

Wreckage and Recovery

God's Way of Making Believers Holy: Romans 5–8

David Gooding

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

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The Believer's Secure Standing

Romans 5:1–11

Let's read together in the Epistle to the Romans and chapter 5.

Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace in which we stand; and let us rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but let us also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation works endurance; and endurance, approvedness;¹ and approvedness, hope: and hope does not put to shame, because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us. For while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for the good man some would even dare to die. But God commends his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Therefore, it is as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death passed unto all men for that all sinned. For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come. But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many. And not as through one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment came of one unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification. For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So then as through once trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through the one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous. And the law came in beside, that the trespass might abound; but where sin multiplied, grace did abound more

¹ ESV, NIV—'character'; KJV—'experience'. Dr Gooding uses and defines the term later in this talk.

exceedingly. That, as sin reigned in death, even so by might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (vv. 1–21)

May the Lord fill our hearts with the sense of his abounding grace.

The order in which the gospel addresses our needs

One of these days it could be that you will come across an accident in the street, and in case you do, permit me to give you a little (rather cheap) medical advice. Suppose there has been a car accident and you come across a man lying on the ground. His left leg is broken; his right arm is broken; the front of his face is smashed in, and he is looking a horrible sight. But in addition to that, some bit of iron from his car has gashed his leg and severed the main artery, and the man's blood is slowly pumping away.

Now, what do you do? You say, 'Well, he does look a terrible sight, let me get out my handkerchief and just brush the blood off his face, and let me try and put his nose back straight, as it ought to be, because he is a horrible sight and doesn't look very well!'

No, you wouldn't do that, would you?

You would say, 'Yes, he's a horrible sight, and one of these days we shall have to attend to that, but the first thing we must do is to stop that artery bleeding! For if we don't, the man will perish completely, and then we shan't have a chance of putting his face right.'

And so it was that the gospel found us all, like the Samaritan found the man who had fallen amongst thieves. It found us battered and disfigured by sin in our character and personality. But the gospel, being God's wisdom to salvation, did not first start by putting our spiritual face right and making us look nice. It went for what was our first and primary and most urgent need, which was the question of our guilt before God; for we were guilty indeed, and exposed to God's wrath! The first thing the gospel does for us, then, is to deal with our guilt and deliver us from the wrath of God. That is a marvellous thing.

The gospel of Christ's death and resurrection

The gospel is God's power to salvation because it can give free pardon for everyone who believes in Christ; it can justify him. That is to say, it can put him in the right with God—declare him right with God, freed from the wrath of God and reconciled with God.

On another occasion we were thinking of the technical terms related to this justification. We found it is by grace, that is, the opposite of our works. We are justified by grace without works. It is not that God's grace gives us the grace to do the works to merit the salvation—not at all! God's grace is the opposite of works. His justification is given to those that do not work but solely put their faith in Christ.

Then we considered at the end of our study what the Bible means by faith. We found that it is not a merit: it is not a work that deserves our justification; it is not a work that produces our justification. Vividly in our imaginations, we put ourselves by the tomb in which Jesus Christ our Lord lay dead—stark dead. And we reminded ourselves that he had come to this because of our transgression. He was delivered up to the rigours of God's law, to the terrible sanctions of that holy law, and they consigned him to death. He was delivered up for our

transgressions (see Rom 4:25). In our imaginations we stood beside his tomb and saw that dead body—cold, inert, lifeless. Had he remained like that, we should have been lost forever. Therefore the urgent need we saw was that Christ should be raised again from the dead.

What could be done about it? The answer was that we could do nothing about it! Our faith did not contribute to the raising of Jesus from the dead. At the risk of being absurd, let me remind you it was not the fact that John, Mary, Thomas, Bartholomew and all the rest of them collected around the tomb of our Lord and, by their faith, made his body rise. Of course not! There was nothing man could do; nothing the strongest believer could do. It was God's sovereign act of free power that raised Christ from the dead! That risen life stands first as the witness that God has accepted that sacrifice, and that God accepts all who trust that sacrifice. And it is the fact that God communicates that same risen life to all who trust that risen Saviour.

So we saw that our faith is not some putting forth of our power that somehow produces our salvation. No, our faith is not a work of merit at all. It is simply us coming in our bankruptcy, agreeing with God that we are guilty and that we deserve his judgment and cannot save ourselves. We are admitting that the sentence of God against us is not only just, but has a right to be carried out. And then, putting our faith in Christ, taking our stand with him who for our sakes bore that sanction, and accepting as a free gift, gratis and for nothing, as simple bankrupts who contribute nothing, we get that free gift from God. That is faith. However weak our faith may be, it remains true that the gospel is God's power to salvation to everyone who *believes*.

Of course when the gospel has got rid of our guilt, it doesn't stop there. The rest of this epistle is going on to tell us of all those marvellous things that God's salvation is now doing, and shall yet do for us by way of patching up our ugly faces and removing the blots and the blemishes and, in the end, conforming us to the image of God's Son. He has a glorious programme. But before we embark on that, let us stop to consider certain delightful results that come to us from the fact that by faith in Christ we have been justified and cleared of guilt before God.

Some of the results of justification

The first result: peace with God

Result number one is this, that we 'have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (5:1). We have peace *with God*. Notice please, the passage does not say we have peace with ourselves but 'peace with God'. There is a difference, isn't there? It is a very real difference, and it is important indeed that we understand what the difference is.

It is very rare that a believer will ever be fully one hundred percent at peace with himself. Is it not so? Well, I hope it's so. I hope none of you are one hundred percent at peace with yourselves. Are you? Looking back over this last week, can you say you are one hundred percent at peace and can say, 'Yes, I'm a pretty decent fellow'?

I hope you're not saying that. I hope while you are giving thanks to God for victories won and progress made in your heart, you are still terribly dissatisfied with yourself. Some of us may be disgusted with ourselves at this very moment for the slowness of our progress and for

the frequency of our faults and the repetitions of our smelly old, very stale, mistakes and not at peace with ourselves. But oh thank God, while we are not, and should not be, at peace with ourselves, if we have trusted the Saviour we may have peace with God, knowing that he has accepted us as we are—accepted us for Christ’s sake! He is no longer, in the legal sense, ‘wroth’ with us. We are: reconciled, justified, declared right, accepted by God. We have peace with God.

There are some manuscripts of the New Testament that, instead of saying here: ‘we have peace with God’ read: ‘let us have peace with God’, and accordingly some English translations have followed those other manuscripts. For my own part, I think that they are right who say, ‘we have peace with God.’ But even if the other manuscripts were more correct, and that the original reading was: ‘let us have peace with God,’ then even so, let us perceive what that would mean. It would not mean: ‘Let us try and get hold of peace with God.’ It would mean: ‘Let us go on having, that is, let us enjoy peace with God!’ You might as well, my dear believer. If you are not enjoying peace with God at this moment, well, you might as well; there is nothing to stop you. My love, as the hymn puts it:

My love is oftentimes low,
My joy still ebbs and flows,
But peace with Him remains the same;
No change Jehovah knows.²

Peace with God remains the same *because* my acceptance with God does not depend on me; it depends on God’s acceptance of the great sacrifice of Christ.

Let us enjoy peace, my dear brother. If for the moment the troubles and trials of this weary life and the disappointments with yourself have overcrowded and overborne your spirit, during the hours of this week now and then, just for a moment, pause and let the sunshine of peace with God break through the clouds. Look again into the face of God and know that for Christ’s sake he has accepted you. You have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second result: a secure standing

We not only have peace with God but solid ground under our feet, for this verse says the second result of being justified by faith is that ‘we have had our access by faith into this grace in which we stand’ (v. 2). We have been introduced: we have had access to, we have been introduced into, this grace.

It is as though we had been beggars, and not only beggars but criminals. So the Queen’s armies and the Queen’s men were all hot on our track and, had they found us, they must have brought us quickly to prison and thence to death; however, by the Queen’s mercy, she forgave us. Oh, that is lovely. We were then certain that there was no more wrath and the arm of the law would no longer pursue us. But there was more than that, for she then invited us to come and stand in her presence in Buckingham Palace. Even as we stood there amidst those deep-piled carpets and the delightful oil paintings on the wall, we suddenly began to think,

² Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), ‘I hear the words of love’ (1861).

‘Wherever am I standing now?’ We suddenly wake up to the fact that we’ve been introduced into the presence of the Queen, and we see all this splendour around us and the glorious Persian carpet under our feet, and we’re not quite sure whether we ought to be standing here or not, how long we shall be standing here, or whether presently, any moment now, a policeman will appear and usher us quickly out!

So we might fear, mightn’t we, even as justified men and women who know that we have been forgiven and that there is no more wrath against us? We might still have a lingering doubt in our hearts as to whether our standing before God was secure or not, and whether one of these days we might, so to speak, be asked to leave and get out. And so the apostle stays to tell us that if we have put our faith in Christ—if we have believed God like Abraham did—not only are we justified, not only have we peace, but please look at our standing! We are standing where? We are standing in *grace*.

The difference between our standing and our state

Our fathers and grandfathers were wise old men, and their theology often expressed itself in homely fashion, but it was none the worse for that. They used to make a very clear distinction. Not that I can personally remember exactly what they used to say in those days, but you would often hear the believers of some sixty years ago say, ‘Now, my boy, please understand the difference between your *standing* and your *state*.’ Yes, somehow believers used to understand those words in days gone by, but we don’t hear them so much now, do we? It’s a pity. And if you think that they are horribly technical terms, well, never mind, you do your best to grasp them and make a distinction in your mind between your *standing* before God, and your *state* before God.

God doesn’t pretend that we are all we ought to be as to our state. As to my state—my character, the development of my behaviour—God is divinely dissatisfied with me and never will be satisfied until I am conformed to the image of God’s Son. But while my state is far from what it should be, the Bible tells me my standing before God is perfect. For I do not stand before God on the ground of my merit nor even (and get this) on the ground of the progress I’ve made since I have been a Christian. My standing before God is solely and totally on the ground of his grace. Get hold of it because, if you don’t, our enemy the devil will upset us on this score. Of course the believer wants to make progress. Yes, of course he or she will want to cooperate with God and become daily more like Christ. And then, of course, the dear believer won’t always succeed. Some days the progress will seem tough, and some days he’ll seem to go backwards. As to his state, it will be now two steps forward and one step back, and up and down. And if I came to think that my standing before God depended on the progress I make in my Christian life, then my peace with God wouldn’t last five minutes, would it?

Sometimes, even though we know better, we fall into that way of thinking, don’t we? We get discouraged because of our poor progress, and then we come to doubt whether we are accepted with God. We are confusing our *state* with our *standing*. So let’s get it clear before Paul goes on to talk at length about how God proposes to deal with our state. And he is going to talk about it at length, so don’t be in any great hurry. But first he says, ‘Please get hold of

it! Being justified by faith, you have a perfect standing that depends not on your progress, but on God's grace. We stand fast in this grace!

How did we get there? Was it through progressing in the Christian life? No, we got there through Jesus Christ our Lord. It was he that introduced us, and there we stand fast and shall do for all eternity.

The third result: confident hope

'Not only that,' Paul says. And I beg you to begin to notice that little phrase: 'Not only that,' or 'Not only so' (see vv. 3, 11). You will find it going on many times now in this letter: 'Not only that,' and, 'Not only that'. It is because he dances to a great reality. God's salvation is so immensely big! You come across one great mountain of God's grace and have climbed to the top of it, and noticed it, and your heart is full, and you think there couldn't be any more, but God's Spirit will say, 'Oh, but not only that, there's something else as well.' Here we read: 'not only so, but we rejoice in hope of the glory of God'.

That word *rejoice* means, in the original language, not so much 'rejoice' in the sense of an 'I am H-A-P-P-Y' kind of rejoicing—you know, full of smiles and pleasant feelings. It is rather rejoice in the sense of 'exult', 'be confident'. 'Not only so, but we have confidence, we glory, we have confidence in hope of the glory of God.'

Now, what do you mean by 'the glory of God'? Well, chapter 3 tells us the glory of God is something that we still come short of. 'All have sinned' (that's in the past), 'and all do constantly come short of the glory of God' (v. 23). God's glory, among other things, is his character—what God is like, the way he behaves. And still we all come short of that glorious standard, don't we? But if we are justified then we have grounds for believing and confidently exulting that one day we shall obtain the glory of God! One day we shall be like him. One day we shall be conformed to the image of his Son for, as chapter 8 puts it, 'Those he justified those also he glorified' (v. 30). And already, before it happens, even now, we may 'confidently exult in hope of the glory of God.'

May I ask you to notice what the word *hope* means in the Bible? In passages like this when the Bible uses the word 'hope' it means something a bit different from what we normally mean when we use the word. We say, for instance, 'I hope the sun will shine when I'm on holiday,' and we mean: 'I expect it won't.' But when the Bible talks about our hoping 'in the glory of God', it isn't just issuing a vain sort of a wish: 'Well, I hope so one day. I would really like to, if it were possible. I wish I could one of these days attain to the glory of God, but of course, it isn't very likely.' No, it is not that kind of hope. The hope a Christian has is described in another part of the New Testament as like an anchor, both sure and steadfast (see Heb 6:19). We may exult confidently in the certain expectation of obtaining the glory of God.

You say, 'Why tell us that here?'

Well, for a very good reason. The chapters that are about to come in this letter—chapters 6, 7 and 8—are going to talk to us at great length and in great detail about the methods God is going to use with us to begin to change us and to transform us into the image of Christ. God is really going to do something with our faces, you know. As Ephesians would put it, he is going to take the blots and the blemishes, and the wrinkles away, and one day we shall be like Christ (see 5:26–27). The process is going to be quite long. And you might as well know it so

let me say it bluntly: sometimes it will be very painful. Some days it will be enjoyable, yes and sometimes not enjoyable. We might as well face it.

Some folks get the idea that when they trust Christ, thereafter it's going to be all joy and gladness and wonderful feelings all the way home to heaven. That is not true; let me tell you that straight now. God will give you much, much joy and gladness. Because he is determined to make you like Christ, he will do it, giving you as much joy as he can, but even when he can't give you joy, he will still do it. And sometimes it is going to be painful. Therefore, some days you're going to be discouraged, and God wants you then not to make a mistake of thinking things are going completely wrong. Indeed, he wants you to know before you start that you can be certain that the result will be achieved! What an encouragement that is. In the days and weeks and months where I feel that I haven't made much progress, or that I've blotted my copy book or that I've slipped back, and the devil whispers in my ear: 'There you are. You might as well throw in the sponge, old boy. You'll never be like Christ. Some likelihood, isn't it? What? You be like Christ?' Then I may come back to God's holy word and learn not only that I have peace with him and that my standing is a standing in grace, but I may learn to be confident in hope, in the certain expectation that I shall one day attain the glory of God. And that very certain knowledge shall steel my will and encourage my fainting heart to go on with God; certain that the desired result shall be achieved.

The fourth result: rejoicing in tribulations

Not only so, as well as being confident of one day attaining the glory of God, verse 3 tells us that we can rejoice in our tribulations as well. And again, that word *rejoice* doesn't mean, 'sing aloud for joy and feel happy and beaming and glad'. It is a word that means 'to exult', 'to have confidence'. And you'll notice that he says that we may have confidence in our tribulations *knowing* certain facts, not having certain feelings.

When tribulations come it's likely enough our feelings will be down in the dumps, and if we were going by our feelings, we wouldn't have much confidence, would we? Oh, my dear good Christian friend, do learn please that our feelings are very poor guides as to the actual fact of things. Aren't they now?

Here is a woman at home. She has money for the week, and she is now going out to the shop. She just checks into her purse, and the money isn't there. 'I've lost the money! What shall I do? I've lost the money!' Her feelings are up at a high pitch, and she's full of exasperation and frustration, and it's a tragedy! But she hasn't lost the money at all. The money is on the mantelpiece! She'd meant to put it in her purse but forgot; she thought she had but she hadn't. So, there it is, and she's not lost it. And those feelings were all for nothing, weren't they?

Our feelings are stupid things sometimes. If they're nice, enjoy them, but don't believe them whatever you do! Yet how often we do precisely that. If we *feel* all right, we think we are all right. But just feeling all right is no guarantee you are all right, is it? Sometimes one reads of tragic stories in the newspaper of little children gassed in their beds. They felt all right, but feeling all right didn't mean they were safe when the gas filtered into the room. In spite of their feelings, they died.

Oh, yes, enjoy the feelings if you've got good cause to think they are genuine, but don't you ever trust them! No, if you want to be a confident Christian you must learn to put your trust, not in your feelings but in God's facts—knowing—not feeling, but knowing. We may be confident in the midst of our tribulations, *knowing* certain facts.

Now, what are the facts, then? However bad the tribulation and however down in the mouth I feel, I am to know that where there is genuine faith to start with, all that tribulation can do is to 'produce endurance' (v. 3). Your Bibles perhaps read 'patience'. Well, yes, it means patience, but there are various kinds of patience, aren't there? Or at least we mean various things by the word.

Some men are very good with their fingers. Some men, for instance, make model ships. I saw a picture once where a man had made a model cathedral out of matchsticks, and there were about 567,421 matchsticks in this thing. How on earth he had all the patience to put it together, I don't know. But if you'd have gone in when he'd come to a very sticky bit, and maybe he was just doing a very delicate operation, and you had got in his way, I shouldn't have been at all surprised if he might have been angry or lost his temper or kicked you or done other some unmentionable thing! And you would have said, 'What an impatient man!' Yes, impatient in the sense he'd lost his temper, well understandably. But that very same man that lost his patience with you because you kept interrupting, nevertheless would stick at the job until he got it finished, bad tempered as he might be.

It is that second kind of quality: the sticking at it, the stickability, the going through with it, that this verse is talking about. And we are to know that where you start off with faith, then come what tribulation may, all it can do is to work endurance.

You say, 'Is that important?'

Of course it's important! Let me remind you of a parable in which this word comes. I'm quoting now what is known as 'the parable of the Sower' from Luke 8.

Endurance in the parable of the Sower

Our Lord told us that when the word is preached there are different results. Sometimes the word falls, so to speak, on the hard path, and the birds of the air come and gobble it up, and it never brings more fruit of course. That's just what happens when the gospel is preached, and somebody hears it but doesn't understand it and it doesn't sink in, and the devil removes it before they've even got out of the door of the place where they heard it.

'There are others,' said our Lord. Sometimes the seed of the word falls on rocky ground, where it springs up at once. And you think, 'How marvellous!' But then the sun comes up, and the wind blows, and it all comes to nothing and shrivels up. Why? It was because it had no root in itself. That can happen too. Folks can hear the gospel and be moved by the general excitement and make some kind of profession that is based simply on emotion and on their feelings and is not real and genuine faith in God. Such folks, being sustained for a while by their pleasant feelings and their religious moods, when persecution or tribulation arises for the word of God, then they are stumbled and they shrivel away. Why? They had no root in themselves.

That's no good. The only thing that's any good is this, and here I quote our Lord's word: 'And that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the

word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with endurance’ (v. 15). That is the only kind that is any good, where the word takes root and grows and keeps on growing, and in the end brings forth fruit. Of course that’s the only way you can bring forth fruit. If a bit of corn sewn in the ground stops growing after two weeks, it never brings forth any fruit, does it? No, to bring forth fruit, he’s got to carry on with endurance.

Now, that is exceedingly important, for we have learned in our previous chapters that though Christ has died as a great propitiation for sin, not all men are saved, not all men are justified. Christ has died; the sacrifice has been offered: that does not mean that all men are automatically saved. No, the only ones justified are those who have exercised faith. And if it’s going to be any good it’s got to be a faith that goes on going on. You can’t say, ‘Oh, well I believed, you know. Why, yes, I trusted Christ on July 17, 1909. Of course, I don’t believe now. I stopped believing long ago, but I’m still saved!’ That would be no good, would it? Faith is not a merit, but it is an indispensable link. If that link could be broken then everything would be lost. And of course Satan knows that, and he will do all he can to break that link. From time to time all sorts of tribulation will come our way—some of it natural to the flesh, some of it sent by (or if not sent, then used by) Satan to try and break that link of faith between our souls and God. If it were possible for him to succeed, how could I ever have any peace or confidence? Therefore God wants us to know, right from the start, that where there is faith, then all that tribulation can do is to work endurance. As an old hymn put it:

Yes, I to the end shall endure,
as sure as the earnest is giv’n;
more happy, but not more secure,
the glorified spirits in heav’n.³

We are to be confident in our tribulations, not feeling, but ‘*knowing* that tribulation works endurance’. The same sun and the same wind and the same rain are coming on that bit of seed that never had any root, but just sprang up all of a sudden, and it withers and shrivels up and produces nothing. Not so the seed that takes root in good soil. It will endure and grow. It is the seed of his word in the hearts of those that have genuinely trusted Christ.

What endurance produces

Endurance therefore, as you might see, ‘works approvedness’. Perhaps that is the best translation of the term you can give it. *Approvedness* shows that the seed is good seed. It shows that the faith is genuine. There are sometimes some old greybeards to be found about the place. You know the kind of thing that can happen. When the man first gets saved and he’s just professed faith in the Lord, and he goes and tells Mr Y: ‘I’ve trusted the Saviour’ and he looks up and says, ‘Hmm, time will tell,’ or something like that. He needn’t be so glum about it, need he? It is quite true what he’s saying. Time *will* tell, but he needn’t be so glum. They that endure demonstrate to all and sundry that their faith was genuine right from the start. What other means have you of telling me? So then endurance works approvedness. It demonstrates to all and sundry that the person is a genuine believer.

³ Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), ‘A Debtor to Mercy Alone’ (1771).

Of course that approvedness gives ground to hope again, doesn't it? How full these verses are with hope that is based on God's grace. Now here is another ground for hope. After years of experience, being assailed by life's difficulties, with spiritual tribulations of all sorts and kinds, and coming through them, battered perhaps, with the old shield of faith with one or two dents in it where some uncommonly heavy and fiery dart of the evil one bashed it hard, they are coming through and still carrying on. They are still able to look up to God and say, 'God, after it all, I believe.'

What a moving passage that is in Geoffrey Bull's account of his imprisonment, amidst all the horrors of being brainwashed until he felt his sanity was going, and perhaps his testimony compromised, then at last, in a few minutes of quiet in the old cell, amidst all the mental confusion and physical bodily pain and torture, to be able to kneel and look up to God, and say, 'God, I believe.'⁴ And that endurance is a ground for hope: 'Yes, God's work in my soul is a real thing.'

Some of you sitting here tonight can say that, can't you? You have had twenty years, thirty years or forty years' experience, and you will have proved that God's grace is real; it has kept you right up to this very moment. You have proved it. The young academic gentleman who has just recently learned a bit of philosophy may not understand how it is you can possibly have such confidence in your heart, because you can't argue logically like he has learned to argue, but his logic won't give him much confidence. You've got the true ground of confidence: the experience of the reality of God's grace in your life.

So this approvedness is another ground for hope, for 'certain expectation'. And it is a *certain* expectation. That's a funny old Hebrew word, which is here translated: 'makes not ashamed'. Hope 'makes not ashamed'. We don't talk like that nowadays, but I suspect we could easily understand what it means.

I once heard a funny story, forgive my telling it; it was told to me by a railway official in England. He explained that not far from King's Cross station there used to be, in the happier days of British railway, a train that left somewhat after midnight, about 4 a.m., or some impossible hour like that. It was used to take workmen and tools and equipment and her majesty's post, and various other things from King's Cross to Peterborough. But this was a train that was never open to passengers because it had to go on parts of the rails that were not insured by the company for passenger traffic. So passengers were never allowed on it. One night there came a businessman a-puffing and blowing into King's Cross station. He came helter-skelter to catch the last train from King's Cross to Peterborough, and he missed it! And he was not a little put out, for he wanted to go to Peterborough, and to Peterborough he was going! So, having missed the last passenger train, he suddenly spotted this other train. He went out to some guard or ticket inspector and said, 'Well now, look, I want to go on this train.'

And the man said, 'Oh, I'm sorry, sir, you can't.'

He said, 'But I am.'

'No,' he said, 'you can't; it's not a passenger train.'

Well, he didn't care about that: he was going on this train! He didn't care.

⁴ Geoffrey Bull, *When Iron Gates Yield*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955.

So nothing would content him. He went along to the train, opened the door, chose a nice compartment, and got in. Of course he'd come a long way, and it was 4 a.m., so he thought he would just take his shoes off and make himself comfortable on the old seat and wait until the train took him to Peterborough. So he went to sleep through the hours of the night and dreamed of the progress he was making.

He woke up in the morning, and the train was quite still. He felt quite certain that now he'd arrived in Peterborough, so he put his shoes on, opened the door, and there he was standing on the platform in King's Cross station!

What a fool he felt! Yes, how ashamed of himself he felt. He had been so confident he was going to Peterborough, but when he went to sleep the railway officials took the precaution of unhooking the carriage that he was in. The train went to Peterborough, but not him! He did feel a fool. Hope had made him ashamed because it was not based in facts.

Yes, and you are hoping to get to heaven, and not only to get to heaven as a place, but to be transformed into the image of God's Son, to obtain the very glory of God. Oh, friend, what is your hope based on, and in? Do make sure that it's in the right place, won't you? To wake up at last and find that you put your hope in the wrong place: what a shame it would be and what an indescribable disappointment. Do make sure your hope is built:

... on nothing less
 than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
 I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
 but wholly lean on Jesus' name.
 On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
 all other ground is sinking sand.⁵

This hope does not make us ashamed. Why not? Well, finally for tonight let us consider now the deepest ground of all in which the Christian hope is based.

Secure in God's love

Hope does not make us ashamed because the love of God is: 'shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (5:5). 'The love of God' is not my love for God. The rest of the verses in this paragraph go on to tell us, not of our love for God, but of God's love for us! The love of God: it is the love that God commends towards us. It is *that* love that is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

This is the first mention of the work of the Holy Spirit towards the believer in this epistle. We shall find many more mentions of it later on. What a delightful work of his this is. From the very moment the believer puts his faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and, like a man might pour out a glass of water on the ground until water goes everywhere all around the place, so does he get the love of God and pour it out in our hearts. It is not just in our minds, but he makes it real in our hearts so that the love of God is a real thing to us, not just a pious hope.

⁵ Edward Mote (1797-1874), 'My Hope is Built on Nothing Less' (1834).

Don't ask me exactly how he does it. How does a little baby know his mother loves him? I don't know. Somehow mums have ways, don't they, of conveying to that little personality that nestles on her breast that it is secure, that it is loved. The psychologists tell us those beginning years are so tremendously important if that child is ever to grow up into a rounded personality. In the time when that child's personality is being laid down, it should feel secure, and if for some reason it is deprived of that security, psychologically that child may be bent and twisted for the rest of his or her life. So right from the very start, beginning with the babe in Christ, the Holy Spirit pours out the love of God in their hearts to give them that basic security on which God shall build the rest, secure in God's love. But in order that it might not be just a kind of spiritual instinct but something that we know intelligently with our minds, the Holy Spirit begins to argue the case. And with his delightful arguments we bring our session to an end.

The first part of the Holy Spirit's argument (v. 6)

I do hope you will allow the Holy Spirit to argue. There are good arguments as well as bad arguments. Sometimes you hear dear Christian folks say you shouldn't argue. We know what they mean. They mean that you shouldn't get hot under the collar and lose your temper and all that kind of thing. But good arguments are good, aren't they? Let's call them *reasoning* then, if you don't like the word 'argue'. I do hope you will let the Holy Spirit *reason* with you, for warm as the love of God is, it is also absolutely logical and consistent!

So the Holy Spirit argues like this. He says, 'Look, please will you tell me. What would you think is the biggest thing that God will ever do for you?'

Be careful how you answer that one.

'Oh,' you say, 'the biggest thing God will ever do for me is to give me a house with four bedrooms in it!'

'Oh, no,' you say, 'no, I didn't mean that. The biggest thing God will do for me is to take me home to heaven and give me a mansion in the skies!'

No, that isn't the biggest thing God will ever do for you. He will give you 'a mansion in the sky'; he'll even give you a galaxy or two if you're not careful! If you work too hard for him here, you might find yourself landed with a galaxy or two up there, to look after for all eternity. That'll be quite a job! Doubtless there are more diamonds in any one star in a galaxy than we've ever seen with our eyes. Diamonds aren't much to God!

The biggest thing God will ever do for you? Let me tell you that God has already done it. Hasn't he? God has created who knows how many thousands of galaxies. With a word he spun them into being, and upholds them! But God had only one Son. Galaxies are things, but God's Son is a person. The biggest thing God will ever do for you, he has already done. He has given his Son to the death of a cross for you. After that, anything else is quite small.

Isn't it so? Could you imagine anything bigger than that gift? Go on. I'm not asking for polite compliments; I'm asking you to be a realist. Imagine one of these days you'll get home to heaven and see your mansion in the sky, and say, 'Now, God, we're beginning to talk. I never did think much of that story of the cross and of your gift of Christ, but now you've given me a mansion, now this is it!'

Is that how you'll feel, do you think? No, indeed not. A moment's sober thought is enough to show us that the biggest thing God will ever do, he has already done. He has given his Son for us. He has died for us!

The first part of the Holy Spirit's argument (vv. 7–9)

Now, question number two. The Holy Spirit says, 'Would you please consider: when did God give his Son for you? And what will you lack when God gave his Son for you?'

Surely if God were going to give his Son to die for you, he surely would have waited until you'd improved a bit, wouldn't he? Wouldn't he have waited until you had made strides towards heaven before he'd give you a gift as big as that?

That isn't God's love. This is the love of God: 'while we were still enemies, while we still were sinners, Christ died for us' (v. 8). Have you got that? I'm afraid this is not a matter of feeling; it is a matter of fact. While I was yet a sinner and an enemy, God gave Christ to die for me. That is a fact.

Certain things follow. You are not sinners now, are you? Not in that vulgar sense? You are not enemies now. You have repented! You have trusted Christ! Oh yes, in many things you still fail and fall, but instead of trying to maintain that hard old front and say it doesn't matter, you confess your sin; you acknowledge your unworthiness. You have come to Christ and God has received you. You have been justified, yes? You have been reconciled! You are no longer that guilty sinner. You are no longer that open enemy. You have been reconciled with God: justified, accepted!

Now, come and consider. If Christ died for you when you were still a sinner, when you were still an enemy, do you think that now that you have become a child of God, a friend of God, he would one day cease to love you and throw you out? Would that make sense that God would love me when I was a sinner, to the extent of giving Christ for me, and now that I've become a child of his, he will cease to love me for some reason and throw me out? That would be an absolute logical nonsense. If God would behave like that, then God would be convicted himself of being inconsistent in his love. His love would be proved to be an inconstant thing, an arbitrary thing, a thing you could not rely on, a thing that made no logical sense! And God is not like that.

God's love is no will-o'-the-wisp of emotion. Some folks are like that, aren't they? You go to see them one day and they'd give you anything. They'd give you a rose out of the garden, and an ornament off the mantelpiece. You can't look at a book in their library before they'll give you the whole lot! You'd get embarrassed by the things they'd give you. You go the next day? They shut the door in your face! You say, 'What temperamental folks they are.' Not God.

So then the Holy Spirit argues: 'if when you were enemies you were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that you are reconciled, shall you be saved by his life' (v. 10). Oh, God help us to take it in! God help us to give him the quiet necessary that those lovely floods of the love of God may begin to trickle ever deeper into our personalities until they have produced there that firmness, that security in our hearts, knowing that at last, by God's grace and love, we whom he has justified shall be glorified and conformed to the image of his Son.

The Wreckage Caused by Sin

Romans 5:12–6:4

We begin by reading in the Epistle to the Romans chapter 5, beginning at verse 12.

Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned: for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come. But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many. And not as through one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment came of one unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification. For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through one, even Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall many be made righteous. And the law came in beside, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly: in order that, as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, in order that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or are you ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. (5:12–6:4)

The Lord lead us into the secrets of his blessing as we think about his word this evening.

Our security in Christ

Tonight we must attempt to move on and perhaps a little bit more quickly than we have until now. We were thinking last week that God's salvation does two major things for us. In the first place, it releases us from the guilt of our sins, saves us from being exposed to the wrath of God and puts us in the clear with God. It makes us right with God. It declares us just before

God. But we found it does not only release us from the wrath of God, it then proceeds to make us like God—to make us holy—to sanctify us and not merely justify us.

So we began to think about that second operation of God upon our souls, that lovely task that he has put in hand to make us holy like himself. We didn't get very far with our thinking because as we studied the text of the New Testament we found that before God proceeds to tell us how he proposes to make us holy, and what practical steps he intends to take to make us like himself, God delays a moment to assure our hearts of one fundamental thing. He delays to assure us that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is utterly secure in the love of God and that his security does not depend on his spiritual progress, but that God has, for Christ's sake, received him and will never cast him out and never abandon him. We spent the whole of last week, in fact, thinking about this lovely argument that the Holy Spirit engages in with all who belong to Christ (5:1–11). He is pouring out God's love for them in their hearts and arguing that if God loved you while you were yet a sinner, so much that he gave his Son for you *while* you were yet a sinner, it is all the more certain that God will never abandon you now that you have become his child. And therefore we may confidently exult: we 'shall be saved from the wrath of God through him' (v. 9); we 'shall be saved by his life' (v. 10). What is even more glorious, we shall attain 'the glory of God' (v. 2).

Personally, I like that phrase: 'the glory of God'. God is talking here about what we shall be one day when he has made us perfectly holy. But sometimes we think of holiness as a kind of negative thing: not doing that and not doing the other and not going here or there. Holiness seems to us to be a kind of a refrigerator—a state next to death—in which there are so many things that we don't do that we scarce do anything at all. That is not the biblical idea of holiness! Here God describes perfect holiness as the very glory of God! It is all the wonder and beauty of his life—the majesty and glory of that positive pulsating eternal life of God! *That* is the state to which God is determined to bring us. Before we start the long and lengthy course in holiness in the school of Christ, God gives us courage to know we shall attain it one day. We shall attain the glory of God. And in the meantime we are to know that if we are truly Christ's, then our acceptance with God does not depend on our progress, even in holiness.

The assurance necessary for our progress

Now, of course we enjoyed it last week as we let God's Holy Spirit thus argue our security in Christ. Whether we realized it or not, God was doing it very deliberately, for he not only wants to make us feel comfortable and secure; he really wants to begin this practical job of making us holy. And that can at times be decidedly uncomfortable. You see, if we are ever going to be holy we shall have to be released from, delivered from, our wrong attitudes as well as our sinful dealings. It will mean that, from time to time, God's Holy Spirit will have to probe into our hearts, deep into our personalities, because we shall not find that we wake up one of these mornings and, hey presto, we've become holy!

'Well, fancy that. I hadn't been thinking it much lately, but goodness me, what is this, Wednesday morning? And if I haven't woken up and now I'm completely holy! Well, what a miracle!'

No, it doesn't happen that way. It doesn't even happen with us as it does with motor cars. Sometimes motor cars get afflicted with sundry ills. Who doesn't know it? You know that place where the pistons go up and down (cylinders, I think they're called), they get all choked up. Instead of pulling strongly the engine puffs and groans and wheezes and bangs. So if your car does that you take it along to the garage, and the man undoes a few bolts and bars here and nuts and whatnots. And he gets a thing and screws around in it, well, more or less like that, and hey presto! Before the car knows what's happened (without its consent of course) the thing is done.

Well, that's all right for cars, but that won't do for human personalities, will it? If you're going to make a human being holy, you will find you are in for a very, very delicate task. God could of course, if he chose, come in like a tank and override our free will, override our choice and our consent, and stop us sinning. But what good would that be? He might get a something that didn't sin, but it wouldn't be a human being, would it? God would have reduced us to machines, and God will never do that.

It is a solemn though majestic thing that God, having given us a free will, a human personality, will never destroy that free will or personality. So much so that if we choose to say, 'No' to God and continue in saying, 'No' and go out into eternity saying 'No', even then God will not destroy our free will in order to save us. God respects human personalities so much that if we take our human personality and free will and say, 'No' to God, in the end God will put up with that eternally. Not even to save us would he destroy our free will.

That means that though God proceeds to make us holy, he has got to carry us with him all the time, hasn't he? You'll never become holy automatically. I shall become holy as I am made to face my sins, my wrong attitudes, and recognize and confess them, saying, 'Yes, I have been wrong; these things are wrong', and repent of them. Let us get that settled from the start. Sometimes we think that repenting is a thing that the unconverted have to do before they get saved, and that is very true, but it is something that the child of God has to do every day of the week almost, and all the way home to glory. We are to allow God's Holy Spirit to point out what is wrong and then to agree with God it is wrong, and to seek God's grace that it be put away and overcome.

God's criticism is not meant to crush us

That process can at times be painful; let's not deceive ourselves. When it's over, then we shall find how pleasant it is—after the chastening is over, after the bitter lessons are learned: 'it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness' (Heb 12:11).

But we're like a lot of kids, aren't we? Here's Tommy. He's having such a lovely time scribbling on the wallpaper. Why does mother say it can't be done? He's scribbled and scribbled and scribbled and scribbled, and it's marvellous! And he doesn't at all enjoy the process when it is pointed out to him that people shouldn't scribble on the wallpaper. Of course one day he'll grow up and say how stupid it was anyway. But for the moment, Tommy is kicking wildly at being restrained and being told it's wrong.

Alas, we are often like that aren't we? God's Holy Spirit begins, by this means or the other, to point out to us that we are wrong. Then, instead of welcoming it, out go the old defences with every reason under the sun why people want to criticize us like this, or why we should

do it, and thus, and thus! (You know the old story.) Then God insists, and we begin to feel sore. It is for this very reason that, before we start, God assures us of our eternal security in the love of God. He loves us. He loved us while we were yet sinners. Oh remember it, my brother! You know, God will never be disappointed in you. You know that, don't you? God will never be disappointed in you, for he always did know everything about you. He may oftentimes be sorrowful about you, as he is about me, but he will never be disappointed. He is under no illusions. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows us through and through. He knows how deceitful our hearts are, and how desperately wicked. The amazing thing is that he loved us while we were yet sinners! Being under no illusions, knowing the worst about us, he loves us just the same.

Therefore he wants us to know we are secure, so that when his Spirit begins exposing us to ourselves, and we find out that we're not necessarily the charming people that we thought we were, and we discover that we are not the important people that we thought we were, and we discover that God has no intention of letting us remain spoilt boys and girls. In those moments we may realize that God isn't rejecting us; he loves us still.

I don't know about you, but I find criticism hard to take. When anybody starts criticizing me, I, sort of instinctively (and stupidly enough), feel they are rejecting me. It is hard to take criticism, isn't it? We shall have to learn it, for God is going to do a lot of it. He wants us to know that he doesn't reject us when he criticizes. It is his love that makes it impossible for him to allow us to go on unchecked and uncriticized.

Here is mother, and her Tommy has gone out into the street. He has forgotten to blow his nose this last quarter of an hour. Well, yes maybe the other woman's son—Jonny—yes, he's likely to do that, but her Tommy isn't going to be like that! What is she getting all upset for? Well, it's because that's her Tommy! Yes, because she really loves him. And because God loves us, he is not going to let us go on in our foolish and sinful ways, creating trouble for ourselves and other folks and displeasing him. Out of his love to us he is going to teach us better than that.

Therefore I say, and let me repeat it, for God wants us to get hold of this: we are secure in his love. He loved us while we were yet sinners. And I will tell you something else: even when we discover this or that about ourselves that is wrong and sinful, and we realize we've got to face it and put it right, it doesn't always happen that it goes right the very next day or that we get the victory the very next hour. There will come times in our battle against sin that we feel we're making so very little progress, and we come to lament with Paul: 'O wretched man that I am! The very thing I want to do, I don't do, and the thing I don't want to do, I do' (see 7:14–24). And in those moments, my dear friend, if you thought your acceptance with God depended on your spiritual progress then you would be distraught indeed, wouldn't you? And it does happen that folks fall into that. Sometimes they are under the impression that if they trust Christ tonight, thereafter life is going to be all marvellous unbroken sunshine! All goes well until they find that life with Christ isn't all marvellous unbroken sunshine, and that life with Christ can be quite tough. Then, because they find themselves saddened and perplexed by the naughtiness of their own hearts and its wickedness, they begin to doubt their salvation.

So, shall we get it straight? God says, ‘I want you to be absolutely sure. Please allow my Spirit to pour out my love in your hearts. I want you to know that I loved you, not after you began to be holy, but while you were yet sinners! And I gave Christ for you while you were at your very worst. And, having loved you like that, now that you’ve trusted my Son I shall not abandon you ever, until I have made you completely like him.’

All right, well if that’s how God loves us we may turn and face ourselves—shakily perhaps, but realistically, I hope, and ask the question: ‘Well then, what is all the fuss about? And what is wrong with me? Why am I not holy? And why do I find becoming holy so difficult? What is wrong?’

The truth about us is worse than we think

Well, now we’re in for a gloomy time if you must go and ask questions like that! Oh, wow you’re in for a gloomy time! You are ‘wronger’ than you think, if I might use such a word in English. Our trouble goes deeper than you may imagine! And if we mean business with God, we are now going to want to say to God, ‘All right God, yes we’re in for it—one hundred percent. Thank you for forgiveness, but we’re not content with just forgiveness, we want to be holy, God. Now we’re in for it! Tell us what is wrong!’

Well, you must be prepared to find out, and this is no little thing. We are very wrong, very bad and worse than we think. I do ask you then to notice these verses that follow. I am not encouraging you to think that sin doesn’t matter, and you oughtn’t to be upset when you sin. Of course we all ought to be upset when we sin. But I want you to get hold of it: that your heart is more wicked than you think it is.

Sometimes you will find believers who have fallen into some sin, and they can scarce believe it. They say, ‘You know, but I wasn’t that kind of a fellow!’ But of course they were. How did they get it into their heads they weren’t? It is indeed part of our defence to know how bad we are, to be brought to face the terrible potential of our own deceitful hearts. And so we can listen to Jeremiah and be content that Jeremiah is not exaggerating when he said, ‘the heart is deceitful’ (17:9). The modern psychologists have told a bit of what that means, haven’t they? ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.’ Oh how impure many of my motives are, even in my holiest moments, because my subconscious is very deceitful.

Let’s be realists and face the trouble.

What is wrong with us?

We found in chapters 1, 2 and 3 of this letter that we were guilty sinners. But now we are going a stage deeper; we are going to ask ourselves: ‘Why do we sin? And why does everybody sin? What is wrong with us?’

You see, if we don’t get hold of this, perhaps you’ll be coming along to me one of these days to tell me, ‘Look here old boy, pull your spiritual socks up and behave a bit better!’

All right, yes, my spiritual socks go down, and I ought to pull them up. But that’s pretty shallow advice, isn’t it?

‘Try a bit harder,’ you say.

Oh, did you suppose I lapsed into sin because I wasn't trying then, or something? Is it your notion that if I try a bit harder, that will do?

Alas that's how the world talks, doesn't it? That's how religion talks: 'Try a bit harder, and you'll be all right, old chap!' Oh but how pathetically unrealistic it is. It wasn't for lack of trying that we became sinners.

What we've received from our parents

What is wrong with me? Well, yes, I have done, and alas I do, wrong things. And many of them are my fault; I know they are wrong. But that is only part of the story. The other part is this: I was born of parents that were sinful. God bless them. They're in glory now. They did their best. But for all that, they were sinful. That meant that they didn't always handle me as a baby as they ought to have done. They got impatient with me when I yelled and shouted, you know, as babies have a way of doing. Perhaps they neglected me when I was tired. They did their best, but they weren't perfect. And my little infant brain, when it was laying down its psychological patterns, reacted stupidly, though I didn't know I was doing it! It reacted stupidly and built in a lot of silly old complexes that chase me and haunt me to this present. Whose fault was that? Do be aware of it, won't you, when you're laying out your programme of spiritual advance for me? Do be aware of what a complicated past I've had.

And then it wasn't only my parents. (I'm not making excuses; I'm just telling you the facts.) There were all the other folks in the town where I was born. You see, I come from a town where everybody, every single person I ever met in all that town—in school, in shops, in home—every single person without exception, was a sinner! Oh what chance had I got growing up in a world like that? Why, you only got to the infant school five minutes and somebody swiped your blackboard duster!

It wasn't all my fault, was it?

Why is it that everybody, here in Belfast too, without exception, is a sinner? Because the whole lot of us descend from a race ruined at its source. We were born sinners in fact. You will be chasing the moon in your attempts at holiness if you don't face this. For to make the likes of us holy, with all the complications of thousands of generations of sinners behind us and all the complicated heredity we have received and built into ourselves to cope with it, there will have to be a system of salvation that is as basic and thorough going as the fault was.

Understanding Romans 5:12

Let's hear it stated in more formal terms, shall we? The second paragraph of Romans 5 is a very difficult paragraph. If I don't get it all right to your satisfaction then please have mercy on me.

Why does everyone die?

It is a difficult paragraph that talks about profound matters, but it is observing this in verse 12: 'that through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin'. Mark the phrase. The inspired apostle is talking very circumspectly: 'through one man, sin entered into the world.'

It was like one of those big dykes in Holland that the Dutch engineers have built to make their land safe against the great sea that rolls outside. The dyke stands there defying all the elements and keeping the land safe, until at one little place the water saps its strength. Then presently a hole is opened, no bigger than a fist, but in through that hole comes the very rushing tide of the North Sea, and before you know where you are the tide has entered Holland and acres are devastated! So Adam stood on this little planet, guarding it, because he had within him the seeds of the whole human race. And through one man's sin, through one man, sin entered—like a vast flood, a miasm, a poison, like some gigantic virus. Through one man sin entered like a vast blight with its inevitable consequence and through sin, death. Having entered into one man, watch it extend: 'so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned'.

You say, 'What does that mean?'

Well, it means the same as it means in chapter 3, verse 23 where the same word is used and the very same tense is used: 'all sinned'—'All have sinned,' says Romans 3:23.

What do you take that to mean in that verse?

'Well,' you say, 'it's simple enough: all have sinned.'

Oh, jolly good, well this means the same then! So, 'death passed to all men for that all have sinned'.

But you'll say, 'Now, that's curious because, you know, Adam sinned by breaking a commandment that he had. God had said to Adam, "You shall not eat of that tree" (see Gen 2:16–17). So he had a positive, explicit commandment, and he sinned by deliberately transgressing an explicit commandment. The men that lived after Adam didn't have any commandments like that.'

And you're perfectly right. Search your Bible; you won't find any such commandments!

And you say, 'And yet they died!'

Yes, they died even though they had not sinned 'after the similitude of Adam's transgression' (5:14). They died, even though they had broken no explicit, positive commandment. It is chapter 5 that recalls it in the book of Genesis. Just let me read you bits and pieces from it: '. . . Seth . . . he died. . . Enosh . . . he died. . . Kenan . . . he died' (vv. 6–14). Well here comes Mahalalel, perhaps we should do better with him.

No, '. . . and he died', as well (v. 17).

What about Jared?

No, 'he died' (v. 20).

Oh. And Methuselah?

'He died' (v. 27).

Noah?

'He died' (9:29).

What a long story it was, and even though they had no particular commandment that they broke, yet they still died. What does that show? It shows that they were sinners, that they had sinned even though you can't point to any particular transgression.

Let me illustrate it to you. You have been motoring from Enniskillen, coming down one of those great motorways doing, you know, 80, 85, occasionally 90mph, and you come to Augher or Clogher or Five Mile Town, or some other such establishment. And you've got so

used to doing 85mph that Five Mile Town scarcely sees you! You're blasting through Five Mile Town like a shot, in spite of the fact there's a notice up to the effect that: 'Thou shalt not do more than 30'!

Do you know, I can remember the days when there weren't any 30 signs. What a paradise it was! There weren't any 30 signs anywhere. Life was free! Yes, you could come through Five Mile Town at 90 if you liked, and nobody could have accused you in those days of transgressing any law, for there wasn't any law that said, 'Thou shalt not do more than 30.' So they couldn't have you up in court for breaking the speed limit in those days. But do you know, even in 1926 if you'd have come with your Austin 7 at 90mph (supposing it were possible) through Five Mile Town, you would have been sinning, wouldn't you? What a stupid thing to do to come through Five Mile Town at 90mph when the grocer, without looking, could step out of his shop and you'd knock him into eternity! Or a little child could be knocked down in the street. That would have been an inconsiderate, selfish, irresponsible thing to do in itself, even though there was no law that said, 'Thou shalt not do more than 30.'

Paul is observing here, that for many years in this earth, God laid down no specific prohibition, and therefore nobody could have been charged with having broken those commandments. And yet they died! Although they hadn't *transgressed*, yet they *sinned*.

Why does everyone sin?

So now we are faced with another problem. Why does everybody sin? Why aren't there occasional exceptions now and again? You'd better ask the evolutionist I think (though he doesn't know). If everything is by chance, goodness me, why doesn't that old belle Dame Chance throw up a perfect human being one of these days? She has had long enough to do it, hasn't she?

Why does everybody sin? Everybody has sinned except for one—that great notable exception. How many more came from the first sin? God's answer is this, 'and by one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners' (v. 19 own trans.). He makes it clear, through Paul, that every person is a sinner, and he makes that clear first so that he can then go on and tell you how you can be saved. To put it in a nutshell it is as verse 19 tells us, that you were made a sinner, constituted a sinner, by Adam's one disobedience. You were constituted a sinner by what somebody else did. In that very same way you can be constituted righteous by what somebody else did.

Is that fair? Oh I know that you had no choice in the matter of being born human. You had no choice of being a member of the human race. On the other side, you do have a choice as to whether you choose, or do not choose, to receive Christ and become a member of his race. Yes, you have a choice.

And you say, 'Well, that isn't fair then because I was automatically born a sinner without doing anything about it. I was born a sinner automatically! Why can't I become a saint automatically?'

Oh well, you know, that sounds logical, doesn't it? But it isn't so logical as it sounds. That's like getting a turnip in a field and saying, 'Turnip, I see you're not very high in this world.'

And the turnip says, 'You know, I was automatically born a turnip. I don't see why I shouldn't automatically grow into a pussy cat!'

Well, how would it? Of course it's not going to happen. We were born into this world automatically, without our consent, as human beings. Why aren't we automatically saved? Well, have you any idea what being saved is? It is not to be some kind of glorified computer, with God pushing the buttons here and there, and making us do as he has programmed and designed we shall do. Being saved is to be made a *child* of God, to have the very life of God, to reign with a will that is free. It is not to be an angel but something far bigger and more significant than an angel! And you can't become such automatically. To do that you will have to take the freewill God has given you, and use it. For God is wanting and designing, not that you shall be a machine, but that you shall be a king; not that you should be a cog wheel in a computer but a free personality: a prince, a princess—to reign and command! You can't become that without your consent. That is why, on God's side, on salvation's side, it is not automatic. But though that isn't automatic, the advantage is all on God's side, on salvation's side. It is a glorious advantage! Adam sinned and the whole race was spoiled, ourselves included. But when we trust Christ we shall find, as the verse puts it, that his gift 'abounds' (v. 15)! The excess of benefit is all on the side of Christ. Listen to some of the excess:

Not as through one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgement came of one unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification. (v. 16)

Look at it this way. Adam only had to do one trespass. There was enough poison in that one trespass to poison the whole race. What about you? How many trespasses have you committed? We are not thinking now of the things you couldn't help. I'm thinking of the things you did deliberately, knowing they were wrong. How many of those have you done? One of them would have been enough to ruin the whole human race. How many have I done? Yet, though I stand in myself guilty of a thousand, thousand trespasses, God is prepared freely to give me pardon and salvation.

'Or think of it this way,' says Paul, 'through one man's trespass death reigned . . .' (see v. 17). What a word it is. Death *reigned*. Sometimes we imagine we're free, don't we? Oh dear. What slaves we are! Death reigned! He has been utterly irresistible, hitherto, hasn't he? Oh yes, our learned medics (thank God for the learned medics) by dint of hard research and wearisome thinking and endless expense have managed to push back the kingdom of death a few centimetres of time, sometimes and for some human beings. But after these multi-thousand years of human existence, it remains as true as ever it was: death reigns. You may put up your little hands and try and keep it off; death comes like some great juggernaut, slowly but irresistibly it comes. Death reigns, doesn't it?

Oh won't you let God tell you what a future he has for you if only you'd trust Christ? Think of that irresistible march of death, and then remember that God tells us that by the time he has finished with those who trust Christ, they shall 'much more reign in life' (see v. 17). Gone the frustrations! Gone those crippling inhibitions! Gone the enfeebled brain! Gone the old complexes! Gone the limitations! They shall 'reign in life through one man, Jesus Christ'. Oh what a day it will be!

And what about holiness? When God delivered Israel out of Egypt and began to talk about being holy; yes, he told Israel, 'Don't do this, and don't do that,' but he put it like this: 'I have

called you out of Egypt to make you go upright—no longer bondmen but free!’ (see Lev 26:13). God is going to have us reign in life through Jesus Christ.

Law is given to expose what is there inside of us

So, that is the problem. By one man’s disobedience we were constituted sinners. It is as basic as that. God’s answer is equally basic: through Christ’s obedience as the beginner of a new race, having met all that you shall ever meet, and having himself been utterly victorious, by his obedience he has become the head of a new race to all who trust him. What Adam did wrong, Christ has put right. Adam chose self; Christ voluntarily took his sinless self and, faced with that most hideous task of ‘being made sin for us’, he surrendered self and chose God’s will. The Bible tells us that that one act has a power that will infiltrate and one day transform all who are joined to Christ.

And to get it all in the clear (oh watch it please) see what he now tells us. God isn’t skidding over the trouble; he isn’t trying to brush it under the carpet. No, in order to make us aware of how deep our trouble is, God spent some centuries giving people the law.

‘What for?’ you say.

‘The law came in beside, that the trespass might be cut out.’ No, indeed not. The law came in beside, that the trespass might *abound*’ (v. 20)!

If I might recur to my illustration, that is not the reason why the Five Mile Town city fathers put up that 30mph sign at the entrance to their town. It was not so that the trespass might abound. No indeed not! They were putting it up to cut the trespass out. But, you know, it had an effect. You wouldn’t have thought Mr So-and-so was such a person, would you? No, all these days he’s been driving he’s been quite a decent chap. When you go and stick your 30mph sign up, you’ll find out something about Mr So-and-so, and that is that he doesn’t always regard the law.

You’ll say, ‘That’s a minor thing, you know. I think 30mph limits are stupid when the road is clear.’

Do you know, I have a funny feeling when I’m behind the wheel of a car, I feel just like you!’ But it is different with God’s holy law about moral things, isn’t it? God gave that law so that the trespass might abound—to bring it out into the open, to show us what *is* inside.

My good fellow Christian, do allow God to use his law on you, won’t you? There are some folks that think that Christians have nothing to do with the law. No wonder their spirituality is feeble. Oh get you to Moses and his law, if you can stand it! Get you alongside of Christ and his interpretation of that law in the Sermon on the Mount; it won’t make you feel comfortable. It won’t in itself save you. You will find that what it will do is to expose you to yourself! You will find transgressions within that you would never have thought were there. You will find pockets of resistance. You will find self-will. You will find self-centredness that perhaps you never realized was there. You will find that half of that self-pity you have is really pride and self-centredness. Law is given so that the trespass may *abound* and the trouble be brought out into the open, for this deliberate reason: that God is confident that however much the trespass abounds and be shown to be as bad as it is, he has grace enough to more than abound! God has the answer.

You say, ‘Well, we can continue sinning then.’

No, you've got it wrong there. For God's reason for bringing out the old disease and showing how full of transgression and self-will our heart is, is not to leave us there; it is to bring us to face the trouble and repent and then to realize that in ourselves we cannot cope, so that we then lay hold upon God's salvation.

A preview of Romans 6

We are going to spend our last five minutes just preparing our minds for next week's lesson. It has got some hard things in it, so let's just inoculate ourselves a little, shall we?

'Look,' says God, 'when I say that I've got grace enough to overcome all your transgression, that isn't giving you permission to transgress.'

Paul says, 'Continue in sin? How shall we? Don't you know that as many of us as were baptized, were baptized into Christ's death? We were buried with him' (see 6:1–4).

So now let's come back to what you did. Well, let's hope you did it. You were meant to when you trusted Christ. God commands all believers to be baptized, doesn't he? He doesn't leave it optional. Goodness me, wouldn't you be a proud woman if you had been led to Christ by Peter himself? But please remember, if you think like that, that if Peter had led you to Christ, he wouldn't have left baptism optional; he would have commanded you to be baptized. And you would have been a bold Christian to defy Peter himself, wouldn't you?

The Lord commands us to be baptized. What for? What is it anyway? Baptism is a burial, you know. It is not a washing, it is a burial. And that is important, for when I get baptized I am not saying: 'Look at me; what a marvellous boy I am! Don't you think I've progressed? What a paragon of virtue!'

What I'm saying when I get baptized is that at last I come to see myself as God sees me. I am so fallen, so guilty, that I deserve to be executed, dead and buried. Is that true of you? How bad are you? Do you think the diagnosis is too severe that, in and of yourself, you are so hopelessly bad that you deserve only to be executed and buried? You think you're not as bad as that?

I see. Well, tell me something. You tell me why Christ was called upon to die and be buried. It was all about sin, wasn't it? Whose sin? Is it your opinion that Christ was so bad that he deserved to die? Was it for his own sin he hung on that tree, died and was buried?

'Oh no, of course it wasn't!'

Well whose sin was it then? I must tell you whose it was, drastic as it may sound: it was my sin. Do you know when Christ, my Lord, hung upon that tree the world went by, and they said, 'Look at him. There you are; we all said it. Look what a sinner he has been. Now it's coming out! Now God has abandoned him. There you are. He trusted in God? No, now we know the truth about this Jesus, this carpenter from Nazareth! Now, at least we know the truth! Now he's on a cross. He trusted in God, but God doesn't want anything to do with him. God has abandoned him! Well, he admits it himself; listen. He's crying, "My God, why did you forsake me?"'

'There you are!' said the high priest; 'now you can see the truth about it. Jesus is dying because of Jesus' sins!'

Yes, but you know, when I heard that I had to do something about it. I had to come and tell the world: 'Half a minute now. That is not true. Dying he was and dying for sins, but not his own sins! It was David Gooding's sins that held him there. I want to show the world that. I want to put the record straight!'

'All right,' says God, 'Gooding, old boy, you can do it. You will now come and be buried in water, for a testimony to the world of what the facts are.'

Do I speak to a believer here, and you are not yet baptized? Oh come. Oh come. Would you allow Christ to die for your sins upon the cross, publicly, and not be prepared to do what God tells you to do, to come and identify yourself with Christ by being buried with him in baptism?

That is not the only thing that baptism will do; it does more things than that—happier things too! But we shall have to leave that for another occasion.

Four Things God Wants Every Believer to Know

Romans 6:1–7:6

We begin to read this evening in the Epistle to the Romans and chapter 6.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein? Or do you not know that all we who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also in his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that has died is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he lives, he lives unto God. Even so reckon you also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey the desires thereof: neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under law, but under grace.

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid. Know you not, that to whom you present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were servants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered; and being made free from sin, you became servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification. For when you were servants of sin, you were free in regard of righteousness. What fruit then had you at that time in the things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Or don't you know, brethren (for I speak to men that know the law), how that the law has dominion over a man for so long time as he lives? For the woman that has a husband is bound

by law to the husband while he lives; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband lives, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if the husband die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that you should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter. (6:1–7:6)

The Lord give us understanding of this difficult but important part of his holy word.

Our studies so far

When we broke off our study on the last occasion, we were thinking together on the topic of believer's baptism. This is how we came to be doing that. We had been reading in Romans 5 that God gave his law, not so much that people would keep it and earn their way to heaven; he gave his law in order that the transgression might abound. That chapter had told us that sin was already in the world, even at a stage when men had no positive commands to obey or prohibitions to observe. Sin was there, but unless men would be made conscious of their sin, and how bad that sin was, they would not perhaps be moved to come to God to be saved from sin. Just as it is possible for us to have a very serious disease in our internal organs and yet never go to a doctor because we have not realized that the thing is there. So God gave his law, that the sin which was inside should now be made apparent and apparent as the evil thing it is—as a positive transgression of God's holy law. He gave his law, then, that the transgression might abound. And he wasn't afraid to do it. He was aware that in his grace there was resource enough to meet whatever transgression came out and to save us, in the sense of forgiving us, yes, and more, in the sense of delivering us from those evil habits of ingrained sin. He gave his law then that the trespass, the transgression, 'might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (5:20 own trans.). God's grace is more than enough to cope with all our actual and potential sinfulness.

Then Paul comes round to imagining that somebody is saying, 'Oh, Paul, but if there's enough grace to cover all my sins, does that mean I should go on sinning, so that God's grace may abound? If God is good at forgiving, if he likes forgiving, if it honours his grace that he forgives my sins, however many they are, well why shouldn't I go on sinning then? God will get a bigger opportunity to show his grace!'

'God forbid,' says Paul. 'How shall we, who died to sin live any longer in it?' (6:2).

And of course, it brings from us the retort: 'But what do you mean that we died to sin, Paul? In whatever sense can it be true that we died to sin?'

So that is where we came in to talk about what Christian baptism means, and we were observing, along with Paul, that Christian baptism is first a burial and then a resurrection. The person goes down under the water: that is a burial, but comes up out of the water forthwith and immediately: that is a resurrection. Of course, God has designed it that way (let us be careful to notice) because baptism is meant to be a very vivid illustration. That is why we

should never change the form, should we? It is meant to be a very vivid illustration of the way God leads us into a holy life. So let's ponder it for a moment.

From death to life

'Baptism is, first of all, a burial,' says Paul, 'an indication that the person being baptized has died and is now being buried.'

You say, 'Has died? In what sense?'

'Well, in this sense,' Paul says. 'Don't you realize, don't you know, that as many of us as were baptized into Christ, were baptized into his death?'

Doesn't every believer believe that Christ died for our sins—that Christ died for me so that I could be forgiven? Well, but wait a moment. What does that mean? Is it that Christ did the dying so now I can go on living in sin? Oh indeed not. There is no such gospel.

Let me point out to you how it is that God can count Christ's death to our account.

Baptism is a burial

How can God's holy law accept the death of Christ instead of mine when I was the one who did the sinning? The answer to that is this. When I receive Christ, when I believe Christ, Christ and I *become one*, and therefore what happened to Christ can be counted as having happened to me, and to all who believe him.

Suppose there is a gentleman over here, and when he became twenty-one he inherited £100,000 from his great-grandfather. Good for him. Now it's his. It's nothing to do with the girl around the corner who lives at number 42 Aida Street; nothing to do with her whatsoever! She's nothing to do with him, and the £100,000 is his. When he inherited it, well, it meant nothing to her. Legally, it is nothing to do with her whatsoever.

Ah, but suppose this young gentleman is walking down Aida Street one day, and he catches sight of this good young lady and admires what he sees, and presently he proposes that tremendous question, and the two get married and become one. Well, now of course, the fact that he inherited £100,000 is very much to do with her!

And there was a time (mark it well) when the death of Christ had very little to do with us. The fact that Christ died on the cross doesn't mean we are automatically saved or automatically forgiven. It is possible that Christ died on that cross and men and women perish. When does that death become valid for me? It is when I trust him; when he and I become one and forever and forever in the sight of God's holy law remain one! There is no prospect ever of divorce, but I am one forever with Christ, because I've become one with him, and God regards, legally, that what has happened to him at Calvary, happened to me. He died for my sin. That means then, I died too. And when a believer is baptized, he is now saying, 'Yes, that's right. Christ died, but not for his own sins; he died for me. My sin was such an evil and bad thing that it brought Christ to death and the grave. And I take my place with him. I own the justice of God's sentence. I deserve to die and be buried.'

There can be no thought, can there, of a true believer saying, 'Since Christ died and took the penalty for my sin, I can go on living in sin, and he can go on taking the penalty'? That is impossible. A man that talks like that is just not a believer.

But then at the same time we notice that baptism is not only a burial; it is a resurrection.

Baptism is a resurrection

This too is meant to be a very vivid illustration. It would be a sombre thing, wouldn't it, if when people were baptized they were put down under the water and left there? That would be a solemn thing. Only that's not how it happens! Baptisms are the happiest funerals you could ever attend, because they are followed immediately by a resurrection! The person comes out of the water, and that too is a part of the symbol, part of the meaning. It is, so to speak, enacting a resurrection. What for? It is to put across the second half of the gospel. Christ died for our sins, and we who trust him are legally accounted as having died with him. But Christ rose again the third day, and we who have received him and are joined to him now possess a new life! 'For like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life' (v. 4).

I ask you to notice what that phrase: 'newness of life' means. It isn't just a pious wish that perhaps this new convert will now change a little bit. It is far more than that. It is saying that our mighty Saviour has risen from the dead! Oh that wonderful new life! Think of him for one moment: his body dead in that eastern sepulchre, bound hand and foot with the grave clothes. Stand and watch, in your imagination, that tremendous new surge—an incoming of life that brought that body out of the grave! Newness of life indeed! This verse is saying that that new life is available to all who have received the Saviour. It is not just talking about turning over some new leaf. It means what it says when it talks of a *newness* of life; it is a new source and kind of life.

This is what being saved is. It is coming into contact with, yes, and more than in contact with, it is coming into *union* with the living Lord Jesus Christ. It is not merely believing a text of the Bible, though that is very important; it is receiving and being joined with a living person. That then is going to be the basic secret of a Christian's holy life, symbolized in our baptism. We are dead and buried because of our sin and under the judgment of God—rising again to live in the power of the life of Christ.

Now, if we are going to get used to doing this, what we shall need to do is to get four bits of *knowledge* into our heads. I know that's not perhaps as exciting as you hoped it was going to be. You hoped I was going to say that when you come to receive Christ you will have four beautiful experiences of lovely feelings inside you. Well that could be true, and could not. If we are going to walk in this newness of life as a constant habit, one of the secrets is getting a really clear hold in our heads of certain bits of knowledge.

Four things God wants every believer to know

Would you look at them please, and if you are one of those who marks your Bible, mark these bits. Verse 6: 'knowing this . . .' And verse 9: 'knowing that . . .'. And verse 16: 'Don't you know . . .?' And chapter 7:1, 'Or are you ignorant . . .' (or, 'don't you know . . .?').

Here are four things God wants every believer to *know*. May I say it again? The business of living a holy life is going to be, for many of us, a lifelong business of learning. We shan't be perfect overnight. Learning to lay hold of, and use, the power that is available to us is going

to be a long process. Some days we shall seem to do it well, and some days we shall do it not so well. And when we've thought that the last five years we've been progressing very well, we shall certainly strike a patch when things don't go quite so well. Yes, and let me tell you something, because my hair is now nearly as grey as that of some of my elders. Don't you imagine because you have overcome every sin up to date (if you have) that you have thereby overcome every sin there is. There are some sins in your life, some wrong attitudes, you may not even discover are there until you are forty-five. And believe me, if you dare, that there are some sins that old age is liable to that young folks would never think of. You haven't won all of your battles by the time you are twenty-five. You'll be fighting battles against sin until you're ninety-five and a half! There will always be the need to lay hold of the armoury and to know the facts, so that in the awful warfare, whatever the feelings are, we may have behind us, strengthening us in the fight, God's solid facts! 'Knowing this . . . knowing that . . . knowing the other . . . and knowing' the fourth thing.

The first thing we are to know: The old man was crucified with Christ (vv. 1–7)

The first thing we are to know is this:

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that has died is justified from sin. (6:6–7)

Some of you may have a different translation, so let me read that again so that we'll get clearly what it is saying:

knowing this, that our old man *was* crucified . . .

It is not 'is crucified every day of the week'. It should be 'was crucified'. 'Is crucified' is old English; it is a past tense. 'Was crucified', says the Greek.

was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be *annulled* . . .

That is, 'put out of action'.

for he that has died has been *justified* . . .

Notice the term:

. . . from sin.

'So,' you say, 'the first thing I have got to know is what has happened to this old man: "knowing that our old man was crucified"'. Please tell me, who is our old man?'

What is meant by 'the old man' or 'the old self'

A surprising variety of opinions exist about who our 'old man' is. We need to get it weighed up very carefully. The Bible is here telling us our old man 'was crucified'; not 'is to be crucified

every day of the week', but 'was crucified'. When was he crucified? When Christ was crucified. It was then. It is past.

Now, I say it kindly, there some folks who sometimes get into despair over these verses. They are taught that 'the old man' represents our bad, evil nature—that bit of us that wants to sin: wrong desires, wrong thoughts, evil temper, jealousy, envy, spite—all the nasty bits about us. The 'old man' in English, seems to them a very good term to put on that, and they readily think 'old man' means the nasty bits about us. Then they hear the Bible say that our old man was crucified. That sounds a bit odd to start with. And then they hear a preacher saying, 'Look here, the Bible says that your old man was crucified with Christ, therefore he's dead. And if you are dead, well you can't be alive, can you? I mean to say, a dead man's dead. If a dead man's lying in the gutter in the street, he can't feel anything; he can't hear anything; he can't see anything. And the Bible says' (so says the excitable preacher) 'that your old man is dead!'

The person in the pew says, 'Now, that's very funny, because mine isn't. My temper, envy and spite are very much alive!'

How are we going to understand it? It is no good cheating ourselves, is it? It is no good deceiving ourselves and pretending that the nasty bits about us are dead when, in fact, they are very much alive. So let's try again.

Who said 'the old man' is our temper or our envy or the nasty bits? The Bible says here that the old man was crucified. Tell me, when Christ was crucified on a cross, how much of him was crucified? It was the whole lot, wasn't it—the whole man? Tell me, you who were baptized, do you believe this? When you were baptized, if you can remember that day or night, or whenever it was, which part of you did they baptize—the nasty bits?

'No,' you say, 'no.'

They baptized the whole lot, didn't they?

'Yes, the whole lot—lock stock and barrel—the whole lot was baptized.'

Yes, of course. You see, it's a mistake to think about us like that, as the old man being the nasty bits, and if only we could get rid of the nasty bits, we should be left with some other man that was the nice bit. No, no. The old man is *me*, the whole lot of me, as I was without Christ. He was born: David Gooding—blue eyes, five feet nine inches tall, moderately handsome looking, but has a terrible bad temper and all sorts of ugly things about him, but on the other hand, quite a decent chap if he was in the right mood—the whole bang shoot of him!

When God's law caught up with him it didn't say: 'David Gooding, you know, on the whole, you're not a bad chap. There's just this little nasty bit about you here. Now just let me take out that nasty bit. Whoops—now it's out. Now you're fully decent.'

No, indeed, it didn't. It looked David Gooding straight in the face, and it was said: 'You know, this man Gooding, he's a sinner! And the penalty of sin is that the man who did it must die. The whole man, not just the nasty bits.'

Of course, the law of the country takes the same view too, doesn't it? Suppose one of these days, and God forbid it happening, but suppose one of these days you get into a fit of temper, and you knife somebody and kill him. And suppose by that stage they have reinstated capital punishment for murder, and you stand in the dock and you are found to be guilty of murder.

And the judge goes to pass the sentence on you, but you say, ‘Half a minute, your lordship. You know, I myself am a pretty decent chap. And really, it wasn’t me that did it; it was my bad temper, you see. I do have just that little fleck of a bad temper, and sometimes it blazes out, and I can’t control it, and that’s what happened this day. The man that I killed called me some horrible words, and I lost my temper and killed him! But it wasn’t me. On the whole I’m a pretty decent chap.’

‘What’s that got to do with it?’ says the judge. ‘Perhaps you are a pretty decent chap. You say it’s your temper made you kill him, but then I must tell you, you shouldn’t have let your temper make you kill. We shall not hang your temper; we shall hang you. And the prison officers won’t merely bury your temper; they’ll bury you!’

Our old man is not some nasty little bit inside us; and the rest is all nice. *The old man* is the complete man as he was born into this world, a fallen creature. It is the complete man, condemned by God’s holy law to die, be executed and buried and finished with.

‘Know it,’ says God, ‘that you, the old you, the whole of you and all your ugly deeds: past, present and future and the lot—you as a child of Adam—came under the sentence of God’s law; you agreed it was just. As far as God’s law is concerned, you were condemned, executed and buried.’

Justified from sin

Oh this is radical stuff, isn’t it? You will notice that at this stage we are still dealing with God’s holy law and our situation before that holy law. Our old man was crucified. You see, he that is dead has been ‘justified from sin’.

You say, ‘What does that mean?’

Well that means this. Suppose you have been charged with murder. You’ve been convicted, and the judge has sentenced you to death. They hang you, and they lay you out on the prison floor. Well, now you’re quit,⁶ aren’t you? What would be the good if one of the wardens came out suddenly, or one of the lawyers—be-wigged and be-gowned—and said, ‘Half a minute, don’t bury him yet. We’ve just found he not only murdered his grandmother, he murdered his mother-in-law as well.’

Well, so what? What will they do? Will they have to somehow haul him up and hang him again? Of course not. No, once a man’s dead, he is quit as far as the law of the land is concerned. And the wonderful thing is this. I wonder would you guess it, you who believe in Christ. Because you have received the Saviour, God’s law counts it that you, the old child of Adam, are finished with, done with, passed beyond God’s law forever. ‘He that has died has been justified from sin’ (6:7).

Oh I’m glad of that. There used to be a page in God’s ledger up in heaven with my name on it. It said, ‘Gooding: born . . . (I won’t tell you when, but it was a long time ago) and an entry under my name. And under the name were all the things that ‘old man Gooding’ did. If you had eyes to see that ledger tonight, do you know what you would see? It would be struck out in red and the words across it: ‘Account closed. Prisoner died.’

⁶ *Quit*, in the legal sense, means ‘free of’. So here and throughout the talk, the sense is to have been released from the penalty one was under.

You say, 'That's a funny thing, I saw him walking down the street this afternoon.' So you may have, but as far as God's law is concerned, the account has been closed. The prisoner has been executed; he is dead and buried. The law has no more to say to him.

You say, 'How can it be?'

Because I trusted Christ, my good friend, and God's law counts it, legally counts it, that what happened to Christ happened to me. Oh what a marvellous thing it is to know at the start of one's Christian career that you are in that sense free from the penalty of the law because the penalty has been paid!

You say, 'But what's that got to do with my leading a holy life?'

Well it's this, my good sir. You couldn't even start off to live a holy life unless you were quit, could you?'

Let me use an illustration. Here is a man, and he's gone into business. He's decided times are rough, so he's now opened a shop. For a while all goes well, and then something or other goes wrong, and the man can't pay his bills, and he is bankrupt. So he wakes up this Thursday morning and says, 'You know, I'm bankrupt; I can't pay. Oh, too bad. Well, I'll tell you what, I'll close up here, and I'll open up a different shop next door.'

The law will say, 'No you don't, old boy. You don't do it like that.'

That's no good at all. You can't just walk out and say, 'Well, I'm bankrupt, and I can't pay those debts so I'll forget about that. I'll start up again here and do my very best now to have a successful business.' That's useless. The law won't let you do that. Not until you have been discharged from that law can you even begin to set up again.

You want to live a holy life? Let me tell you, you will never do it. You haven't any legal right to begin until the question of your debt before God is settled and you get clearance in his court to begin again. This is the very basis of Christian holiness: all that I am in and of myself, as a child of Adam, I accept is an absolute right-off and bankrupt. In and of myself, I am not hoping that I shall at last improve so that God will accept me. I am saying, 'No, I was such a failure. David Gooding that used to be was such a failure that he had to be executed, dead and buried; that's him finished.'

And the law says, 'Yes, well I'm satisfied.' And I'm legally quit to begin again with a new life. That is this life of Christ that I'm talking about. Is it not so?

The second thing we are to know: Christ having died to sin once does not die anymore (vv. 8–11)

Now you say, 'There's another thing I want to learn. You see, I did certain sins and wrong things and failings before I became a Christian, and I can see that of course the penalty of those things was death. Whereas what worries me is this, that since I've become a Christian, I have done some other wrong things. And now and again I still do; I still fall and fail and sin. Now, what about those things?'

Now, that's a point.

You say, 'Do I have to die again, so to speak?'

Well, that's a very important point to know, isn't it? Because let me tell you, I'm not encouraging you to sin, but we must be realists. It is no good exaggerating and getting all sorts of unreal ideas in our heads. The most ardent believer that is keen to live for God and

live a holy life will from time to time fail. ‘In many things we all fail,’ says James (3:2). What happens when I fail? Does the law come down on me again? Has the penalty to be paid again? What is the position?

Well, this is fact number two that you ought to know. Not only are we to know that our old man was crucified, we are to know the second thing:

knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once . . .

Not twice, once—only once.

. . . but the life that he lives, he lives unto God. Even so [in that very same way] reckon you also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive to God . . . (see 6:9–11)

So we’ve got to know this. Christ paid the penalty. He died to sin, that is, he bore our sins in his body and paid the penalty. He died to sin once; he’s never going to die again. Now that he lives, he lives to God. Because you are linked with him, God wants you to get it and know it, please, and count yourself to be in the same position as having died once and being now alive to God. The penalty of the law is forever behind you. There is now no condemnation (8:1). You will never be asked to pay the penalty of sin any more than Christ will be asked to pay the penalty of sin. He did it once. He died once—never again. In that same way is the believer quit, free of the penalty, and alive to God.

‘No,’ you say, ‘I can’t quite see how this is going to lead me to a holy life. Of course, it gives me great security to know that there is no more penalty, but I thought, Mr Preacher, you were going to tell us the secret of living a practical holy life in day to day living.’

Ah, yes, but don’t be quite so impatient; we’ll come around to it yet. There is the fact that the reason why some folks don’t live a very happy Christian life, or a holy one for that matter, is because they haven’t got these legal things straight yet. And when, as a believer, they fail then they fall into the misery of the ‘Slough of Despond’ because they think, ‘Well, that’s spoiled everything. Now, I shall have to give up because I’ve gone and sinned again.’

And Satan will say, ‘Yes you have. Yes, you’re right. I mean for you to call yourself a Christian in the first place was rather absurd! And now, of course, you’re down and fallen, so, now you might as well give up!’

They get down in the mouth and are miserable and worried, and of course all their spiritual strength and joy in the Lord goes. And when we lose our joy in the Lord and our spiritual strength and confidence, of course we start sinning more than we had before.

So it will pay us to get these legal points straight. In fact we shall find, as the following verses put it, herein is our strength:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey the lust thereof: neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you . . . (vv. 12–14)

Why not?

‘Oh,’ you say, ‘because you’re full of the Holy Spirit.’

That’s not what it says here, is it? That is what we shall have to think about on another occasion, God willing, but what is said here is:

For sin shall not have dominion over you because you are not under law, but under grace. (v. 14)

You say then, ‘Please tell me what that means: “sin shall not have dominion over you because you are not under law, but under grace”.’

Well, let’s consider what we have to do as believers. We are like a lot of soldiers, aren’t we? And we’ve got a lot of weapons: five fingers on this hand, and five on that, and a tongue, and goodness knows what else. All of them are ‘members’—‘weapons’ that we have got to use. There is a question of whose side we are going to use them on. Are we going to present them to *sin*, to let sin rule them? Or are we going to take these weapons and present them to *God*, for God to use them? In the moment of temptation I am called upon (as every other moment of the day) when I have all sorts of urges to do this, or to say the other, that I know to be wrong, then what I’m exhorted to do is to take my members and present them to Christ and say, ‘Oh look, Christ, I shall be overcome if you don’t help me! You use them!’

Now, that is the theory, and believers do try to do it, don’t they? One of these days, I forget, and I yield my members to unrighteousness, to sin of some kind, and then what?

‘Oh,’ I say, ‘I’ve ruined it now, gone and done the old thing again. Now I have blotted my copybook. Well, now it’s no good. So I might as well go on doing the wrong thing. Might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, mightn’t you?’

And sin once more establishes its supremacy and reign over you because you think, ‘Well, it’s no good, I’ve gone and done it again, and well that’s useless.’

‘Don’t let it do that,’ says Paul. ‘Don’t let sin *reign* like that. You needn’t.’

Why not?

‘Because you are not under law.’

Please notice that. It doesn’t say, ‘not under *the* law’ but ‘under law’.

You say, ‘What on earth has that got to do with it?’

Well, this. Law, as a system, is a very serious thing, isn’t it? God’s law in the Old Testament doesn’t just say to us, ‘Now, I shouldn’t tell lies if I were you. You know, it isn’t really a nice thing to do.’

It says, ‘You shall not tell lies, and if you do the penalty is death.’

God’s holy law doesn’t just say, ‘Look, don’t steal because that isn’t a very nice thing to do.’ It says, ‘You shall not steal, and if you do the penalty is death.’

God’s law doesn’t merely say, ‘Now, try a bit harder today: love the Lord your God with all your soul, mind and strength. Go on, have a go, and try to do it a bit harder.’ It doesn’t say it like that, it says, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and mind, soul and strength, and if you don’t, God will curse you to your face.’

Well now, I am a believer, and I’m joined to Christ, and I wake up like I do some Thursday mornings—a bit bleary eyed. And the thought comes to me, ‘Well, now I’ve got to get up, and I’ve got to love the Lord my God today with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, and I’ve got to do everything perfectly. And if I don’t, God’s law will justly curse me.’

Do you know what I would do if I were under God's law? I would say, 'Oh well, I won't get up then.'

Well, yes you smile at that. You may be a ton better than I am or something near perfect, but the reality is, if I were under law I tell you straight, I wouldn't get up. I would say, 'What's the use? I won't last out the day; I won't last the morning. Me, do everything perfectly this Thursday morning? That's no good. My elders may, but not me, therefore I might as well stay in bed!'

Ah, but if I tried that ploy, the law would say, 'Gooding, if you don't get up I shall curse you for staying in bed.'

I haven't got any option whether I will serve God or I won't; God commands it. If I were trying to face my Christian life under law, well the first time I made a mistake I'd say, 'Well, that's finished then. I might as well dive in the river or something. I'm finished; I know the penalty of the law, and it's done!'

I should be forever defeated. And sin would reign, wouldn't it? You know there are many folks walking the streets of Belfast, who would like to be saved, only they say to themselves, 'Ah, well it's no good. I did make a profession once, but then I fell and, well, I've broken it all, and that's finished it.'

So, now what?

'Well,' they say, 'might as well be killed for sheep as a lamb, mightn't you? I mean, my resistance is no good. I don't try these days at all; I just go on sinning.'

Oh, if I speak to a believer here tonight who is thinking this way, won't you listen to God's word? Won't you learn his facts? Sin need not have dominion over you! It is possible for you to get up and start again as a believer. Why? Because the penalty of sin has been paid. I'm not telling you sin doesn't matter; sin matters a lot, and if we've got away from the Lord and gone into sin as Christians, there is no penalty, but coming back can be difficult, can't it? And the lessons we shall have to face can be bitter. But courage brother and sister, you can do it! And you are free to do it! You are not chained by the penalty of the law. You are free, thank God! Thank Christ's sacrifice! You are free to get up and begin again in the path of holiness, and in the school of Christ. Don't let sin have dominion! Don't let it keep you down, for it needn't. Poorly as you may have done, however full of mistakes your Christian life has been, at this very moment you can say, 'Sorry, Lord. Now I'm coming back. Now let me start again.' And you are free to get up.

Some of us, if we'd be honest, would admit we've had to do it one thousand and one times. We've had to start again. Poor old Abraham: he wandered at times, didn't he? He went off wandering around Egypt. What circles he did make. But mercifully we read he came back to where he started; he began again. All Christian life is the story of ten thousand and one times of beginning again. I don't know about you, but there are some days I have to start again, I don't know how many times, and I am free to do it because I am not under law.

The third thing we are to know: Yielding ourselves to obey will form a habit and make us slaves (vv. 12–14)

You say, ‘Well if we’re not under law, then we’re under grace, so of course it doesn’t matter if we sin, does it? You are saying, Mr Preacher, are you, that, “Oh well, it doesn’t really matter. All of you sin, and you just say ‘sorry’”?’

No, I am not saying that at all. You will get me wrong, and Paul wrong, if you think that. I am saying if you have sinned as a believer, you can confess it; and you are free to get up and go again, because you are not under law. But I am not saying that sin doesn’t matter, or it doesn’t matter if you go on sinning. Why not?

‘Well,’ says Paul, ‘let me use an illustration. It isn’t a perfect illustration, because I speak after the manner of men. It isn’t a perfect analogy, but it will do’ (see v. 19). Don’t you realize that to whomsoever you yield yourselves as servants to obey, his servants you are?’ (see v. 16).

That’s a very simple psychological point, isn’t it? But it is the fact. If you keep on obeying somebody you will become that somebody’s slave.

You know how it is, don’t you? At work, somebody comes along and says, ‘Do this.’

‘Oh,’ you say, but you do it.

Then the next day comes, and the person says, ‘Do this, and do that.’

‘Well, the cheek of the man telling me what to do; he’s not the foreman!’ But you do it. You will want to look out, because he’ll come the next day and the next day and the next day and the next day! And when you’ve done it three hundred and forty-four times, it is going to be very difficult to say ‘No’ come the three hundred and forty-fifth time.

There were some wise good Christian men when I was a child. Their object lessons were somewhat limited, but they used to try and illustrate it to us kids that sin — constant sinning — forms a habit that you can’t break. They would use the old well-worn illustration of putting a bit of thread around a chap’s arms. You know the one. He could break the first strand. And then they’d put two strands around, and he broke them. But when they tied it around a hundred times, even the tough kids couldn’t move them. ‘His slaves you become.’

Oh, my dear fellow believer, we are not under law, we are under grace. Do you want to be a slave because you’re under grace? Then go on sinning; go on yielding your members to sin. The very fact you repeatedly do it will turn you into a slave. Of course it matters. You want to be free? God wants you free. And if you will allow Paul just to carry on his analogy (it isn’t the very best that anyone thought of, but he himself says, ‘Oh, that will do. You know, I speak after the manner of men.’). The best thing to do is to make a habit of holiness, to make a habit of yielding to Christ, because you then become *his* slave (vv. 17–18).

They put me on a diet last year. They thought there was too much of me, and I had to be cut down. My friends warned me that it would be terrible sticking to this diet. It was in a way, but I found very soon it was more terrible trying to do the splits. If I kept by the rules, and said, ‘No,’ that was that. If I tried to indulge one day and be strict the next, I lost count of which day I was meant to be on, so I indulged all the days! ‘Your safest way,’ says Paul, ‘is to yield your members to Christ and become his slaves.’ And that means, in a practical sense, yielding yourself to Christ’s teaching.

I mustn't liken any of you to jelly; that's the last thing I would do. I wasn't meant to do this talk on cooking, but I also know one or two things about cooking, and about how to make jellies with knobs on them like jellies should have—those lovely looking things. And of course you don't have to *cut* the knobs out. If you thought that, you were mistaken. Of course you don't cut bits out of jellies to make all those beautiful knobs on the top. What you do is get a mould and you pour the stuff in into the mould and then put it in the fridge and it all goes hard, and when you take the jelly out, it has taken the shape of the mould. You really don't have to do any cutting whatsoever. It's easy this housework stuff! And the jelly didn't have any difficulty getting knobs. It got them by allowing itself to be poured into the mould!

Yes, I don't mean you are a jelly, but you know if you can trust Christ—can you trust Christ? Can you trust him that when he commands something, it's for your good? Or are you one of those people that when you meet a commandment you say, 'Ah, well, no I don't see the point of that! And why should I do it? I don't think that was for me,' and you start making all sorts of reasons why you shouldn't obey. What you are saying is that you don't really trust Christ. If only you could trust Christ as a believer when he said something, let yourself be 'jelly' to that extent. Let him pour you into the mould of his word, and that will begin to form your character. And if you keep on making a habit of it, you will become a veritable slave to Christ, and you will find it is the way to freedom.

The fourth thing we are to know: The law holds its grip until a person dies (vv. 15-23)

There is one other bit of knowledge that we ought to know. Once more we are back with the law. Paul now wants to come to tell us what is the very happy, most intimate secret of a holy life. He is talking particularly to people who were Jews who were once under the law of Moses. Their method of trying to live a holy life was to take that law as it stood on the page of Scripture, or on the tablets of stone, and just do their best to try and keep it. They failed of course. And some of them, when they failed, would have liked to have got a divorce, but God says, 'No, you don't.' You can't just walk away from God's holy law because you don't like it. Take one particular example—the law relating to marriage and divorce. In Judaism, you couldn't walk off just because you didn't like your husband. He might be a bit grumpy, as you've learned, and demanding, but you couldn't walk off. You were bound to your husband as long as he or you lived. Of course if the man died, well then you were free to marry somebody else that was far more pleasant! But as long as he lived, you were stuck with him. Of course if you died, well that was a merciful release too, wasn't it?

Other than death, you couldn't get out of it. And of course God's law was always like that. It's no good saying to God, 'God, I can't keep your law, therefore I don't intend to,' because God will hold you to it. The only way of getting quit of God's law is to suffer its penalty and die. The marvellous thing is that in the person of Christ, because we've been joined to Christ, then for us the penalty has been suffered, and we have died! What for? Not to go our own sweet way and say, 'I've got my freedom at last!' No, indeed not! It was so that, being free from the law in that sense, we should be married to another, even to Jesus Christ who rose from the dead, that we might thus bring forth fruit to God.

This evening we've been talking about hard legal things, but let us just pause a moment to begin to let this new principle sink in. We'll come back to it, God willing, on Saturday. Though there is a true legal basis for Christian holiness, the heart of the matter lies here. The secret of living a holy life is to let it be an affair of the heart. I mean that: an affair of the heart between you and the lover of your soul.

Have you ever come across a couple when they've just started courting, or are newlyweds? She's got his trousers pressed, and she's been studying what he likes for birthdays. He's been studying the particular flowers that she likes. He never would have done it before—he was a crusty old bachelor. But now, it's all this affair of the heart business, and he's wanting to please her, and she's wanting to please him. They'll do the crankiest things (well, I mustn't say that!), they'll do the *loveliest* things just to please one another!

Thus does God design a holy life to be, not my trying to keep some hard rule, but an affair of the heart between me and Christ. Oh, you can count it sentimental if you like. But it means saying, 'Christ, now is there something you'd like changed in me? And, overall that was pretty disgraceful today, wasn't it? I'm sorry about that. I can't change it myself. Would you, in your mighty arms, embrace me and put your life in me, that I might bring forth your fruit to God?'

There is a part of our personality that should never be ceded, not to anybody! For the human personality in its most intimate is a marvellous thing, and God gave it to you. Be yourself. Don't you let anybody ever trespass on that inner personality of yours! Save for one. Your blessed Lord and the lover of your soul invites you to let him penetrate that very shrine of your personality. So, as Paul puts it: 'It is I, yet it is no longer I; it is Christ in me. It is an affair of the heart by which I have become strong and full of his life, thus to bring forth fruit to God' (see Gal 2:20).

The Lord bless his word for his name's sake.

Failure and Victory in the Christian's Life

Romans 7:7–8:11

We will read now in the Epistle to the Romans and chapter 7, beginning at verse 7.

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, 'You shall not covet': but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin is dead. And I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death: for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me. So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good. Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good;—that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do. But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise. But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. (7:7–8:4)

May that same Spirit lead us into his holy secrets here this evening.

Our previous study: Four basic facts we are to know

On our last occasion we were taking a few elementary lessons in the school of holiness. Our task then was to lay hold of God's basic facts, and to make sure that we know them. Four basic facts that we are required to know, and if we know them, we shall find them to be four fundamental principles that will help us in our learning how to live a holy life.

We were asked *to know that our old man was crucified with Christ* (6:1–7). That is, those of us who trust Christ, who belong to the Saviour, are asked to know that our old man was crucified with Christ. It was not just a part of us, not the bad part of us, but the whole lot of us as children of Adam, condemned by God's law as guilty of death, were executed, dead and buried, along with Christ. And we are to know that because it is the first step in getting *quit*. If we would begin again and live a holy life, we must first be legally quit. We are therefore to know that in Christ we are *legally free* to start again. Though we are still compassed around with the deadweight of what we have been reading about this evening—sin in the flesh—however many times it leads us to fall, we come back to this basic fact: we are to know that we are legally free and quit, ready always to start again.

We are to know also, as a second basic fact, that *Christ having died to sin once does not die anymore* (vv. 8–11). The death he died, he died for sin once; the life he lives, he lives to God. He doesn't need to die again; his one death covered all the guilt of every sin, and the work of atoning for sin is past. Now he lives, and lives to share with us his risen life. Therefore we are to yield ourselves to him. Our members, our emotions, our bodies, our minds, our intellects and all we have are to be yielded to him.

That reminds us of the third basic fact that we are to get hold of: that *if we constantly yield ourselves to obey someone, it will form a habit, and we shall become slaves of that somebody* (vv. 12–14). If we constantly yield ourselves to sin, we shall become slaves to sin. That is true of the unconverted; it is true of the converted as well. If as believers, we abuse God's grace and constantly yield ourselves to sinning, we become slaves of sin. Why shouldn't I yield myself to sin? For this very reason: that we become slaves to the one we obey. To use a lowly metaphor, as Paul does, it is far better that we learn to yield our members to Christ and obey him. It will form a blessed habit; it will make us slaves of Christ, and being slaves of Christ is to be free.

The fourth basic fact we need to get hold of and be sure we know is *that the law holds its grip on everybody until the person under it dies* (vv. 15–23). 'A married woman', says Paul, 'is bound to her husband by the law'. Of course if her husband dies then she's quit of him, but until he dies, the law holds her to her husband. Of course if she dies, then she's quit of him (but they don't always want to do that). And we were held to the law of God. It is no use our saying, 'Well, what a bad mess I've made of things in the past. I know what! I'll turn over a new leaf!'

'Oh, but', says the law, 'just a moment. You don't turn over leaves like that. With all of those accounts not paid, you can't turn over a leaf just like that! What is more, suppose you do turn over a leaf, what do you propose to do today, now that the leaf is clean? You're still under my jurisdiction. If you sin today, I shall condemn you again today!'

You don't just walk out on the law like that. And if we were still thus held by the law, every day would see us condemned and sentenced to the penalty. Our situation would be

hopeless, however hard we tried, however spiritually minded we became, however much we wanted to live for God's glory! If we were thus under the law, every day would see us condemned and lost.

Oh what a wonderful fact it is! Get hold of it, and know it—that in Christ we have been set free from that kind of legal arrangement. The law hasn't died; the law is still very much alive; but when Christ died, we died. He bore his sentence and passed from underneath its jurisdiction, so that we are free—free to live life now on a different principle. Not with a law that says to me as I rise each day: 'Gooding, you shall behave one hundred percent perfectly today, and if you don't, I shall curse you to the penalty of death.' No, that principle would be useless. I am free to live life on a different principle. What is that? Well, not now a law with a penalty attached, but an affair of the heart with Christ—to be married to Christ so that I might yield myself to him, that he in me may bring forth fruit to God. So we might liken these two things to two husbands: the law as a husband and Christ as a husband. Everybody here is married to one or the other. The law: what a husband to be under! Forever lasting at your side: 'Don't do that, and don't do that, and don't do that. And do this, and don't do that. Now look what you've gone and done! Oh how stupid you are!'

But don't imagine that if you are married to Christ he is going to be less concerned. He is very critical too. What would you think of a husband that couldn't care what his wife looked like? And Christ is exceedingly interested in what we look like, and how we behave. And he will be constantly saying, 'No, not that. Oh please not that, my dear, that's not how you behave in the family of God. Oh wow! That was a clanger you dropped just then! You know, we don't behave like that in God's house.'

Oh yes, he'll constantly be at us. He's going to turn us and change us from being slaves of what we were into being veritable princesses. The process will sometimes be painful, and it shall not be done without much criticism and instruction. The difference with Christ is that he loves us already. He never will reject us and, what is more, he has the power to produce in us the very life that his heart is set on. More of that later on.

The good that I want to do

When the principles aren't enough

You will say to me, 'Look here, Mr Preacher, it's all right you standing there labouring those great basic facts that we are to know, but I know the facts! I've known them a long time. I know it all. But, Mr Preacher, those facts don't work. It's all right sitting in church and feeling very holy, and getting a grasp of the facts, but you get out into the hurly burly of life, in the factory with difficult workmates and elsewhere, and somehow the facts don't apply themselves. It all breaks down, and the good I would do, I don't do in spite of knowing the facts.'

Well, if that's how you find it, I nearly said you could take courage, for from reading God's holy word that is exactly what I would expect you to find! For did you notice that after that passage in chapter 6 and the beginning of 7, where Paul bids us get hold of these basic facts, he then confesses to us that, even though he knew the facts, there were days when he was

plunged in the most bitter of experiences, finding that the good he would do he didn't do, and the evil he wouldn't do, that he went and did? It happens so often and so much that he had to cry out: 'Oh wretched man that I am'. It's like being chained to a dead, decomposing corpse—the old, sinful self.

God's word is a wonderful thing. It's very much like a map, isn't it? Suppose you are going on a long journey to some wild country, and you've been motoring along the road and the road gives out and presently it becomes a dirt track and gets lost with the jungle. Presently you hear a lion and you see a buffalo, and you begin to get scared and say, 'I think, I got off the route.' Well then you sit in your car, don't you, and you wind the windows up in case the lions get in. Then you get out the map, and you say, 'Now, what does the map say?' And the map says, 'By this time, you ought to be on a rough road, and there'll be a lion or two there and a buffalo and a jungle.'

'Oh,' you say, 'well, that's not very pleasant, but this is what the map says should happen!'

Oh how merciful God is. We who are in the infant's class in the school of his holiness have before us a map written by one of the senior scholars who went this way. And he had the honesty to tell us that when he knew these four basic facts then, in spite of it, he found very often that somehow it didn't seem to work. Why not?

There are learned theologians who argue about the verses that we now come across in chapter 7, from verse 7 to the end, with this wretched experience that Paul describes, this constant struggle inside—wanting to do well and only succeeding in doing ill. They argue about this, and they say, 'Now, do you think this came after Paul's conversion or before Paul's conversion? And if it comes after, surely a believer shouldn't be living like this!'

Well, perhaps there are some believers who are not living like that. I know a good many who are, and very often I'm included. So although we shouldn't be, some of us do. But anyway, let's forget about those who argue over this because you will observe where this chapter 7 comes, won't you? It doesn't come at the beginning of the epistle where Paul is expounding human guilt and showing that everybody is guilty before God and needing a Saviour. It doesn't come in chapter 1, nor yet in chapter 2. It doesn't even come in chapter 5 where Paul is showing us that because of Adam's sin the whole race is ruined. It doesn't even come there. It comes in chapter 7. So we won't argue as to whether it is true of us before we get saved or after that: it is both. But we shall ask, 'Why does this lesson on sin come right here?'

Because that's what it is, isn't it? It is another profound diagnosis of sin. Why does it come here? Well, for this reason, that if you would live a holy life, then you will have to let God show you, at this level, the seriousness of the spiritual disease from which you suffer. This is the third level of the diagnosis.

Diagnosing sin at a deeper level

Permit me to use an illustration, though I have to be careful what I say in the presence of so many medics. But I can imagine somebody whose eyes were becoming a little bit dim. First, he thinks it's the glass in his glasses that's wearing thin through too much looking through it, and so he goes along to the optician. And the optician says, 'Oh, no, no, that isn't that the problem. You need stronger glasses; that's what you need—all curved and so on.'

‘Ah, so that’s it,’ says the man.

‘You see,’ the optician says, ‘when you get over fifty years old, the muscles of your eyes get a bit weak, and they don’t work as they should, so you will need stronger glasses.’

So he diagnoses the trouble as weakness of the muscles. Well, good stuff. Then he makes the glasses. And the man says, ‘Yes, it’s a decided improvement.’ And it lasts about a week, and he says, ‘Yes, well it has improved, but I still can’t read the tiny print.’

So presently he goes back to the optician, who has another look through to the back of his eyes, like the opticians do with their funny lights. (Whether they ever do see anything, I never did know.) And he says, ‘Ah, well you’ll have to go and see the specialist now. I think there is something wrong.’

And he goes to the specialist, and the specialist says, ‘Oh yes, what the optician said is perfectly true: your muscles are weak, but the reason why they’re weak is that there’s something wrong with your bloodstream.’

Oh. So the first diagnosis was true: the muscles are weak. But now there is a deeper diagnosis that it’s something to do with the bloodstream. So they send him to the chemist, and he has to buy a bottle of fearful tasting stuff and take it regularly every day to clear up the old bloodstream. And there’s a decided improvement, but it still isn’t one hundred percent right. So he goes back to the specialist who says, ‘Oh I don’t know, old chap, I’m worried about you. I’m going to send you to another chap, and he’ll saw through a bone or two and take some marrow out to have a look at it.’ And this other specialist looks very solemn, and he says, ‘Oh yes, no wonder your blood is wrong, there’s something wrong with your marrow.’ So now he has had three diagnoses, all at different levels, and this is now the most profound: he’s rotten in his very bones.

In this epistle we have three diagnoses of our spiritual trouble, and each one gets deeper. We’d be wise men and women to listen to God. Being holy isn’t just an afternoon tea party. You try and be holy! You’ve no permission not to be, but you try and be holy. You will find it is a far more difficult thing than you thought when you were unconverted, and that for two good reasons. As you get to know Christ, and you begin to live with him and in his company, you will become aware that various things are sin that you never knew were sin before.

It’s all right for me to sit in my kitchen eating my peas with my knife. If I go to Buckingham Palace with the Queen, somebody will gently tap my arm and say, ‘You know, old boy, we don’t eat our peas with our knife in this establishment.’

I didn’t know that till I got near the Queen, but still!

If you live near Christ, you’ll find a lot of things that you thought quite clever before, and quite all right, which he won’t approve of. You will become aware of sin at a much deeper level, and what you thought gross sins before, he still can’t bear, but things that you even prided yourself on hitherto, he counts most deadly sins: spiritual pride, boasting, bickering, backbiting, envy. And when in your sorrow and alarm you try to apply the rules and the four basic facts that you’ve learned, then you discover something else. You discover that the resistance is more deep-seated than you had guessed before.

That’s why the law was given to us. There’s nothing wrong with the law. Thank God we are no longer under its penalty, but we do well to listen to it, for the law was given to expose this thing from which we suffer. Is the law sin? No indeed not. The law is not sin. Let us not

speak in a manner dishonouring of God's holy law. We still need it, don't we? In my library I've got a book on medicine, I suspect you may have as well—*Home Doctor* or something like it. Well, you don't sit reading it every day, do you? That doesn't make you feel very cheerful. No, you go in for positive healthy living and exercise and eating. But such a book is useful for diagnosing ailments.

The law isn't sin, but it very often provokes it. 'You see,' says Paul, 'I was alive once without the law, in the sense that the law had never really honed in on me and got under my skin. And I was thinking I was a pretty decent chap, and then one day the law really spoke to my heart, and said, "Paul, you shall not covet" and I said, "I won't". Then I found that I was. So I said, "Don't be so stupid; stop it!" But I couldn't stop it. Then I said, "This is ridiculous. I mean, I agree with the law; it's right! But I still do wrong. In fact, I did it now more than I did before".'

I like the way he is so candid. He says, 'I found that sin was stronger than all my knowledge' (see vv. 7–12).

Did that which is good bring death?

'Oh,' says somebody, 'Paul, do you think God's law is, you know, well, that God was perhaps a little bit unwise in setting us a law like that? I mean, his standards are too high for us ordinary flesh and blood, aren't they? Do you think that that's the trouble, that the law was good (of course it was very good) but though it was good, it was made death to me because really, it was unsuited for the likes of me? Do you think God has been unreasonable?' (see v. 13).

You know how it is sometimes, don't you? Here is an eight-year-old, and he has learned a bit of music from the teacher, up to fourth division. He can play it pretty well: 'The Harmonious Blacksmith' or something. And mum was having a party tonight, so eight-year-old has been practising the whole of last week, and now he is to stay up for the party to play it to the guests after dinner! Then the guests are late, and dinner drags on (you know how guests can be), and it's now getting on a quarter to ten before eight-year-old has got a chance to begin. And eight-year-old at quarter to ten is beginning to behave like eight-year-olds are likely to at that hour. He's kicking the piano and everybody else's shins and making an awful noise, and all the rest. And mother says, 'Now, come on now, play!' And, no, he isn't going to, and he's putting his tears on, and oh dear me what a show! Of course you say, 'Bad boy, he oughtn't behave like that.' But then other folks are saying, 'Yes, but what a stupid mum to keep the boy up at that hour anyway to play the piano.'

Do you think God has been like that and has expected too much of us in his law? 'God forbid' says Paul. God forbid! It is no way to cure our disease to try and pull down God's standards. We are to be warned as believers, that though we are not under the penalty of the law, we are not supposed to tell ourselves that the law doesn't matter, and that we can fall short of it quite merrily, and we don't have to be so honest, and we don't have to be so just, and we don't have to be so pure, and we don't have to be so loving because we're not under law! That is to make our disease worse, isn't it? Yes, we are right to keep it, and we have no excuse for not keeping it. We shouldn't try to make ourselves feel good by telling ourselves that the law doesn't matter anymore. God has a right to demand the standards.

The mind, emotions and will all agree that the law is good

You say, 'I am a wretched man.'

You are indeed, for see how sin has ruined and conquered you. There are, so the psychologists tell us, three parts to human personality. There is our intellect: the logical part of our thinking. There are our emotions: our feelings. Then there's a thing that is meant to decide: our will. And Paul has the honesty to confess that as a believer in Christ who wanted to do God's will, he found that sin had so ruined him that it simply laughed at intellect and emotions and will.

Of his intellect he says, 'With my mind, with my intellect, I serve the law of God' (see vv. 21–23). Who wouldn't? In our quieter moments our intellect tells us that the law of God is right. Not to do it is insanity. Who can listen to our Lord telling us the Sermon on the Mount and not be utterly convinced: 'Yes, that is how I ought to live'? 'Indeed,' says Paul of the contemplation of it, 'I not only agree *intellectually* with God's law, but as I consider it intellectually, my very emotions are moved, and I *delight* in the law of God after the inward man' (v. 22). Have you never found it so? You read God's holy law; you read the epistles as to how we should behave as Christians, and you say, 'Yes, that's marvellous. Oh what a wonderful thing that I've been introduced into!' Yes, well, that's jolly good; our emotions are moved.

'Then,' says Paul, 'you know, I brought my *will* to bear. I took myself by the scruff of the neck, and I said, "Paul, now you agree with your mind the law is good, and with your emotions you enjoy it and delight in it. Now, old boy, you're jolly well going to do it!"' He says he has brought his will to bear: 'The will is present with me' (see v. 18).

'Intellect, emotion, will: I combined all three,' says Paul, 'in an effort to keep God's law, and, oh wretched man that I am, I found myself defeated. Sin just rose up and made a mockery of the lot.' You will have noticed a very interesting thing, won't you, as we've been listening to him? It shows he's saved actually, doesn't it? He is not excusing himself. Nor is he saying it doesn't matter; nor is he making excuses for sinning—he doesn't like it; he hates it; it's rotten. We begin to see in him the movings of God's Holy Spirit bringing Paul through this experience until he finds how deep-centred sin is in his makeup, and bringing Paul to hate it.

I fancy God does that with all of us sometimes, does he not? Has he done it with you? Oh, I would like to be holy overnight—one hundred percent holy. Who wouldn't? But God sometimes takes longer at it than we would like him to. God is going to make us eternally holy. How? He will make us holy by letting us discover how rotten sin is in ourselves, until we're fed up with it, hate it and abhor it! It is part of the way of becoming holy.

Do you know what? I've been stupid in many things. I have sometimes listened to testimonies of folks telling how they got saved and the kind of lives they lived before. And I got saved so young I found myself saying, 'Well, I didn't have the chance to do all those interesting things. Pity I got saved so early. I mean this chap seems to have got the best of both worlds; he had that world, and then he got saved, and now he's got Christ! Yes, well jolly good. It does sound interesting what he got up to.'

I'll tell you something. God isn't going to have anybody feeling like that in heaven. Just you imagine halfway through one of the choirs, if some of us said, 'Half a minute, Lord, I want

time off. There were certain sins we didn't get the time to do down on earth. We just want time off to do them, and then we'll get converted again.'

Of course not! Being holy means being utterly convinced that what God says is evil, is evil! And it means learning to hate it with all our being. But we shall discover that, in itself, merely knowing those great glorious facts that we have considered together won't bring us release and victory. What will?

The way to victory

As we know, chapter 8 is about to tell us the way of release. The way of victory is by God's gracious, powerful Holy Spirit who can come alongside and exert his unseen, silent but exceedingly real power on my weakness. It comes in the very moment where I should fall if left to myself. He may exert his holy power and infuse and invigorate me with the life of Christ himself and cause me to overcome. Oh yes, of course we know about the Holy Spirit. But if Paul's experience is true of us all, we shall learn to lay hold of the power of God's Spirit in proportion as we have discovered our own impossible weakness.

It very often happens that we get saved, and we know now we're forgiven and, yes, we have eternal life; and we're going home to heaven! And the Lord gives us this and that victory in our lives, and our lives are cleaned up a bit. Yes, with our lips we attribute it to the power of God, but presently, even without thinking about it, we are thinking, 'Yes, I am pretty decent now compared with what I used to be. Look at me. How well I am doing! What progress I'm making!' And if we go on thinking like that we are in for a very big shock, for the flesh in us is as bad as it ever was.

It's like the Canaanites and their stronghold in the promised land when the Israelites came in. Sometimes the Israelites came with their sharp swords, and in the power of the Lord won a victory over a number of Canaanites, and rest of the Canaanites ran away. And the Israelites said, 'Hurrah, hurrah, we've won now! We've got the victory!'

Well, so they had in a way, but all that had happened was the Canaanites had run around the corner and got in one of their strongholds and were looking out at the window and, you know, saying all sorts of things they shouldn't: 'Well, these Israelites, imagine them thinking they've got the victory, but we're still here!'

I have to find that what God says is true: that, even as a believer, 'in me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing' (see v. 18). My flesh is no better now than it was forty years ago when I first trusted Christ. It is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be of its own strength. It is as I begin to take God seriously and believe it because I have discovered it in experience that I shall turn to where alone my resource is, and learn to rely in actual practice on God's Holy Spirit each moment.

A believer's relationship with the Holy Spirit

We can at least pick out the major things from chapter 8. First of all, let us notice our relationship as believers with the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, who sets us free from the law of sin and death (see 8:2). What is our relationship with him? Look at 8:9; it

says this: 'But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so being that the Spirit of God dwells in you.'

You are in the Spirit if the Spirit is in you. Oh what a wonderful thing. It is not merely that he comes alongside to help me, though that is true. But this verse says: 'I am in him, and he is in me.'

What it means to be in the Spirit

What do you mean, 'I am *in* the Spirit; I am not *in* the flesh'?

One thing I'm sure of is that we should not underestimate what the verse is saying. There is a great mystery about human personality. Who am I? What am I? What is the 'I'. Is my foot me? Well, in a sense. If you stamp on my foot, I say, 'Hello, you're hurting *me!*' So, yes, in a sense my foot is me, isn't it? But then it is a part of my body. The real me is not even my brain, is it? I can look at myself. I expect you can too! You can look at yourself, can't you, and say, 'Oh my, I'm feeling angry now. I'd better get away from this chap here, or else I should give him a bit of my mind!' You can feel the old emotion coming up, can't you? And you make a distinction between that, and you. And we say, 'I am losing my temper'. Just like you say, 'I've lost my dog,' you say, 'I've lost my temper'. Yes, do you notice what you're saying? There's an 'I' there, isn't there? That profound, wonderful thing, that is the real you.

Listen, if you are not saved, that 'you' has its roots in the flesh—that fallen humanity with which you were born. It will be with you eternally if you go on like that and will advance to greater and greater corruption, until you pass from life into eternity there, as God has it, to *perish*. Oh, it is a terrible word: to be a something that once was human, now ruined because of the fall. It is a bit of humanity. It was once a man, a woman. But would you call it a man or a woman now? It has perished. It exists, yes, but perished, perverted, lost.

Do you know what happened when you first trusted Christ and agreed with God to be united with Christ, and agreed with God that you should, so to speak, share the very death of Christ and be buried with him? The roots that bound you to that flesh were cut, and you are not now 'in the flesh'. The real you is rooted in God's Holy Spirit. How marvellous: a new ground of being—rooted *in* the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit himself is surging through you. You in him, he in you: both at one and the same time. There are some dear folks who think it's possible for a Christian to be in the Spirit and yet not to have the Holy Spirit in them, and so they seek to get baptized in the Holy Spirit. But this verse tells us that if you are in the Spirit, the Spirit is in you (8:9). You can't have one without the other.

That means that you are not any longer in the flesh, that the 'you' is no longer rooted in that old fallen nature. You are in the Spirit. That old fallen flesh is still there though, and we shall see in a moment what we have got to do about it. But that is our relation with God's Spirit: we are *in* him, and he *in* us. This is the source of the guarantee, not only of our eternal security but of our triumph in holiness.

The implications for the body

You say, 'Well, what will the implications of that be for my body, you know, my physical body: ten toes, two legs, two eyes and ears, and all that kind of thing? What is the implication for my body if I am now a believer and the real 'I' is in the Spirit? Does that mean that my

body is going to be cured of all its illnesses: rheumatisms, gout and everything else, and I can claim healing whenever I get ill?’

No it doesn’t. And I tell you quite straightly and frankly, it does not mean that. You will save yourself a lot of heartache if you decide to believe God and not buoy yourself up with hopes that God does not give. If the Spirit is in you, the body (your physical body) ‘is dead because of sin’ (see v. 10). It is not one hundred percent dead yet, but it is on the way to becoming that, isn’t it?

I’m not frightening you, but it is the fact; you might as well face it, my dear brother, my dear sister. You needn’t be afraid of it. You are in God’s Spirit; you shall live eternally. Your body is dead, on the way actually to die, isn’t it? Just look at my hair, or the absence of it, and the way I get the gout and all those uncomfortable things and walk hobbly-sticked and all that. And you get your migraines. And somebody else has bronchitis. Yes, of course, yes, because the sentence has been passed on our bodies, and if the Lord does not come, we shall all die.

You have observed that, haven’t you, in spite of what some folks say? In spite of the fact that there are folks around with very great faith, I’m sure, there isn’t a believer living over one hundred and fifty, is there? If the Lord doesn’t come, we die. Oh yes, God does sometimes, miraculously (I have known such cases), when it pleases him, renew our bodies for the time being. You know there was one man (his name was Lazarus); God renewed his body in a spectacular fashion and brought it out of the grave after he’d gone to corruption. Did you know that Lazarus died again?

Oh yes, we have no need to buoy ourselves up with false hopes. If the Spirit be in us, the body is dead; it remains a mortal body subject to death. It will always be a mortal body until that great day that is coming when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God! The dead in Christ shall rise, and we that are alive and remain shall be changed and caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air (see 1 Thess 4:15–17). Do you know that the great power that shall make that change is already in you? It is God’s Holy Spirit that shall affect that change—the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus—he is already in your mortal bodies (see Rom 8:11).

You say, ‘Then why doesn’t he make my body immortal now?’

It is for one very good reason. We said on an earlier night that being saved doesn’t turn us into machines. Being rooted in God’s Holy Spirit does not destroy our personalities; it does not make us machines. What God is going to do is to make us holy, by his grace and power, but by our decision.

I once was in a home; I won’t tell you whose home it was, and I’m not telling tales out of school because the man whose home it was is now miles from here, and I don’t know where he lives. I went into this good man’s home, and I was talking theology with him, and in came a dear lady with the morning coffee. The way he talked with her, and the way she quivered in her shoes, I thought it was a maid getting treated like a slave. I found out afterwards it was his wife! The poor woman. What being married to him had done to her! It had not developed her personality; it had made her a downcast slave. Oh you may be sure that God’s Holy Spirit will never do that with you. He is going to present you one day to Christ as a bride adorned for her husband: a vigorous, lively, developed, rounded, fulfilled personality! Christ doesn’t

want slaves for his bride. Because of that, the Holy Spirit is not going to learn our lessons for us but will empower us to learn the lessons! He is not going to do all the work for us but will empower us to do the work! In order to build in decision and values into our characters, he leaves us in this fallen, weak body with our old fallen nature around us still and says, 'Now, look here, the lesson is that you, in me, learn to deny that flesh; you learn to put it to death. That is, all that is wrong and that is evil, you learn to say 'No' to it. You've got to fight it. It won't disappear overnight any more than the Canaanites (the wicked old souls) ran away when they first caught sight of Joshua. They didn't; they came out and fought. And sometimes the Israelites, by God's power and grace, fought them. Sometimes they didn't. Sometimes the Israelites grew tired, and they married them instead. We have got to learn to mortify the deeds of the flesh in the power of that Holy Spirit (see v. 13).

Condemnation and consequence

You say, 'Why should I?'

Because that is the way to life. The old fallen flesh is the thing that restricts us. If we would live then we must put that to death.

'What happens if we don't? What happens if as a believer, in the Spirit, I nevertheless give in to the flesh and walk according to the flesh and indulge the flesh.'

'Well,' says Paul, 'if you do that you'll die. You must die' (see v. 6).

Now, please let us notice what that means. It does not mean to say that we shall be lost: 'There is no condemnation for them that are in Christ' (see v. 1). But I say, there are consequences, aren't there? It is very important that we get hold of this very clearly: the difference between *condemnation* of sin, and *consequence* of sin.

It is sinful to get drunk, isn't it? Therefore, if I will drink methylated spirits before breakfast every day and for lunch as well and night times as well, that is a sin. Yes, and the law has a penalty.

Suppose God has saved me from doing such foolish things. I've trusted Christ. Then there is no *penalty* for getting drunk. Oh, but my brother, if because there is no condemnation, no penalty, I carry on drinking methylated spirits before breakfast every day, though there is no penalty I shall reap the *consequences*! Even though I am a believer, I shall ruin my stomach. I shall send myself out of my mind. I shall get the delirium tremors and, goodness knows, end up in a wretched grave; I shall indeed. We are delivered from the penalty of sin, not from its consequences! 'And,' says Paul, 'if you believers—you who are in the Spirit, if you continue to walk after the flesh you will reap the consequences: a thin, weak, feeble spiritual life, buckets of tears and sorrows and dishonour and shame, not only on yourself, but on the Saviour you profess to follow.'

No, that is not the way. We are in the Spirit; therefore let God lead us by his Spirit, and constantly lead us. What a delightful thing his leading is. When he comes alongside to lead us, he first of all assures us of our security as children of the Father. He witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God and makes us feel at home, and he begins to banish fear and slavery.

May I take the time to say it? My dear young folks, if you ever find what you think is the Holy Spirit in you driving you, making a slave of you, and producing all sorts of fears that

drive you to do this and drive you to do that, please remember that is *not* God's Holy Spirit. It could be a slight psychological disorder. That is not God's Holy Spirit. He doesn't fill us with that kind of fear and dread. He doesn't make slaves. He makes us aware that we are God's freeborn children. But he will stay alongside because he wants us to grow up as sons. From being babies in the family of God, he is going to make us grow, according to God's plan, until we have been conformed to the very image of God's Son.

Until school is out

What happens then? When we've gone through school and we've grown up, and we've become adult sons of God with the very character of God written upon us, then God shall let us out of school. Of course he will. The Saviour will come. He will give us new bodies, and the Saviour is going to take the creation around us and free it from its frustration and groaning and give us God's great universe to rule for God as his grown up sons and daughters! What a marvellous salvation it is.

The Lord give us the grace thus to thank him ever, and constantly remember what he has done in giving us his Holy Spirit and putting us in that Holy Spirit. The Lord teach us the practical wisdom every day to learn more and more to rely on that Holy Spirit, so that by his prayers, by his empowerment, he may lead us step by step by step until he has conformed us to Christ's image and brought us home to the Father's house.

Shall we pray.

Father, for these wonderful things now, humbly and gratefully, we praise thee. Oh what a glorious God thou has shown thyself to be. How majestic are thy purposes; how infinitely generous thy grace. How breathtaking are those vistas of perfection and delight and joy and living that thou hast opened up to us who know thy Son as Saviour.

We thank thee for thy divine purpose. Whom thou didst foreknow, thou didst predestinate to be conformed to the image of thy Son. Whom thou did predestinate, them also thou didst call. Those thou didst call, them thou hast justified. Those thou has justified, thou has glorified.

We praise thee, Lord, for the desires thou hast wakened in our hearts, not for heaven as some old people's retiring home, but for heaven as that great goal of living—that perfect sonship that we shall then enter in, to be like thy Son, to be troubled no more by the battle against sin.

If Lord in these moments we have learned enough not to trust in the strength of our own desires—we have found them too often will-o'-the-wisp—then in these moments, as we quieten our hearts, listen we beseech thee to the voice of thy Holy Spirit whom with incalculable grace thou hast placed in our hearts and personalities. Hear his longings and yearnings and breathings and groanings that rise from our hearts by his grace as he strives to bring us along the path thou has marked out. Oh, God, what it is that he wills, by thy grace we would will. And

though we know not what we should pray for, hear his prayers within us, and answer them according to the great tides of thy divine power and grace, that we might walk the more firmly, in thy Spirit from this moment onwards, and without faltering step, along that path until the time comes when all our prayers and wishes are turned to reality and we see Christ!

Hear us we beseech thee, for thy name's sake. Amen.

APPENDIX

The Epistle to the Romans

I.	II.	III.	IV.
1:1–5:11	5:12–8:39	9:1–11:36	12:1–16:27
Wrath of God	Wreckage of Adam’s sin	Failure of Israel’s faith and service	Appeal for our spiritual service
Righteousness apart from the law	Righteous requirement of the law fulfilled in us	Christ is the end of the law for righteousness	Love is the fulfilment of the law
Christ died for us	We died with Christ	Jew/Gentile relations	Jew/Gentile relations
We shall be saved from the wrath of God	Saved in hope	All Israel shall be saved	Now is our salvation nearer
Hope of the glory of God	Them he also glorified; creation . . . delivered	Life from the dead	The day is at hand; Satan bruised
THE LOVE OF GOD 5:5–11	THE LOVE OF GOD 8:35–39	THE WISDOM OF GOD 11:33–36	THE ONLY WISE GOD 16:27

About the Author

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