So it was with the Jews, they were always campaigning for their election, but they refused to serve

God. Therefore, concerning their eternal souls, they were lost. But Paul had not given up on his kinsmen according to the flesh. He still had hopes that the people would turn to God and become part of his eternal plan to raise up the family of Jews and Gentiles (the Church) who would lovingly serve him throughout eternity. But Paul knew that as a nation the Jews were doomed.

Rom 10:2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

The Jews willed, they ran, they longed for God's blessings, but not according to the truth. Jesus rebuked the zealous Pharisees, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." (Matt 23:23)

Israel throughout much of its history, and especially at the time of Jesus and the apostles, had a zeal for the letter of the law, but did not appreciate its spirit, which called for faith, humility, justice, mercy, and intimate fellowship with God. Jesus' criticism had also been the constant refrain of the prophets, who did understand the spiritual requirements of the law: "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8)

Rom 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

According to Noah Webster, righteousness means, "1. Purity of heart and rectitude of life; conformity of heart and life to the divine law. Righteousness, as used in Scripture and theology, in which it is chiefly used, is nearly equivalent to holiness, comprehending holy principles and affections of heart, and conformity of life to the divine law. It includes all we call justice, honesty and virtue, with holy affections; in short, it is true religion.

2. Applied to God, the perfection or holiness of his nature; exact rectitude; faithfulness."

God's righteousness is God's goodness. God is righteous because he uses his power and authority unselfishly in order to promote the highest well-being of his creation. God is righteous because he always acts lovingly.

Israel was self-righteous. They were only righteous in their own opinion, and desired to appear righteous in the sight of men. They had the form, but not the substance of righteousness, which is ethical behavior motivated by a pure heart. Jesus cursed the leaders of Israel, "All their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments," (Mat 23:5) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." (Mat 23:25)

Israel did not reflect the character of God. They gloried in the praise of men, not in the character of God. They gloried in their position, not in the sufferings that flow from the cross of Jesus into the life of the true believer. Paul taught in chapter five of Romans that those who are justified by faith in the righteousness of God... "glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience (proven character (NAS) ; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

The Jews, because they refused to submit to God's righteousness to be molded into the character of Christ, had neither the love of God, which is his righteousness, nor the Holy Ghost, which is the Spirit of Righteousness.

Calvinists claim that men are saved by "the imputed righteousness of Christ." Where is this platitude found in the Bible? No one's righteousness can be transferred or accounted to another, nor can another's sin be transferred or accounted to another. Each man is accountable for his own sins and judged according to his own character. Ezekiel 18:20 affirms that character cannot be transferred, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son [a clear statement against inherited moral depravity or the Augustinian doctrine of original sin]: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

No where in the Bible is it said that Christ's personal righteousness was ever imputed to any man. But the Bible does teach in 1 John 3:7: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous."

The believer who abides in Christ brings forth much fruit. (John 15:5) The Christian knows that only as he trusts in Jesus can he produce an acceptable righteousness. Good works are the fruit of faith, and faith is also the root of good works. The believer who does righteousness is a righteous branch, who receives his sap (strength) from Jesus who is the righteous vine.

Saving faith results in obedience to the moral law, which is the law of Christ. In Hebrews 11, Paul, after shortly defining what faith is, gave a long illustration of what faith does, for "without faith it is impossible to please God."

Sinners are treated as righteous upon faith in Christ and take on an actual righteousness by following his example. Faith never stands alone it always contains the germ of righteousness and comes to fruition as we walk in loving obedience to our Savior and Lord. Saving faith always implies a commitment to righteousness, which is a necessary condition for God accepting men into his Kingdom.

### **The Righteousness of Faith**

Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Paul did not teach that Christ is the end of the law, but that faith in Christ is the end of the law as the means of obtaining righteousness. Does the term end here mean goal or termination? There is a sense in which both ideas are applicable.

In the Galatian letter, Paul taught that the goal or aim of the law was to point men unto Jesus Christ as the standard of righteousness. The law was not the end, but a means to the end. It was our "schoolmaster" until we graduated unto the gospel. "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life [after one has sinned and as a result been condemned to death by the law], verily righteousness should have been by the law. {22} But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. {23} But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. {24} Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. {25} But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." (Gal 3:21-25)

The law with its rites and ceremonies, and especially its sacrifices, directed men to Christ that they might be justified by faith. Christians are no longer under the Jewish system, such things as circumcision of our flesh are not necessary under the gospel, since we have had our hearts circumcised to obey God; and Jesus once and for all and forever has made the atonement for our sin. Christ marked the termination of the ceremonial law because he was the fulfillment of its types, symbols, and shadows.

Paul certainly did not mean that the moral law was terminated for a believer. The moral law is eternal and through faith in Christ becomes an internal principle of life. The graduate does not forget, nor would he neglect to teach, what he had

learned under his teacher, even though he is no longer under this disciplinarian. A son is no longer under his dead parents, and he no longer even fulfills the role of a son. But still he would want to honor them, and magnify what he learned under their authority.

Paul settled the question of the sense in which the law was void and yet still active in Romans 3. Men, once having transgressed the law, could not be justified by the law. The law only declared sinners guilty. He explained that Christ came to declare God's righteousness in forgiving guilty sinners by making an atonement, which allowed God to righteously offer forgiveness to those who would meet the conditions of repentance and faith. The Jews claimed they were right with God, because they had received the seal of the covenant, which is circumcision, and because of their faith in their sacrificial system. But Paul taught that both Jews and Gentiles can only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not the deeds of the law, which in Paul's language meant Jewish rites and rituals, including animal sacrifices and particularly circumcision. Finally he concludes, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." (Rom 3:31)

Faith establishes the moral law, the law of righteousness, the law of love in the hearts and minds of men. Faith in Christ does "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, ... That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom 8:3-4) Christ served as a living example of the fulfillment of the requirements of the law in his life and atoning death, which provided the moral influence or motivation for changing men's lives and keeping them holy, which the law, considered merely as external statutes, did not possess. The Living Stone manifested what the tables of stone did not manifest--love, because the Jews had made them a dead letter. The Jews had made a virtual idol out of their tables of stone, but stumbled over the Living Stone. They stumbled over the love of God. Jesus demonstrated, unlike anyone before or since, this love which the law demanded.

Paul made clear that the moral law has not been abolished or made void as a requirement for believers in Romans 13:8: Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. 9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Rom 10:5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. [Lev 18:5 KJV]

Moses was not mocking his people by telling them through keeping his judgments and statutes they would live. There is life through keeping the law, rightly understood, as even Jesus acknowledged. A man came to Jesus and asked, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Jesus responded, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Mat 19:17)

To our Lord, to Moses, and to Paul the law was not simply a collection of statutes, but a revelation of God's character and will. There is life in the law if one keeps it, aware of his dependence on God, whose grace is revealed in the giving of the law and in favoring man with the faculties to appreciate its reasonableness and to obey it. Paul, however, wrote with the Pharisees and legalists in mind, who like himself prior to his conversion, strove to keep the law independently of a loving faith in God. When Paul seemed to write disparagingly of the law, he had in mind men who neither loved nor trusted in God, or else Jewish converts who wanted to put Gentiles under the rites and rituals of Judaism. To attempt to keep the law and live selfishly and pridefully is an impossibility and is in itself a violation of the law's demands.

Paul explained in Romans 9:32 why the Jews had not obtained righteousness, "Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." The Revised Standard version amplifies Paul's meaning by adding the word if, "as if it were based on works." Righteousness never has nor ever will be based on works, whether the works be ceremonial or ethical, if they are independent of faith. The idea that salvation could be based on works alone was a mere supposition on the part of the Jews that had no Old or New Testament basis. It was not taught by Moses, the prophets, or anyone else in the Scriptures. No true man of God in the Bible or history has ever held to such a view.

Righteousness never was by the works of the law, as most Jews perceived, but it was always by faith.

Regrettably, in our day men have gone to the opposite extreme and taught that righteousness could be obtained independently of ethical works. This idea is just as foreign to the Old and New Testament. James warned that if a brother or sister have a need, "And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? {17} Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. {18} Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. {19} Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. {20} But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:16-20) Abraham's faith was a faith that produced obedience.

Indeed, saving faith always embraces righteousness. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" 23

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it [Abraham's faith, not Christ's righteousness] was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." (James 2:21-22) His willingness to obey by sacrificing Isaac was sufficient for God to regard him as righteous without actually following through and killing Isaac. Our willingness to forsake sin and trust in Christ's vicarious sacrifice is sufficient for God to justly forgive our past sins, and receive us into a holy relationship with him, before we have done any actual deeds of commendation. The sinner who repents and believes is justified by faith, but according to Paul's gospel only "to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. (Romans 2:7,13) James concluded, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." (James 2:24) A sinner is justified by faith, but a believer remains justified by faith which works.

Paul was in complete agreement with James, as Romans 6-8 also affirmed and countless other references in his writings: "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." (Titus 3:8)

God fully expected Israel to keep his commandments and live. The problem was that the Jews would not keep the law. It was not that they could not but that they would not. Moses spoke of God's frustrations at the Jews' refusal to keep the law after they promised that they would: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deu 5:29)

Rom 10:6-8 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) 7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) 8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

Paul contrasted the language of faith with the language of the law for the purpose of making his points. However, rightly understood, faith and good works are one, and on the same level, that is why Paul could say that Abraham was justified by faith; yet, without the writers contradicting one another, James could say Abraham was justified by works. True faith always produces good works, and truly good works are the result of faith.

Moses tended to put the law in the foreground and grace and faith in the background in his writings, whereas Paul typically put grace and faith in the foreground and law in the background. It is characteristic of the New Testament

to project faith and grace, "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." This is not to say that there was not grace and truth in the Old Testament or the law. Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. Moses opens the decalogue by stating, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The Exodus was accomplished by the grace of God. The prophet Habakkuk stated, "That the just shall live by faith."

Hebrews 11 teaches that the great works of the men of God in the Old Testament were accomplished by faith. The Old Testament emphasized what men must do to be right with God; whereas the New emphasizes what Christ has done so that we may be right with God, having failed to do what was right. If we truly believe in what Christ has done, we will do what is right. The Jews at times were inclined to do the deeds of the law (keep its rites and rituals); but except for some notable exceptions, they were usually not motivated by faith or love, so their works were dead or without merit.

Christians in projecting their faith must be careful that they do not detach their faith from their works and as a result deny the Lord who bought them. To attempt to totally detach grace from law and faith from works is to grossly distort the picture that Christ and the apostles painted. Grace is not opposed to law; it is opposed to lawlessness. Faith is not opposed to works motivated by love; it is opposed to works motivated by selfishness.

St. Paul applied Moses' words to the gospel, not as a formal quotation of Scripture, but as adapting the familiar language of Moses concerning the law, as being applicable to his point concerning faith.

God promised to bless Israel if the people would, "Hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. For this is the commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."(Deu 30:11-14)

Moses assured the people that the commandment is not beyond the reach of their accomplishments, nor out of the range of their moral or mental life. The moral law which calls for supreme devotion to God is written on the table of every man's heart. No one has to go to some distant place to learn it. All men have a conscience which affirms that they ought not to live selfishly, but love God and one's neighbor. The moral law is the law of our nature. Men are constituted so

that they will have peace of mind when they keep the law of righteousness, and have a sense of guilt when they do not.

Furthermore, Moses said, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." (Deu 30:15-20)

The moral law is called the law of liberty as opposed to the law of necessity. The law of liberty implies a moral choice. The law of necessity implies physical force or the law of cause and effect, such as the law of gravity.

Moses was teaching that the moral law made no impractical demands. God merely expected man to do what conscience and reason affirms that he ought to do, and that he was able to do.

Paul saw Moses' spiritual interpretation of the law as typical of the gospel--a virtual prophecy of the righteousness which is of faith. Paul did not reject the law of Moses as Moses proclaimed it, but he rejected the legalistic, unspiritual interpretation of it as taught by the later Jews. Paul taught that faith in Christ makes no impractical demands. Christ has brought himself within our reach by his incarnation and resurrection. The love expressed through his incarnation and death, and his power exhibited through his resurrection is evidence enough to convince any unprejudiced mind that he ought to have faith in Jesus, who had the strength to overcome sin, Satan, and the grave. The law and man's conscience had taught Israel in Moses' day--obey and be blessed, disobey and be cursed. Man's problem is that all have disobeyed the law and are under the curse. The solution cannot be merely a return to obedience, because law does not have the authority to forgive. The gospel solution is also simple: believe in Jesus' atoning work and be saved, believe not and be damned.

## **Personal Salvation**

Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Both Moses and Paul called for faith which comes from the heart [the will, motivated by love, fully submitted to God]. The Jews as a nation did not have a good testimony of faith in their history. They no sooner had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt by mighty signs, miracles and wonders, than they had begun to look back to Egypt instead of the promised land. Of the generation that perished in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb had faith to enter Canaan.

Jesus denounced the Jews, who did mere lip service to God, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias (Isaiah 29:13) prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips [they claimed to have faith]; but their heart is far from me." (Matt 15:7-8)

And again Jesus said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Faith in the LORD Jesus which comes from the heart will always result in obedience to the gospel. The Jews never really believed or obeyed Moses, or they would have trusted in and obeyed the Christ. Abraham said to the rich man who wanted Lazarus to return and warn his brethren of the torments of Hell, "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 17:31)

Furthermore, Jesus said to the Jews, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:44-47)

In John 5:44 we find the basic reason for Jewish unbelief, they sought honor from men instead of God. Because they refused to believe, they were not saved. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb 11:6)

Rom 10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The law is not the means to righteousness for the sinner, faith is his only hope for redemption and righteousness. The evidence that a person believes from the

heart is a righteous life, "for with the heart man believes unto righteousness." Where there is not righteousness, there is not faith. Multitudes confess with the mouth and go to the wedding feast, but they will be cast out because they do not have the faith from the heart which overcomes sin.

Salvation is a right or loving relationship with God. Sin breaks the relationship. The Jews sought to relate to the law, independently of the Lawgiver. Just as one might read and even enjoy a philosopher's books, without seeking out the philosopher or even practicing his philosophy; the Jews were proud that they possessed the Oracles of God, but they did not apply the Oracles in their lives.

Rom 10:11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever [Jew or Gentile] believeth on him shall not be ashamed . [Isaiah 28:16]

Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation for all men, not the law. Those who put their trust in him will not be confounded or disappointed. He is the Consolation of Israel, and he is the Desire of the Nations.

Adam Clarke commented that, "The whole object of Romans is to establish peace between believing Jews and Gentiles and to show their mutual obligations and the infinite mercy of God to both." Paul had opened the letter to the Romans declaring his readiness to quickly come and preach the gospel in Rome: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. {17} For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:16-17)

The righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel of Christ. The gospel is the way of salvation. Faith is always honored by God, "from faith to faith," that is, from faith expressed by Jew or faith expressed by Gentile. The faithful will not be ashamed.

Jesus honored faith in his ministry. Time and time again, Jesus healed in response to faith. Jesus condemned men for lack of faith, and strongly commended it when he observed faith. Interestingly, his strongest praises of faith were not directed to Jews, but to Gentiles; he lauded the woman of Canaan for having "great" faith. Also when Jesus heard of the faith of the Centurion, "he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. {11} And I say unto you, That many [Gentiles] shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. {12} But the children of the kingdom [Jews] shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat 8:10-12) The Jews would be cast out of the kingdom because they

lacked faith, and the Gentiles would enter the kingdom because they responded in faith. Thus, we see that Jesus had foretold what Paul taught to the Romans.

Rom 10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

No difference between the Jew and the Gentile! This was a hard saying to the Jews, who for generation after generation were devoted to establishing and maintaining differences between the two peoples. Essentially the Jews' religion revolved around this very purpose, to separate themselves from the heathen Gentiles. But the fullness of the Gentiles had now come. Jewish dietary laws and customs, many of which had been ordained by God and were intended to serve a purpose, had become obsolete. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, Jesus had "broken down the middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile to establish "one body, and one Spirit, ...one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph 4:4-6)

Rom 10:13 For whosoever [Jew and Gentile] shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Notice the emphasis in verses 12, 13, and 14 is not upon those whom God calls to general election or service as in Romans Chapter 9, but on those who call upon him for personal salvation. One might say that God has supplied the phone through the gospel and given us all his number--- Romans 10:9-10. But we must call upon him if we want to be saved from sin and death; his name is Jesus.

Rom 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! [Isaiah 52:7]

These questions may be raised by the Jewish gainsayer, who was constantly excusing Israel's unbelief. The objector was asking Paul, "How do you expect us to believe, when we have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel?" This is of course a very old and constant plea from Christianity's critics, "What about those who have not had the opportunity to hear about Jesus?"

Paul had already partially addressed this issue in Romans chapter 1, which taught that God is revealed through nature. Romans 2 taught that his law is written on every man's heart. The gainsayer had a point, the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus must be proclaimed if men are to believe.

Paul answered these objecting questions, which he had proposed a gainsayer might ask, by quoting Isaiah, who along with other prophets, preached the gospel of peace and glad tidings. Isaiah is so full of prophecies concerning the coming of Christ and the New Testament that it has often been called the fifth gospel. Gospel means good news. The gospel is good news to those who believe, but bad news to those who don't believe. Regrettably, Israel consistently rejected not only Moses but the prophets; so no Jew should be surprised that they rejected their own Messiah, the very one their prophets proclaimed. They neither believed the prophecies nor their fulfillment.

Remember that Jesus was perturbed with Nicodemus, because he was a teacher of Israel and knew not things concerning the new birth. Nicodemus should have been familiar with Jeremiah's promise of the New Covenant, which would put God's "law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." (Jere 31:31-33) Ezekiel also exhorted Israel, "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Ezek 18:31)

The Jews had the Oracles of God; they had no excuse: their prophets had preached the good news, but the people rejected the gospel.

## The Report

Rom 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

Paul quoted Isaiah 53 which predicted that few would believe the "report," that the Messiah would suffer at the hands of his own people and be despised and rejected. The Jews expected the Messiah to come and immediately set up an earthly kingdom; they did not believe or understand the prophets' message that the Messiah wanted to reign in the hearts of men, not rule from a worldly throne. They did not appreciate it when Jesus stated that his kingdom was not of this world.

The Gospel of John uses Isaiah's words as an explanation for the unbelief of the Jews, "That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? {39} Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, {40} He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not

see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. {41} These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. {42} Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: {43} For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:38-43)

In what sense did God through the prophet blind their eyes? Certainly, he did not force or cause them not to believe or refuse them the opportunity to be saved. If so, then Paul prayed against God's will when he petitioned God that they might be saved (Rom 10:1). When Jesus quoted this prophecy of Isaiah in Matthew 13, he paraphrased Isaiah and clarifies his meaning by explaining, that the Jews closed their own eyes (of their understanding) because they did not want to be converted.

They "could not believe" because of their pride and refusal to have Jesus ruling over them, nor did the Jews of Isaiah's day want God ruling over them. They hated God and loved their vain religion. They could not believe, because no man can believe unto salvation until he repents. And this the Jews refused to do.

Some of the chief rulers did believe, but not unto salvation. They were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but they would not confess with their mouth unto salvation because they could not give up the synagogue, and the esteem of men, for the reproach of the gospel.

Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Paul affirmed that in order to have faith one must hear. The Jews were hearers, but not doers of the word. They boasted that unto them was given the oracles of God, but they did not obey the word.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: {25} And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. {26} And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: {27} And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Mat 7:24-27)

The Jewish house was in for a great fall because it had been built upon the sands of tradition, ritual, customs, and gross hypocrisy. The believing Gentiles and a remnant of Jews were building their house on the rock of faithful obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom 10:18 But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Paul used the strong expressions of Psalm 19 to illustrate how the Jews had heard the gospel. The psalmist declared that the heavens with their beauty, order, and magnitude testify of the Creator; so, Paul declared that the gospel had gone forth into all the known world, wherever Jews were living, but they refused to hear, so they were without excuse.

Rom 10:19 But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.

These words come from Moses' last message to Israel so the people should have considered them to be very significant. Let us hear more of the context: "And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. {21} They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." (Deu 32:20-21)

Moses had rebuked them because they were children in whom was "no faith." So we learn even from Moses' day, Israel refused to give God the one thing he demanded--their trust. Instead, before they had even entered the promised land they were trusting in the idols of the Gentiles, the idols that could not even save Egypt from God's wrath.

As they had provoked God to jealousy with their spiritual adultery, God in the last days would provoke them to jealousy with a non-people. As they had worshipped the foolish idols of the Gentiles, he would provoke them with a foolish nation.

No, of course, they did not listen to Jesus, nor would Paul's opponents listen to him, because they would not listen to Moses or the prophets. If they did not know, it was because they refused to understand.

Rom 10:20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.

Paul quoted from Isaiah 65:1, which spoke of God's revelation to the Gentiles, to whom "the arm of the Lord" was revealed.

In verse 12 of the same chapter Isaiah explained why he judged Israel and turned to the Gentiles: "Because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not." God called, but they refused to listen.

Nevertheless, God condescended to save a remnant of Israel: "Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. {9} And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there." (Isa 65:8-9)

Rom 10:21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. [Isaiah 65:2]

Throughout Israel's history in vain God reached out to the nation. They would not believe Moses' report, nor Isaiah's report, nor any of the prophets; when their own Messiah finally stretched forth his hands on the Cross before their very eyes, they cursed and mocked.

The Gentiles were "without excuse," because they had rejected the light of nature throughout most of their history. (Rom 1:20) Nevertheless, to them "the arm of the Lord" was being revealed. Even more so were the Jews "without excuse" and condemned because they had not only rejected nature and conscience, but the law and the prophets and had delivered up their own Messiah to be crucified. They had persistently neglected, disobeyed, and spoken against every opportunity God had given them for repentance.

Is there any hope for Israel? Would they ever come to their senses like the Gentiles? For this answer we must turn to the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

# ARE THE JEWS STILL THE CHOSEN PEOPLE?

## COMMENTARY ON ROMANS CHAPTERS 11-16

Remember what was said of the barren fig-tree in the parable? (Luke 13:6-9) It was placed in circumstances favorable for the bringing forth of fruit. Everything was done for it that could be done, and yet no fruit appeared, so the command

went forth, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" For a time, the execution of that order was delayed at the vine-dresser's intercession, but at length the axe-stroke fell.

Israel had once been a stately tree covering the land with its shadow. But at the time of Jesus its leaves had fallen and it had become rotten to the core. The Jews still expected their nation to be restored to its former glory, despite the prophecies of Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. But Paul instructed them in Romans 11, that their hope should be a spiritual hope not a natural hope in the restoration of a nation.

In 70 AD, Titus' armies attacked Jerusalem and cut down the tree and left but a stump. In 1948, a sprout grew out of the stump. Many consider this to be a sign that the nation will be restored to its past glory. Is this a realistic hope? We will consider that question in Chapter 5 of *The Mystery of Christ Revealed*.

Rom 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

In Romans chapters 9 and 10, Paul proved the Jews deserved to be rejected as a nation with special privileges from God. The question was, does it follow then, that God has totally rejected his people? Obviously not, Paul's own salvation was evidence that God had not cast them off completely. If there was hope for him, there must be hope for his kinsmen. But this hope was through a new and living way, the gospel of Jesus Christ, not their fleshly lineage, nor their temple sacrifices, nor circumcision. Their hope was no longer a national prospect, but a personal one based upon a commitment to Jesus Christ. Indeed, it was never to have been considered primarily as a hope concerning physical boundaries, but a spiritual boundless hope resting in the eternal God. The national boundaries were simply means to a greater end, which was that God's Kingdom would cover the earth.

In the evangelical community there has been considerable focus on the nation of Israel since 1948. Many consider the return of the Jews to the promised land as a fulfilment of prophecy and a sign that we are near the end. They anticipate the rebuilding of the Jewish temple and the reestablishment of the sacrificial system before the second coming of Christ. In their minds the Jews are still the chosen people, and God has a plan to resurrect the nation of Israel to its former glory in our times.

This popular view seems incredible in the light of God's purpose from the beginning and his work in human history. After laboring so carefully through the ages to break down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, why would he permit or much less ordain its rebuilding? God's chosen instrument since the first

advent of our Lord is to reveal himself through the Church to all the nations of the earth, not through the state of Israel.

Many prognosticators consider the state of Israel to be God's timetable concerning the understanding of Biblical prophecies in regard to end-time events. As a result the focus of so many books published in our generation is on the nation of Israel rather than the Church of Jesus Christ. The predictions in these books time and time again prove to be false. But this is no problem to the authors, "peoples memories are short and Christians are gullible," when the next international crisis arrives on the scene, whether it be the Gulf War or the war in Kosovo, or even something to do with a Red Heifer, they come out with another book explaining the event, or calf, in the light of Biblical prophecy. One would be led to believe that God's primary concern is the state of Israel instead of the Church which was birthed in the incarnation, ministry, agony, death and resurrection of God's beloved Son--the "Hope of Israel" and the "Desire of All Nations."

When I say that Jesus gave birth to the Church, it might be more accurate to say that the Church was born-again. For the Church's founders may be traced back to Abraham and Moses, and to the promises and the law. When the Messiah arrived he established the Kingdom of God, or the New Testament Church, which was to be the fulfillment (spiritual completion, not a substitute; Jesus spoke of everything he did as a fulfillment) of the Old Testament Jewish Church: "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."(Luke 24:44)

There is in certain circles of Christendom an almost fanatical support for national Israel. We frequently hear from these Christian Zionists that the Bible teaches, "Whosoever blesseth Israel God will bless and whosoever curseth Israel God will curse." In this school of thought, should anyone even dare question the Jews' God-given right to occupy Palestine, they are likely under the curse of God, and probably anti-Semitic, and may not even be saved. The fact is that anyone, Jew or Gentile, who opposes or curses the Church of Jesus Christ, God will oppose and curse.

The promise that Abraham and his people would and should be blessed was for the purpose that the nation was to be a blessing by revealing God to the world. "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, ... unto a land that I will show thee: {2} And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: {3} And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3) We have already shown that the Jews throughout their history failed miserably in their ordained mission to reveal God to the Gentiles; so God repeatedly, and then finally in 70 AD, judged and destroyed their city, temple, priesthood, and nation.

The destruction of Jerusalem was an event which has no parallel in history. It was the outward and visible sign of a great epoch in the divine government of the world. It marked the inauguration of a new order of things. The Messianic kingdom was fully come. The culminating act of King Jesus was to sit upon the throne of his glory and judge his people by sending Titus' armies to finally destroy Judaism.

Philip Schaff wrote in the History of the Christian Church (Vol 1 Chap 6): "The destruction of the Jewish theocracy was the greatest calamity of Judaism and a great benefit to Christianity; a refutation of the one, a vindication and emancipation of the other. It not only gave a mighty impulse to faith, but at the same time formed a proper epoch in the history of the relation between the two religious bodies. It separated them forever. It is true the apostle Paul had before now inwardly completed this separation by the Christian universality of his whole system of doctrine; but outwardly he had in various ways accommodated himself to Judaism...But now the rupture was also outwardly consummated by the thunderbolt of divine omnipotence. God himself destroyed the house, in which he had thus far dwelt, in which Jesus had taught, in which the apostles had prayed; he rejected his peculiar people for their obstinate rejection of the Messiah; he demolished the whole fabric of the Mosaic theocracy, whose system of worship was, in its very nature, associated exclusively with the tabernacle at first and afterwards with the temple; but in so doing he cut the cords which had hitherto bound, and according to the law of organic development necessarily bound the infant church to the outward economy of the old covenant, and to Jerusalem as its centre. Henceforth the heathen could no longer look upon Christianity as a mere sect of Judaism, but must regard and treat it as a new, peculiar religion. The destruction of Jerusalem, therefore, marks that momentous crisis at which the Christian church as a whole burst forth forever from the chrysalis of Judaism, awoke to a sense of its maturity, and in government and worship at once took its independent stand before the world."

Godly men should be looking to the Church as God's fulfilment of the promises made unto the Fathers of Israel. Christians need to make the Church, not the nation of Israel, the focus of the world's attention. Men need to be reminded that if they bless the Church, which is the people of God, they will be blessed; if they curse the Church, then they will be cursed.

Holding out some vague promise to the Jews that they will once again become a great nation, detracts from the work of the Cross and the propagation of the gospel to all nations. It is like Lot choosing to dwell in the cities of the plain, and pitching his tent toward Sodom, instead of cooperating with Abraham and remaining in the promised land of Canaan from where Abraham, "Looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God and he desired a better country, that is, an heavenly. (Hebrews 11:10,16)

It is like the Jews of Galatia returning to the weak and beggarly elements of worldly bondage, instead of being content with the glorious liberty of Sonship with the heavenly Father in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. After all, the Jews are in "the Holy Land" in unbelief. Israel's state policy is hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ, despite the Christian Zionists who have unconditionally embraced this nation.

God brought the nation of Israel into existence in order to have a group of people that would embrace the types, shadows, figures and examples of a spiritual kingdom to come under the rule and reign of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The main problem God had with man was sin. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned God killed two animals, shed the blood, showing substitutional sacrifice, and dressed them in the skins to cover their spiritual nakedness [sin]. Blood sacrifices for individual and national sins were the central focal point of the ceremonies under the Law. So, in order to minister the substitutional sacrifice [Jesus at the Cross], God brought into existence a priesthood [Jesus] to be a type of Mediator [Jesus] between God and man. This service was provided first in a portable tabernacle [God dwelling with us] and later in a temple [Church]. The temple had to be located somewhere so it was located in Jerusalem [the Church]; the city had to be in some country, Israel [the Church again]. Once the animal sacrifice was fulfilled by the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, then there was no need for a priesthood, temple, city or nation. God's Old Testament plan and commitment to Israel was focused on the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Whatever hope the Jews had depended on the accomplishments of Christ's first coming and upon their individual response to his atonement.

Jesus fulfilled "all the prophets had spoken," which eliminated on one hand and fulfilled on the other all that God intended to do with the state of Israel. God had no future obligations to the nation of Israel or to individual Jews beyond the promises that he had extended to all of the world through Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament inspired by the Holy Spirit must cover every relevant Old Testament Scripture. If not we can be swamped, indeed, many have already been drowned, by hundreds of natural Old Testament prophecies which must still be brought to pass. A good rule of Biblical interpretation is that if Christ and the apostles did not interpret the prophecy, then it is gone with the death of the nation itself.

The New Testament applied Old Testament prophecies concerning a restoration of the nation of Israel to the New Testament Church; and in so doing recognized the Church as Spiritual Israel and Christians as the chosen people. The identity of the Church as Spiritual Israel was seen in a number of passages in the New Testament:

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: {29} But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and

circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Romans 2:28-29)

Paul called believers the true circumcision, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Philippians 3:3)

Abraham is called the father of us all, who share the faith of Abraham. (Rom 4:11,16) "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:7, 29) Abraham is the father of a spiritual people, and all believers are sons of Abraham; therefore his offspring is Israel, spiritually speaking. The Church has inherited the promises given to Abraham. "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: {7} Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. {8} That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." "Even us [the Church], whom he hath called [predestinated], not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. (Romans 9:6-8, 24) Finally, Paul waxed bold in Galatians 6:16 when he calls the Church, "the Israel of God."

We should pray for the Jews that they look to Christ and his atoning work for their salvation. Any true Christian wants the Jew to be saved. God wants it! Paul prayed for it, but it is not going to come to pass unless, as individuals, they turn to God by their own choice. God's spiritual promises still extend to them. He is not willing that any should perish. Jews must enter the Kingdom through the new and living way, which is through the blood of Christ. It is the one and same way for all men everywhere.

Paul exhorted the Ephesians to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace between Jew and Gentile, for, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:3-6)

God wanted the Jew to be set apart under the Old Covenant, but under the New Covenant Paul explained that, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:22, 28) The Jewish inheritance does not come through the resurrection of an apostate state, but through the Church of the living God.

Rom 11:2-3 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias [Elijah]? how he maketh intercession to God

against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. [1 Kings 19:14]

It was impossible for Paul, or any knowledgeable Jew, to imagine that God was completely finished with his people. God could be no more through with them then he was in Elijah's day; when the nation was so backslidden that not only had they been killing God's prophets, they even sought Elijah's life after his greatest triumph in defeating the false prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel.

Rom 11:4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.

Ah, the "seven thousand," we cannot forget the "seven thousand," who in the midst of the gross apostasy of Elijah's day had not succumbed to Baal worship. Paul's emphasis in Romans 9 had been on the election of national Israel ("the people which he foreknew"), which was an election to privilege, to opportunity, not to assured unconditional salvation. God originally chose Israel as a nation to stand in special relation to him. A nation is not merely a totality of so many individuals, but an abstraction, a quasi-personality, a corporate reality.

But God was not merely concerned with corporate Israel. He was also concerned about each individual soul within the nation. Election takes on another strain when it comes to the "seven thousand." Here individual experience, man's freedom and choices became the focus. The "seven thousand" had no aggregate life. They did not form an organism or quasi-personality. They were "reserved" not as a mass, but as units; so isolated, so little grouped together, that Elijah did not even know about their witness. They were just so many individuals, each of whom by the grace of God and the power of faith stood personally firm against the Baalism of that dark day. In their case, Paul passed through national election to something more important to his eternal purpose, individual election to a personal everlasting relationship between God and man and with the family of God. This was not an election merely to privilege, but to a holy intimacy with the Lord.

God had preserved the nation to bring forth the promised Messiah (Gen. 3:15); and once he came, the nation as a whole rejected him and he prophesied the coming final destruction of their city and their temple. From then on, God worked through the Church, "the Israel of God," and concentrated his efforts on the "New Jerusalem."

In every generation God had maintained his reserves as he did in Elijah's day. These were the faithful, God's special forces, who were called to form the root of the Church. God reserved them to himself because they had not "bowed the knee to the image of Baal." These were the ones of whom the chronicler spoke,

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." (2 Chr 16:9)

Indeed, God will show himself strong to those that have a pure heart. God will preserve them in times of extreme temptation, when multitudes are falling away from the faith. These are the remnant, each generation has had them, sometimes a smaller, other times a larger remnant. This remnant is the true Church.

### **His Gracious Choice**

Rom 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

There was an election within the elected nation, Israel, who were those that actually responded to the grace of God and repented and believed the gospel. Paul had previously established that within the nation chosen to be God's privileged people, through whom God was determined to reveal himself, only a faithful remnant from each generation actually were eternally saved. "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel [natural Israel] be as the sand of the sea, a remnant [spiritual Israel] shall be saved:" (Rom 9:27)

In Paul's day it was a very significant remnant of Jews made up of some of the greatest men of God that history has ever seen, who established the Christian Church, which soon became predominantly Gentile and so has it remained until this day.

Rom 11:6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Actually, no one was ever saved by "works," as understood by the Jews. For to them "works" consisted primarily of "works of the law," which in Pauline language meant the rites and rituals of Judaism, especially circumcision.

Neither has anyone ever been saved by truly good works motivated by love, because Paul established that "all have sinned, and that the wages of sin is death." (Rom 3:23, 6:23) Therefore, all sinners are condemned by the law, because none have lived without exception according to the law of love.

If any are to be saved, therefore, it must be by God's grace and mercy, but not that grace which excuses sin: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us...to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." It frees us not merely from the penalty of sin but the dominion of sin, as well.

Grace according to Strong's Concordance, comes from the Greek *charis* which means "the divine influence upon the heart and its reflection in the life." Calvinists speak of grace as if it were some divine power, force, or causation which makes one "willing to be saved." The grace of God is not a divine causation, but an influence. God's grace may be resisted. Stephen, before he was stoned, reproved and rebuked the Jews, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. {52} Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: {53} Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." (Acts 7:51-53)

Grace is not some physical power or substance; grace includes the endowment of man with the high powers of reason and will, and divine instruction and enlightenment, and the revelation of future rewards and punishments. Grace provides forgiveness of past sins, but does not automatically cover future sins.

Lawlessness, rather than grace, characterized the life of Israel as a nation, as Stephen had made clear in lecturing the Jews on their long rebellious history. Only a remnant, "the elect of grace," in each generation faithfully followed and served the Lord.

The true believer is careful to give all the credit to God's grace and mercy for his salvation. Without Calvary, there would be no hope for any sinner to be saved.

Rom 11:7 What then? Israel [natural Israel] hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election [spiritual Israel] hath obtained it, and the rest [natural Israel] were blinded.

Why did the people of Israel not obtain what they sought? "Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone." (Rom 9:32)

But a select portion of Israel, having their minds open to God's will and believing in Christ, had obtained acceptance. The rest were blinded by their unbelief.

Rom 11:8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. (Isaiah 29:10)

And why had God done this? Isaiah gave the answer a few verses later, "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:" (Isa 29:13) They no longer had an affection for God, and they had exchanged the truth of God for the traditions of men. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. (Prov 16:6) Israel still claimed a reverence for God, but had it been genuine, they would have forsaken their sins.

Rom 11:9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: [Psalm 69:22] 10 Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and bow down their back away. [Psalm 69:23]

Psalm 69 has strong Messianic overtones. Verse 21 was fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The Spirit thus spoke through David foretelling that Israel would reject the Messiah.

Psalm 69 was a leading instance of numerous psalms where David pronounced the sternest retribution against his enemies. Some have thought that these are out of character to the spirit of Jesus who cried from the Cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." But Jesus' own disciples were reminded of this Psalm when Jesus drove the money-changers out of the temple: "And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (John 2:17)

Nor are these imprecations from Psalms out of keeping with Jesus' own words, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, {30} And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. {31} Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. {32} Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. {33} Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Mat 23:29-33)

Yet, after Jesus pronounced all the curses that were going to come unto their generation which was certainly comparable to anything we read in the Old Testament prophets, he revealed his mercy and compassion by crying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a

hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! {38} Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. {39} For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Mat 23:37-39)

They "would not," be saved. He would, but they wouldn't. The nation was doomed, but even at that late hour with Calvary on the horizon, Jesus was still willing to save Jews individually! Despite the fact that he knew that they would kill him, he concluded his message by saying, one day they will bless him whom they will pierce. This has taken place anytime from that moment on, when any Jew has turned to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and by affirmation of him as the Blessed One.

### **Provoking the Jews to Jealousy**

Rom 11:11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

The calling of the Gentiles was accelerated by the unbelief of the Jews. Provoking the Jews to jealousy was God's last desperate attempt to reach the Jews. Much as a man, who pursues an uninterested lady, may embrace another girl to provoke the uninterested one to jealousy. Often such tactics work, especially with carnal people. Unfortunately, it has not worked very well with the Jews. So far, it has just influenced them to have a greater rage against God and his people, the Israel of God, the Remnant.

Rom 11:12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

The Jews' fall gave God the opportunity to pursue the Gentiles and the world has been better for it. Ironically, as long as the nation of Israel maintained its position, because of the hypocrisy of the people, the nation was a hinderance to God's plan to reach the world. But when Israel was destroyed, it became the means for God to bless the world. Had the church remained mainly Jewish, it would have probably been too encumbered with tradition and a particular racial identity to effectively reach all nations, kindreds, and tongues. The last two millenniums have seen the filling-up of the Gentiles; how much fuller will be the hour of the Jews, should they individually finally come to their senses and be born again.

If God continued to bless Israel so long even in their rebellion, essentially because of the faithfulness of Abraham, will he not continue to be longsuffering

with them until their fullness comes? How does their fullness come? The same way it comes to all men through the new birth and the infilling of God's Spirit, which provides a far greater salvation than anything they experienced under the Old Covenant or anything that could be accomplished through the rebuilding of their temple in the last days. In the Old Covenant God dwelled in a building; under the New, he lives within the hearts of men.

Rom 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

In Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11:1-12, Paul had been addressing primarily the Jews, but now he spoke to the Gentiles to whom he was sent by God. Paul's manner was always to speak to the Jew first. But when the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul turned to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:45; 28:28)

Rom 11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Paul certainly did not believe that Jews were reprobate and beyond hope. His love was so great he was willing to go to any legitimate means to reach them.

Paul hoped that the conversion of the Gentiles would stir up in the Jews a yearning for their own personal relationship with God, and that "some of them" would be saved.

Rom 11:15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

The rejection of the Jews was instrumental in bringing the Gentiles to God. When God received repentant Jews through faith in Jesus Christ, they were "passed from death unto life," that is they were born-again. They came into a much more privileged status with God than anything offered under the old temple religion. Indeed, it was a new birth; life coming forth from men dead in their trespasses and sins.

## **Broken Branches**

Rom 11:16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

Jesus Christ is the firstfruit and root. The lump represents the Church and the branches its individual members.

Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

The Church, both before and after Christ, regarded by Paul as one and the same, is here likened to an olive tree. (Jer 11:16; Hos 14:6) The usual practice would be to graft the cultivated olive tree upon the wild stock. Paul reversed the procedure in his metaphor, to enforce the lesson that the Church under the Old Testament was made up exclusively of Jews. But the Church of the New Testament is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, but since the time of Paul, mostly Gentiles.

Rom 11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

Jesus warned, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:2)

Paul warned the Gentiles not to take on an air of superiority against the Jews. He had already established at the conclusion of Romans 2, that there was no room for boasting in one's salvation for both the circumcised and uncircumcised were justified by and through faith, not their own merit.

Rom 11:19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

Here, Paul imagined a Gentile objecting that God preferred them over the Jews. But he warned that this was a dangerous attitude.

Rom 11:20-21 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Unbelief cost the Jews their position, and faith preserved the Gentiles. The Gentiles should not be puffed up, lest when they think they stand, they fall like the Jews. The Jews had become complacent and self-satisfied in their position, and God cut them off. The Gentiles need to be careful that they do not become overly confident.

Rom 11:22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

Paul had reminded the church at Colosse, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled {22} In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: {23} If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister." (Col 1:21-23)

Paul was ever mindful to remind believers that their salvation was conditional upon a continuous, obedient faith, marked by good conduct.

Rom 11:23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

God's hand was still extended to the Jews that they might be saved and once again be a part of the Church (which he continued to compare to a tree), the people of God made up of men from all nations of the earth. But there was no assurance that the Jews as a nation or mass of people will be saved because, as Paul often reiterated in his writings, salvation is conditional upon human response: If they do not remain unbelievers in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, then God is able to make them once again a part of his divine family. But if the Jews remain obstinate, then they will not be able to be salvaged, even by God.

Rom 11:24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

The Jews, because of their past privileges, had much more in common with God's kingdom than the heathen Gentiles; so, if there was hope for the Gentiles, there was still hope for the Jews.

Rom 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

As the conversion of the Gentiles had been a mystery to the Jews, Israel's rejection of their own Messiah was a mystery to the Gentiles, as well as Christian Jews. Paul was concerned that Gentile ignorance of God's mysterious plan could result in the same destructive pride and arrogance which destroyed the Jews.

Jewish blindness will be "until the fulness of the Gentiles come in." This phrase is understood by Calvinists to mean when the last number of Gentiles, which God has elected from eternity past to be eternally saved, confesses Christ. We have already explained why this is not a correct interpretation.

This mysterious blindness of the Jews was only "in part," not affecting the remnant who accepted Christ. The fullness of the Gentiles probably referred to the time of the second coming of Christ. For almost two millenniums the Jews have been mostly blind to the Truth.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians wrote, "And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: {14} But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. {15} But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. {16} Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." (2 Cor 3:13-16)

When individual Jews repent and follow the Lord Jesus, their blindness or the veil over their eyes is removed.

Rom 11:26 And so [in this fashion] all Israel [individual Jews, not national Israel] shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

Paul quoted Isaiah 59:20-21. This prophecy was fulfilled in the First Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ the redeemer and deliverer who came out of Zion or Israel. Many have misread this verse as a statement standing by itself and concluded that it is a promise that in the end God is going to save all the nation of Israel.

Rightly read, it is a summary of all that Paul taught from Romans chapter 9:32 up to this point. It is a conclusion, that so, or in other words, after the manner or way of confessing with one's mouth and believing in one's heart in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9-10), all Jews will be saved. All Jews have the same opportunity to be saved as Gentiles, who believe in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Paul was saying that Israelites can be saved in the same way the non-Israelites can be saved, namely, by faith in Christ--"If they [the Jews] abide not still in unbelief." (Romans 11:23)

Rom 11:27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

This reference also comes from Isaiah, "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." (Isa 27:9)

This verse, "when I shall take away their sins," was not future. It was written

750 years before Jesus the Messiah came. It is quoted by Paul to show that this prophecy has NOW been fulfilled by Christ. The reference is quoting something from the past, that pointed to the future, which was then fulfilled at the cross; that was the once and forever place where ALL sin was taken care of. It now becomes the responsibility of the sinner to avail himself of the cross, Jew or Gentile.

The letter to the Hebrews confirms the benefits of the New Covenant to take away sin, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: {25} Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; {26} For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:24-26)

Rom 11:28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

Moses had written touching the election of the Jews as his people to reveal the Messiah unto the world, "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. [Moses did not regard Israel as holy people in the ethical sense for he had repeatedly called them a rebellious people. They were holy only in the sense that God had chosen them "to be a special people unto himself."] {7} The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose

you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: {8} But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. [Although natural Israel is shut out from the blessing of the gospel, that the gospel may come to the Gentiles, yet they are still beloved of God and are as eligible to be saved as anyone else, for the sake of the patriarchs. The fathers were chosen to establish a nation in order to bring forth the Messiah who would bless the Jews and all nations.] {9} Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;" (Deut 7:6-9)

God did not bring Israel out of the bondage of Egypt based on anything the Jews did, but because he was trying to love a nation into existence that would eventually take this love to the whole world. However, they failed God soon after deliverance with the golden calf incident. Later, they refused to enter the promised land, rebelled, divided into two

nations, the 10 northern tribes were taken through sin and never appeared again as an organized 10 tribes. Finally, the remaining tribe, Judah went into 70 years of captivity. The Jews broke the heart of God over and over, but he still lovingly related to the remnant who responded to his grace. Daniel, in captivity, prophesied that only 490 years remained until the promised Messiah would come. But he was rejected when he appeared. So, Christ pronounced judgement upon them (fulfilling Deut. 28:15-72) and the end to the nation came in 70 A.D., one generation after the cross.

Notice that Deut 6:9 explained that God's covenant with Israel was conditional upon their obedience. The fact is that as a nation they never consistently kept the law, therefore God was not bound to them. Although God's longsuffering with the rebellious nation had come to an end, Paul still held out hope to individual Jews on terms of obedience to the New Covenant.

Under the Old Covenant, Israel had been set aside (elected) to fulfill God's particular purpose to reveal the true God to the nations of the earth. Paul was explaining that they were still elected, but now they were chosen along with the Gentiles to carry the gospel throughout the whole earth through the Church, not to establish a nation.

God kept his promise to the Fathers concerning the spiritual Kingdom of David that would be reinstated, but not in a natural or physical form, but spiritual. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Rom 11:29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Paul was informing Jews and Gentiles in Rome that God had not changed his mind about saving every Jew; that was always his plan, although he was done with the state of Israel. Once the sacrificial system was completed and fulfilled by Jesus, then God no longer needed the priesthood, as Jesus became our High Priest and we became kings and priests before him. With no animal sacrifices and priesthood, no physical temple was needed, for Christians were now the temple of God; with the passing of the temple, went a particular city to which we would have to go to for such sacrifices. John declared that we are the New Jerusalem! Without physical city, there was no need of a particular country to house God's natural method of bringing someone to salvation. The ministry of the Old Testament was finished and should not ever be resurrected except in blasphemy against all of the work of Jesus Christ.

God has not, and will not withdraw his offer to Jews after the flesh to be saved. They may still come today on the conditions given by God through Jesus Christ. All gifts available from the work of the cross are available to the Jew today.

Rom 11:30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

Because Israel on the whole rejected their Messiah and the gospel of salvation, Paul successfully concentrated on the Gentiles' conversion. (Eph. 2:2 & Col. 3:7)

Paul was not saying that suddenly God had jumped from the Jews to the Gentiles exclusively, but we know from Romans chapters 9:23-26, 15:8-12,18,21, that God had always had in mind to reach the whole world with his love and mercy, but he had to start

someplace, with some nation, in order to develop the knowledge of the one true God and then try and reach the world through that group. The Jews failed and limited God (Psa. 78:40-41), so he turned to the Gentiles. Israel failed as a nation, but God took his twelve disciples, who did more in 40 short years than the twelve tribes did in over a millennium. Through the disciples, the gospel went into every nation of the world. (Matt. 24:14) Then God took care of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, but only AFTER the

rejected Jews were faced with the fact that these people, "heretics," had accomplished in a generation what they, Israel after the flesh, failed to do in over 1,500 years of their national history! "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes!" (Mark 12:11)

Rom 11:31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

This does not mean that it was God's plan or that the Jews were predestinated to not believe, but that they had chosen not to believe, and that the Gentiles in Rome must extend their love and mercy to those unbelieving Jews in hope that they might obtain mercy from God for salvation.

Rom 11:32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

Thus Paul, who had begun his argument in this epistle by concluding that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, were condemned by sin (Romans 1-3), now reiterated that point and closed his argument by reminding men that God offers mercy to all that repent and believe. For as there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, as all have sinned, all may be saved, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God, in his own compassion, moved by no merit in either party, offered a general pardon by the gospel to be proclaimed to all. The Jews as a people have refused to receive this pardon on the terms which God has proposed it for last 2000 years, and therefore continue locked up in unbelief. The Gentiles, relatively speaking, have welcomed the offers of grace, and are delivered out of their prison. Individual Jews, seeing the accession of the Gentile world to the kingdom of the Messiah, and the glorious new birth which they in consequence enjoy, still have the opportunity to lay hold on the hope set before them, and thus become with the Gentiles one flock under one Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

Rom 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

The Apostle has now concluded his argument. We have been led from reason to reason, from doctrine to doctrine, from prophet to prophet, from one link to another in a golden chain of redeeming mercies. He has vindicated the justice and mercy of God in the rejection of the the nation of Israel, and the election of the Gentiles. He has shown how unbelief and sin are overruled for good. He has moved himself and his readers from a sense of great despair over the condition of the Jews to a vision of a glorious future for both Jew and Gentile through the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. He now ceases his arguing and concludes with praise. He is utterly amazed at both the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Noah Webster defined knowledge as, "A clear and certain perception of that which exists, or of truth and fact; we can have no knowledge of that which does not exist. God has a perfect knowledge of all his works."

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." (Acts 15:18) God's wisdom comes into the picture in that he so efficiently adjusts his plans to still bring about his ultimate purpose. In his wisdom he anticipates the future consequences of man's choices, so that ultimately God is not frustrated by human opposition. Webster defined wisdom as, "The right use or exercise of knowledge; the choice of laudable ends, and of the best means to accomplish them. This is wisdom in act, effect, or practice. If wisdom is to be considered as a faculty of the mind, it is the faculty of discerning or judging what is most just, proper and useful, and if it is to be considered as an acquirement, it is the knowledge and use of what is best, most just."

Augustine and others from his school of predestination have appealed to Romans 11:33 when confronted with the problems in their system, which teaches that by divine decrees, God has unconditionally elected a definite number for eternal salvation and reprobated the masses of humanity to eternal damnation. When challenged with the unreasonableness and injustice of such a scheme, and after they have exhausted all their arguments, they often quote verse 33 to show that God's thoughts and ways are incomprehensible to man. But this tactic is a gross misapplication of this verse, in light of Paul's revelation to us in Romans and Ephesians, which reveal the mysteries of God.

Rom 11:34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Certainly carnally minded Jews or Gentiles have not known the mind of the Lord, but spiritually minded Jews like Abraham and Moses did counsel the Lord. Disciples of Christ have been privy to his plans and purposes, but the worldly minded are in darkness concerning God's mysteries. "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: {7} But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: {8} Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. {9} But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. {10} But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. {11} For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. {12} Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. {13} Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. {14} But

the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. {15} But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. {16} For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor 2:6-16)

Thank God for men like Paul, who revealed to us the wisdom and knowledge of God with his purposes and plans. Let us be sure not to become puffed up, but humbled by such a wondrous revelation, always remembering that the more we learn, the more we realize how much we do not know.

Rom 11:35-36 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

### **Must Christians Keep Dietary Laws?**

In chapters 12 and 13 of Romans, Paul wrote of practical Christian duties. In Chapter 14, he lamented the division between Jewish and Gentile Christians concerning dietary laws and special days. Jewish Christians were practicing vegetarianism out of concern that they might inadvertently eat meat that was unclean or that had been sacrificed to idols. They were also still keeping Jewish holy days and festivals. Paul considered these brethren as "weak in the faith," whereas the Gentiles were walking in Christian liberty by not observing Jewish restrictions and regulations. This conflict was serious enough that Paul had to warn the Gentile brethren not to despise their Jewish brothers, and the Jews not to judge the Gentiles for not eating. Paul advised both factions to be non-judgmental and charitable towards the other, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom 14:17)

In Romans 15, Paul gave us insight into the seriousness of this division over diet and days. Probably the two factions were neither worshipping nor fellowshiping together. Francis Watson wrote in Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles, "Paul's argument [in Romans] does not presuppose a single congregation in which members disagree about the law; it presupposes two congregations, separated by mutual hostility and suspicion over the question of the law, which he wishes to bring together into one congregation." (p. 97)

Paul exhorted the Roman Christians to be like-minded and unified and to receive one another in common worship: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: {6} That ye

may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. {7} Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. (Rom 15:5-7) If they were worshipping together already, why would Paul have had the need to admonish them to welcome one another?

Paul entreated the Jews to receive the Gentiles: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:" (Rom 15:8)

And what was the promise made unto the patriarchs? Paul had addressed this question in Rom 4:16-17: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, {17} (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations)." The promise to Abraham was that he would become the father of "many Gentiles." [Gen 17:5].

But the Jews who claimed to be the children of Abraham were rejecting their own brothers the Gentiles, but in doing so they were also denying their kinship to Abraham. It was through the fulfillment of that promise that both the Jews and Gentiles should be able to praise God together, the Jews for the fulfillment of the promise and the Gentiles for God's mercy: "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." (Rom 14:9) [Psalm 18:49] Therefore, Jews, even as David had done, ought to worship among the Gentiles.

Likewise, Paul appealed to Moses who had exhorted the Gentiles to join with the Jews for worship: "And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people." [Deut 32:43] Next he reminded the Jews that David spoke of the Gentiles worshipping God: "And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people." [Psalm 117:1] Finally he reminded the Jews of the salvation that Isaiah said would come to the Gentiles: "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust..." (Rom 14:10-12) [Isaiah 11:10]

To convince both congregations Paul proved that he was not coming to them with any strange message, but affirming the message delivered to the patriarchs and the prophets and showing the continuity between the Old and New Covenant. His goal was to create a unified congregation in Rome:

"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. {17} I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. {18} For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, {19} Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto

Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. [To fully preach the gospel of Christ is to preach it to both Jews and Gentiles] {20} Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: {21} But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand." [Is 52:15] (Rom 15:8-21)

In Romans Chapter 16 Paul gave a final warning concerning his old nemesis, the Judaizers: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." (Rom 16:17)

Paul's final words to the church at Rome refers to the mystery of Christ revealed, which was also his theme in his letter to the Ephesians, "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, {26} But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen." (Rom 16:25-27)

This was now, and remains, the era of the Great Commission. God's call was no longer limited primarily to the Jews, but according to Paul's gospel the potential elect are all men everywhere; no one is excluded from the opportunity to be saved. The Church is no longer limited to historical Israel. It is universal. The Jewish hope is not in a restoration of the nation and temple, but their only hope, and the only hope for all men is in Jesus Christ, who has established his Church to carry out the divine purpose [predestinated plan]. The mystery has been revealed! All men through faith in Christ may approach the Almighty on an equal footing. From the beginning and forever it has been God's predestined and eternal purpose to have of "one blood all nations of men." (Acts 17:26) The ages long wall of separation of the two main divisions of men, Jew and Gentile is finished. We must not do anything or approve of any doctrines, which would resurrect dead ceremonies, institutions or nations. No natural descent, whether traced backed to Adam or Abraham, can truly unify men, but the blood of Christ breaks all barriers. The rites, rituals, holidays and dietary law of Judaism provided a necessary but only temporary division, that is now done away in the gospel of Christ.

Jesus said unto his disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." (John 15:16) His disciples were initially called [general election], independently of their works, to service for the proclamation of the gospel to "all nations for the obedience of faith;" however, the call to discipleship was not an assurance of an eternal relationship with God. In John 15:14, Jesus said, "You

are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you." Eternal Friendship is God was dependent on continuing in faith and obedience. All the twelve endured until the end [individual election], except Judas. They succeeded where the twelve tribes, who were called to reveal God to the nations [general election], in the end failed God, and ultimately disappeared.

Paul's pleas for unity and warnings against the Judaizers are important in our day when and where there are pockets of Messianic Jewish congregations, who recognize Jesus as the Messiah, but like the Judaizers of Paul's time, are encouraging and sometimes demanding that their congregations keep all of the law of Moses, including Jewish dietary laws and holidays; such teachings divide those which name the name of Christ. Paul was patient with the weak or ignorant ones, who still held on to certain traditions of Judaism in the time of transition in which he lived and wrote as long as they did not condemn those who did not hold to their scruples. But there is no excuse in our time, when the writings of Paul and the apostles have been widely published for centuries and Church leadership has consistently recognized and agreed that Old Testament ceremonial law is no longer applicable to the Christian, for anyone to be still confused in this subject.

## CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSION

Confusion has been propagated on the Church through the writings of Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin on the subject of predestination, that have no foundation in the Scriptures or reason. The noun predestination is not even found in the Bible. The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology defines the term predestination as follows, "In its wider reference it refers to the fact that the Triune God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. From all eternity God has sovereignly determined whatsoever shall happen in history. The narrower aspect or use of the term is that from all eternity God has chosen a body of people for himself, that they should be brought into eternal fellowship with him, while at the same time he has ordained that the rest of humanity should be allowed to go their own way, which is the way of sin, to ultimate eternal punishment. These are known as the doctrines of election and reprobation." However, this respected reference work admits, "In the Scriptures there is not one term in either the Hebrew or the Greek which encompasses the term predestination." Nevertheless, the dictionary concludes that this doctrine is "central to much of the teaching of both testaments."

Predestination is not central to the Bible, either in the Calvinistic or Arminian sense of the term; it is a fabrication. However, rightly understood, predestination is central to the Bible; Paul introduced the verb predestinate primarily to the Jews to explain, that from the beginning God planned or intended to have a holy people from all nations with whom he could have an intimate, loving and eternal relationship; and that through his Son Jesus Christ, he has provided a way in which those who so choose may enter into this fellowship and experience eternal life, and those who reject him would be damned. In using the term predestinate, Paul merely wanted to show Jews, who considered themselves to be exclusively the people of God, that he was now extending his grace in a wonderful way to the Gentiles. Obstinate and prideful Jews could not understand nor did they appreciate God bringing "heathens" into their exclusive kingdom.

The Biblical idea of predestination was simply Paul's way of explaining that from the start God had determined, planned or predestinated, that his Kingdom would include men from all the nations of the earth. God's purpose had been revealed through both the patriarchs and the prophets, but until the coming of the Messiah it had been shrouded in mystery. Jesus had attempted to instruct his disciples in this mystery, but they just never seemed to get it. It took, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, to reveal "the mystery of Christ," and he became the one primarily responsible for executing God's intention to have a universal church which included both Jews and Gentiles.

Predestination encompassed the term election. There are two elects in the Bible, Israel and the Church. God elected Abraham and his descendants after the flesh to reveal his love, plan, and purpose to everyone on the earth. This was a general election to privilege and position; not an unconditional election to eternal life or reprobation to eternal damnation. God eventually disqualified the nation of Israel as his elect, because of their persistent unbelief. The term election was also used to define the people who choose to respond to the universal offer of grace and mercy and receive the gift of eternal life. This election was the Church which included both Jews and Gentiles who believed in the mystery of godliness as revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Paul had a natural affection and benevolent love for his own people of the nation of Israel, despite their vehement opposition to the gospel. He had a vital concern for their salvation, but he made it clear that it must be on the terms of the gospel, not upon the law of Moses, or their relationship to Abraham, or circumcision, or their temple, or their priesthood. Without Christ and independent of the Church, there was no hope for the Jews.

When Paul seemed to make disparaging remarks concerning the law and its irrelevance to the New Covenant, he was not speaking against the eternal moral law which requires supreme love to God and equal love to neighbor as a condition for eternal salvation. He was putting down the Judaizers who were

attempting to convince Gentile converts that they must keep the ceremonial law, the rites and rituals of Judaism, in order to be justified before God.

In 70 AD, Christ came in judgment against Israel by utterly destroying Jerusalem and the Jewish temple through the armies of the Roman general, Titus, revealing with spectacular fire that God was finally done with the nation of Israel as his elect people. This destruction of the Jewish polity was the death blow to the Judaizers. Since that time there has been no attempt by the institutionalized Church to teach that converted Gentiles must come under Jewish law in order to be saved.

The Jew-Gentile controversies were the main issues of Paul's day. Indeed, to a large degree, answering these questions provided the inspiration and theme of Paul's polemics. These issues have been essentially dead issues since 70 AD, although there are still contemporary hopes within Christendom for the resurrection of the Jewish temple as well as small pockets of false teachers, who in the name of Christianity, are trying to teach Christians to keep all the Torah. In order to interpret Paul's letters, one must appreciate and know the history of the Jew-Gentile conflict of ancient and apostolic times. He must understand that the Mystery of Christ has been revealed.

Regrettably, few Christians have studied the historical context of Paul's letters. They tend to interpret his message in the light of the Calvinism and Arminianism debates of the Reformation era concerning determinism and free-will, issues which did not concern Paul or the primitive church. Consequently, unstudied Christians are vulnerable to erroneous teaching concerning the nature of God and man.

It was not until the late 5th century that Augustinian determinism and the Pelagian free-will debates divided Christians. Pelagius' views were unfortunately condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Afterwards this debate cooled, until the 16th Century as most Christians, according to their philosophical bent, either adopted a semi-Pelagian or semi-Augustinianism position. In 1536, John Calvin revived the debate by fully propagating Augustine's determinism in his Institutes. Since then the dispute has raged to various degrees until today most either accept a modified Calvinism or fall into the modified Pelagian views of the Arminians or Wesleyans. The debate centers around Ephesians chapter 1 and 2 and especially Romans 9. The mistake both sides make is that they seem to assume that Paul addressed the issue of free will as opposed to determinism in these chapters, when in fact Paul assumed man's free-will. The possession of the faculty of will by definition implies freedom to choose. Paul did not waste his time defending intuitive truths.

Most Evangelicals of our day claim that Scriptures teach both the absolute sovereignty of God and individual freedom and responsibility, and that it is impossible for man's finite mind to reconcile both positions. "Both concepts are

true and we will understand it better in the bye-and-bye," they say. Their problem is that they mistake sovereignty to mean that God is the only causative factor in the universe. However, sovereignty rightly understood simply means that God is the Supreme Ruler and Judge of the Universe. There is no contradiction between free-will and sovereignty, when these terms are correctly defined and understood.

Since the First Advent of Christ, the true Church of Jesus Christ has been plagued with fabrications from the dead Jewish religion, that some day God was going to restore them to a place of leadership in the world and revive their religious system. But the prophecies quoted to support this view in fact related to the first coming of Jesus Christ and the setting up of a spiritual Kingdom that could only be entered into by a spiritual rebirth. Prophecies often used to predict the rebuilding of the temple in the end-times were fulfilled either in the return to the Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple after the Babylonian captivity or Christ's dwelling within the heart of believers, who are now the spiritual temple of God under the New Covenant.

The false notions that both Calvinists and Arminians have held concerning predestination have confused many of them when it comes to understanding the question of the salvation of the Jews in the end-times. After working so patiently and thoughtfully to tear down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, why would God want the whole Jewish polity restored before his Second Advent, or for that matter ever revived?

It would be incredible to believe that God after laboring so carefully to respect man freedom throughout the ages would in the last generation usurp man's will and cause a nation to be redeemed. When it comes to the plan of redemption, God's method has always been persuasion, not force.

God's spiritual kingdom has often been misunderstood and slowly the "Jewish fable" took hold, that there would be a day when the state of Israel would experience a glorious revival. My, how the heart of God must have been broken with this natural hope replaced, in the minds of many, his offer of a spiritual and loving relationship. Since 1948, a revived form of Judaism has dominated the evangelical church, only it is not being primarily generated by Jews, but by Gentile Zionists.

Through the "restoration of Israel" idea, God's basic truth about his true sacrifice, priesthood, temple, city and nation are buried under a flood of falsehoods. Some writers from this premillennial point of view projected that 40 years from Israel's birth as a nation that Jesus would return (1988), and start a 1,000 year rule with a new temple, priesthood

and sacrifices in Jerusalem. They added that 7 years before the return of Christ that the Church would be raptured to Heaven, along with the Holy Spirit, leaving

the Jews to harvest the world (without the Holy Spirit!). This means that in 1981 the church was to be raptured, and the Antichrist would make his covenant with the natural nation of Israel and

everything would be peaceful for the next 3 1/2 years. Then, in 1984, the Antichrist would break his covenant with Israel; and then would start the Great Tribulation for the next 3 1/2 years. At the return of Christ in 1988, the devil would be put into a pit and chained for the 1,000 years.

Well, of course, none of this came to pass and the whole eschatological system was rocked for a brief moment. 1981 came, no rapture, no Antichrist in a covenant with Israel, no Holy Spirit taken out of the earth, no Jews evangelized the world, no Great Tribulation, no return of Christ, no saints in heaven for seven years, no rewards in heaven, no marriage supper in heaven and no return of Christ for a 1,000 year earthly millennium. Did anybody cry false prophet? Antichrist? Nay. Book merchants just sat down and wrote more volumes and looked for something else to happen at another time and another way contrary to what Jesus said it would be.

Next some taught that we missed the day that started the 40 year countdown. It should have been 1967, the six-day war. So now they just add 40 years to that and you have 2007 to be the return of Christ to start the 1,000 year rule on earth. But seven years before that (2000) the Church was to be raptured along with the Holy Spirit and the Antichrist would make a covenant with Israel. The next 3 1/2 years would be great with the Jews evangelizing the world and then in 2003 Antichrist would break his covenant and we would have the Great Tribulation for the next 3 1/2 years, or to the magic year of 2007.

One would think that Evangelicals would see through all this by now, but most seem blinded. Perhaps it is time to consider what some regard as a more plausible eschatological scenario: the devil was bound by the cross, not by a pit in the earth; we have been living in the spiritual millennium of the rule and reign of Christ in our hearts for almost 2,000 years now; the Antichrist of John's Epistle is not a man, but a system; everything that God has allowed to come into existence as connected with the natural nation of Israel is a strong delusion, that could cause many to be deceived and take them on into the judgment as tares ready to be gathered up in bundles and burned.

Whatever may be one's eschatological view, one thing the Bible proves is that only those that obey his Word will be counted as the true Saints in the end: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. {10} But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. {11} Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner

of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, {12} Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? {13} Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Pet 3:9-13) Please note, that we are to be looking looking for new heavens and a new earth, not for the restoration of a national state.

It is not works, lineage, or nationality; nor is it casting out demons, healing the sick, or signs or wonders; it is a love relationship with God through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, that is the one and only test of election and sainthood. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph 1:4) God has predetermined that he is going to have a holy people with whom he may live righteously and lovingly in the New Jerusalem.

Dear reader, will you support the divine plan and purpose by responding to his grace and receiving him as your Savior from sin and damnation and become part of the elect, his Church? Do not be deluded by a false view of predestination and think that you do not determine your own destiny. It is your choice.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Calvin, John, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. I & II, Grand Rapids, MI., Wm. B. eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981.

Clarke Adam, Clarke' Commentary, Vol. VI, New York & Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.

Conybeare, W. J. and Howson, J.S., The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

Fletcher, John, The Works of John Fletcher, Vol. 2, Salem, OH: Schmul Publishers, 1974.

Forster, Roger T. and Marston, V. Paul, God's Strategy in Human History, Bromley, England: Send the Light Trust, 1973.

Foster, R.S., Objections to Calvinism As It Is, Cincinnati: Printed for the Author, at the Methodist Book Concern, 1853.

Harrington, Daniel J., Paul on the Mystery of Israel, Collegeville, Mn: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

Latourette, Kenneth Scott, A History of Christianity, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953.

Maclaren, Alexander, Expositions of the Holy Scriptures, New York, NY: Hodder and Stoughton and George H. Doran Co.

Meldau, Fred J., Messiah in Both Testaments, Denver, Colo.: The Christian Victory Publishing Co., 1957.

Pinnock, Clark, and others, The Openness of God, A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994

Schaff, Philip, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 1, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1950.

Wesleyan Bible Commentary, Vol. 5, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965