

A Study Guide for

*The
Faith of
Christ*

by Oliver E. Rogers

A Study Guide for the Faith of Christ

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Introduction

This Study Guide is designed to be used with the book *The Faith of Christ, The Relationship of Christ's Faith, Our Faith and Salvation*, by Oliver E. Rogers. It carefully explains God's amazing plan to **justify** the human race following Adam and Eve's disobedience and expulsion from the Paradise of Eden. It reveals how he arranged to reconcile us, the highest of his creation, and bring us into his "holy" presence along with "our" role in this marvelous plan.

You are probably aware that since the time of Martin Luther, most translators of the New Testament have been rendering passages that directly address our justification by God as being a result of **our** faith in Jesus Christ.

This study will reveal that every passage relating to our justification, beginning with Romans 3:22 and following, calls for the translation "through (or by) faith **of** Jesus Christ" with the emphasis on *Christ's faith*. The role required by human faith in obtaining salvation is fully covered.

It examines **how** and **why** God chose to accomplish his purpose through his Son, Jesus Christ. *It also presents this human characteristic of Jesus Christ that is not generally known or understood by most people who profess to be Christians.*

A proper understanding of this critical subject will enhance your knowledge of the nature of God and why he chose this drastic course of action to include us in his holy family.

The ultimate conclusion explains how humanity must "willingly" accept its Creator's free gift of grace to be a recipient of his great salvation.

The material is arranged in 13 lessons for convenient quarterly study in Sunday schools, Bible classes, seminary studies, and/or college and university classes.

All significant New Testament passages that address this investigation are carefully examined.

Introduction (continued)

Answers to the Following Questions Are Found in This Study Guide

1. What is God like?
2. Why didn't God describe his true nature in the beginning of Scripture?
3. Why did God create human beings?
4. Why did God allow sin to enter the lives of Adam and Eve and the whole human race?
5. Why was it necessary for Jesus to leave heaven, become a human being and live on the earth for 33 years?
6. Why would God submit his beloved Son to such a terrible ordeal of dying on the cross? Wasn't there a simpler way of dealing with the sin of his created beings?
7. What was the *true nature* of Jesus while living on the earth as a human being?
8. Was Christ fully God and fully man at the same time while on earth?
9. Did Christ live by faith in God while on earth?
10. When was Christ given all authority on earth and in heaven?
11. What is saving faith? Who has enough faith to be saved?
12. Who justifies human beings, and how does he accomplish it?
13. What must I do to prepare for eternity?
14. Can I make "my calling" and "election" sure?
15. How can I live and die with "a blessed assurance" of salvation?

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Listing of Lessons

One

God Justifies Humanity, but How? By Our Faith or Christ's Faith?

Two

Creation Planned in the Mind of God

Three

Deity—Humanity of Jesus, Part 1

Four

Deity—Humanity of Jesus, Part 2

Five

A Clear Definition of Terms

Six

Justified by the Faith of Christ, Part 1

Seven

Justified by the Faith of Christ, Part 2

Eight

Paul's Treatment of Justification in Galatian Epistle

Nine

Justified by Faith but Not Faith Only

Ten

Justified by Christ's Blood

Eleven

Justified by His Grace

Twelve

Preparing for Eternity

Thirteen

When the Books Are Opened

Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
e.g.	for example
Gr	Greek
KJV	King James Version
NASV	New American Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
p., pp.	page, pages
RSV	Revised Standard Version
v., vv.	verse, verses

Study Guide

Lesson One

Reference page 23 in book

What Is God Like?

God is Eternal

God, the infinite being, functions in the eternal realm. As such, he exists outside the dimension of *time*. It is no small matter when Scripture refers to him as “I Am” (Exodus 3:14). With him all things are **present**; consequently, he is not a **has been** or a **will be**. It was this realization that prompted David, the sweet singer of Israel, to write: “from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalms 90:2).

J. I. Packer stated the negative correctly when he wrote:

His life does not wax or wane. He does not gain new powers nor lose those that He once had. He does not mature or develop. He does not get stronger, or weaker, or wiser as time goes by.¹

Since God is perfect in every way, he cannot change for the better or the worse. If we can begin to comprehend this eternal concept, it won't shock us when reading the creation account in Genesis chapter 1 to discover there is no detailed description of God or his true nature.

It is not mandatory to account for the origin of all things because common sense teaches us there had to be an Originator. In the same way a work of art calls for an artist, or a building assumes a builder, or a book requires an author, so, too, a universe of

intricate systems makes sense only if we **start with a Creator** who possesses **life, intelligence** and **power**. It is imperative to start with something, and the only reasonable explanation is **God, the Eternal One**.

The Holiness of God

Early in the Genesis account it is stated that God created the man and woman with a nature similar to his own (Genesis 1:26). Unfortunately, that nature was tarnished rather quickly. The Lord stated, emphatically, regarding his holiness in his declaration to Israel: “I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). He came back to repeat the same thought for emphasis in verse 45. The instruction to “consecrate yourselves” was a call to holy living by separating themselves from evil, impure thoughts, motives and actions. **God is holy because his nature is entirely pure, clean and free from contamination.** Nothing impure, unclean or contaminated can exist in his presence (see Isaiah 59:2). This is a concept many people do not understand or are unwilling to believe.

The apostle Peter, in his first epistle, appealed to the new converts to live holy lives. He drew from the Leviticus passage

with the thought: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14–16).

When Adam and Eve were overcome by Satan’s temptation (Genesis 3), sin entered their lives with the result being immediate separation from God. It bears repeating: “God is holy and sin cannot approach him” (read Exodus 19–20). **Until we are able to grasp this principle, God’s drastic actions in arranging to justify, redeem and reconcile humanity unto himself will completely elude us.**

When God admonished the patriarch, Abraham, to “be blameless,” he was calling him to a life of completeness, purity and holiness (see Genesis 17:1). The prophet Isaiah got a glimpse of God’s holiness that led him to write: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:1–3). The apostle John completed the Revelation letter with a similar refrain (Revelation 4:8).

So, to designate God as *holy* is to recognize his perfection and his inability to be tainted by sin and evil. Hopefully, these thoughts will sharpen our comprehension of how we are the handiwork of a Creator who is perfect, complete and holy in all his ways. This helps to explain why God was compelled to design a way to justify sinful humanity and restore the broken relationship that occurred in the Garden of Eden between the man and woman and himself.

The Love of God

Certainly God’s holiness, power and wisdom exceed our comprehension, but the characteristic that encompasses the totality of God’s true nature is **love**. The apostle John was wrestling with this concept when in his senior years he wrote:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:7–8). What a simple yet profound way of describing the Almighty. These three words need to be burned into our thought process—“**God is love.**”

Apart from love, there is little reason why God would have bothered to create human beings. To attempt an explanation of why God allowed Jesus to leave heaven and come to this lowly earth and sacrifice himself on the cross of Calvary, apart from love, makes no sense whatsoever. Love has been designated the super glue that holds all of life together and endows it with true purpose and genuine meaning.

Two words are used in the Greek New Testament, *agape* as a noun and *agapein* as an infinitive, meaning to love, cherish, have affection for, like. This word seems to carry the idea of loving one without regard to the person’s worthiness. The second word is *phileo*, meaning to love, have affection for, like. One context where both words are used with a clear distinction is John 21:15–17. Here, Jesus is testing Peter’s loyalty by asking him if “you *agapein* (love) me more than these,” probably referring to the fish. Peter replies, but uses the word *phileo*. This distinction is not recognizable by reading the English translation. The word used by Jesus in giving a new commandment to his disciples was *agapate*, “love one another even as I have loved you” (John 13:34). The same word was used by the apostle Paul in his colorful description of faith, hope and love to the Corinthian Christians (see 1 Corinthians 13). There we learn that love is patient, kind...rejoices with the truth—always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres, never fails (vv. 4–6). You will benefit by reading the entire chapter.

Love keeps God from giving up on us when we grievously disappoint him and are totally undeserving. No amount of

wickedness can move us beyond the love of God even though his love is a holy love. Nothing short of love prompted God to send Jesus Christ to live among us and ultimately be nailed to that old rugged cross to atone for our sins. The marvel regarding God's love is not only that it is everlasting, but it is also unconditional. God does not say, "I will love you providing you are good and love me in return." His words are: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3).

The first and greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is to love God, love your neighbor and, yes, love yourself with your whole heart (Mark 12:30). Not only is God the *supreme lover*, he is also the *greatest giver*. This fact is best illustrated in the words of John 3:16, which declares that he gave his one and only unique Son, Jesus Christ, to deliver us from sin and provide us with hope of eternal life. In addition, he has arranged for us to have access to *every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ* (Ephesians 1:3).

Included in these blessings are "*forgiveness of sins*" (Ephesians 1:7); "*redemption through his blood*" (Ephesians 1:7); "*reconciliation to God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20); "*the riches of his grace*" (Ephesians 1:7); "*peace*" (John 14:27); and "*entrance into heaven*" (Philippians 3:20).

Our emotions associated with pleasure, satisfaction and enjoyment are gifts from God. The gift of family, through which we enjoy companionship and relationship, comes from God. To think that God has empowered us with the ability to give and receive love is truly awesome, for "*love never fails*" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Once these truths permeate our minds, they will cause us to have a genuine appreciation for our Lord that will compel us to share his love with family and friends.

¹J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. (Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 60515) 77.

Study Guide

Lesson Two

Reference page 61 in book

God's Ways Beyond Our Comprehension

Creation Planned in the Mind of God

It is a stretch of our minds to realize that God had a solution for our sin worked out long before the world began. The apostle Paul stated the thought as follows: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4). He continues by saying that it was "according to his [God's] *eternal purpose* which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11). It is clear from the above Scriptures that God did not wait until humanity had sinned to consider a solution. Peter explains to the people on the day of Pentecost that it was according to "God's *set purpose and foreknowledge*" (Acts 2:23) that he arranged to redeem the people from their sins.

Since God knew that Adam and Eve would succumb to Satan's temptation and sin, why did he place them in an environment where this was certain to happen? One answer is that it was vital for them to be free to make choices. That choice placed responsibility on them to realize there would be consequences for disobeying God. In addition, the Creator would have received little pleasure from the affection offered by them had he programmed them to function like robots. It is true that God is

complete and in need of nothing (see Acts 17:25). Even so, this does not eliminate his desire to love and be loved because his very nature is *love*.

We Are Eternal Beings

God has designed the human race for eternity. In this way, we possess some of God's true nature. There is a vast difference, however, since he has always existed, having neither beginning nor conclusion. But, like God, we shall never cease to exist. From birth, we became *creatures of eternity*. Unfortunately, when sin entered the world, a radical change was necessary because sin introduced death. Fortunately for Adam and Eve, and for us, God arranged, at the proper time, for an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous one (see 1 John 2:1), to appear on the scene. Nothing any human being could do or say could remove the tragedy of sin, which brought *death* and *separation* from God. Only the perfect Lamb of God, who willingly took our place at Calvary and sacrificed his life to satisfy the justice of God, could assure reconciliation of our eternal relationship with the heavenly Father.

Since we have been created for eternal life, the Scripture admonishes us to offer the Lord our praise and glory (see

Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). How could we do less than to honor, love and serve him voluntarily, while bringing him glory in the process. Two excellent Old Testament examples of men with integrity who were determined to live for the Lord and to do his will are Job and Joseph. With Job, Satan attempted to make his case by saying that God had shielded him by placing a “hedge about him and his house” (Job 1:10). Satan proposed a further challenge by saying that if you remove his possessions “he will surely curse you to your face” (Job 1:11). Much to my surprise, and probably yours, God allowed Satan to take Job’s children, his possessions and to afflict him with physical and emotional misery and pain that was almost unbearable. Even so, the devoted patriarch refused to curse God (read chapters 1 and 2). This had to be a shocker for Satan. It undoubtedly brought pleasure to the Lord.

You will recall that Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. Miles away from home, down in Egypt, he was genuinely tempted to commit adultery with Potipher’s wife. After all, neither family nor friends would ever know, so why not go ahead and satisfy his sexual drive? The reason is simple as we listen to his answer. “How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9). He went to the heart of the issue by declaring that it would be a sin against the One with whom he maintained a heavenly relationship. Thank the Lord for young men like Joseph!

Countless are the men and women who have weathered indescribable pain and suffering yet never compromised their integrity; instead, they chose to go with God. These faithful ones have been and are living examples of created human beings who will choose to serve and worship God, come what may. Why should this be a surprise since we are made in the image of our Creator?

Every Human Being Is Special

A careful reading of the creation account reveals that God was pleased with his entire creation, for at the end of the day, he pronounced it “good” (read Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). What grabs our attention is how the record reads following the creation of Adam and Eve. “And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was *very* good” (v. 31, NASV, emphasis added). Only following the creation of human beings does God say it was **very** good. What is the difference? Human beings were created in *God’s own image and likeness* (Genesis 1:27), which places us in a category all to ourselves. Obviously, this is not referring to physical image or likeness because Jesus taught that “God is Spirit” (John 4:24), and as such he does not dwell in a body of human flesh (read Luke 24:39, NASV).

What we can reasonably conclude is that human beings are like God because we share in his true nature—namely, *holiness, goodness, kindness, love, purity, mercy, compassion and intelligence* to name a few characteristics. Indeed, we have been set apart from the rest of creation by virtue of being *created in the likeness of deity*. Until this is clear in our understanding, we’ll never appreciate God’s provision to justify and rescue us from Satan’s domain.

Who Can Understand God?

The prophet, Isaiah, declares that God’s ways, thoughts and actions are beyond our ability to comprehend (read Isaiah 55:8–9). A careful examination of the suffering and humiliation God allowed his Son to undergo to redeem the human race causes many to raise serious questions. “Why,” they ask, “would

anyone put an innocent person through that suffering, even to death on the cross? Surely there must have been some other way.” Any person whose emotions are easily touched could not help but have heart-felt sympathy for the humiliating treatment our Lord suffered leading up to his crucifixion and death.

The problem with this reasoning is a failure to understand God’s true nature. God is holy, and because he is holy, his justice demands that sin be punished. That is why Ezekiel wrote: “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:20). Death calls for separation—so when Adam and Eve sinned, they were separated from God. That one act brought death upon the entire human race. The dilemma at this point was how a holy God would design a plan to remove their sin. Certainly there was no person upon the earth who could satisfy that requirement. Surely God would have chosen a means other than involving his one and only unique Son, Jesus Christ, had such been possible. The reality is that there was no other way for God to satisfy his justice and maintain his holiness outside of allowing Jesus to offer himself as a perfect sacrifice to atone for our sins. In no other way could he have offered a greater demonstration of his mercy and love (see Romans 5:6–8). This is why the cherished words of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...,” impact our thinking so profoundly.

God, who is eternal, views all matters without regard to time and he never errs in judgment because he is *perfect*. In contrast, we are finite creatures unable to see the total picture; consequently, we are limited in our judgment in deciding what is best. For this reason, we fail to understand God’s approach to many things; even so, we must not lose sight of his ultimate goal—to justify, redeem and reconcile sinful humanity to himself.

Jesus’ Supreme Sacrifice

Christians are generally heard to say that Jesus’ journey to Calvary constituted his supreme sacrifice for the sins of humanity. Never would I minimize the importance of what happened at the cross, for it certainly was the *culmination* of what the Father sent him to accomplish for humanity. To me, however, the supreme sacrifice made by our Lord began when the decision was made to leave heaven, a perfect environment around the throne of God, give up his deity, enter this world filled with hostility, warfare, hatred, and bitterness, and experience physical birth as a lowly human being. Here, he was confronted with rejection, humiliation and, ultimately, crucifixion. There was no way his divine nature could feel at home in such a sinful environment! Little wonder he said: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). It seems reasonable to conclude from this passage that Jesus was never fully content while living as a human being upon the earth, simply because this world was not compatible with his *true nature of deity*. Surely he must have longed for the day when he could assume his rightful position at the right hand of his Father.

Study Guide

Lesson Three

Reference page 81 in book

Deity—Humanity of Jesus, Part 1

Things are not always what they appear to be at first glance. I found that to be true of a person who, on his deathbed, confessed to me he was not who I had understood him to be for more than a decade. He had forsaken his wife and children, left the state, changed his name and taken up a new life in another part of the country.

There was a time when I thought Jesus Christ, while on the earth, was God in human flesh. After years of study and research, I've had to alter that view. It is clear to me now that Jesus "lived by faith" as taught by the apostle Paul in Romans and Galatians, and it was his faith that made humanity's justification possible. God allowed him to leave heaven, relinquish his deity and temporarily live among us as a human being. It is true that he was divine because he was the Son of God. This interpretation fits best with Paul's statement to the Christians at Philippi. He wrote that Jesus did not "consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing" (Philippians 2:5–7). Other versions read: "but emptied Himself" (NASV). The apostle continues by saying that he took the nature of a servant and was made in human likeness. He further humbled himself and was obedient in death. This describes a full-fledged human being as I view it.

There is no mistaking that Jesus in his *pre-existent* state was fully God, deity. This is the teaching from Genesis 1:1

right up to the gospel accounts. John began his letter, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). It is clear that the apostle is talking about Jesus Christ in this context. What grabs our attention is how he continues in verse 14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Isn't this what Paul is describing in Philippians 2, when he declares that Jesus was made in human likeness, took the nature of a servant, humbled himself and was obedient to death on the cross?

It is true that many take exception to this view. Avon Malone wrote in his commentary on Philippians: "Any doctrine that denies either his complete deity or whole humanity is heresy." Indeed, this is strong language that demands careful and prayerful attention. Just so, there are major problems with the "fully God, fully man" position. Two verses that immediately come to mind are "God cannot be tempted by evil" (James 1:13) contrasted with "one [Christ] who has been tempted in every way just as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). No doubt, Malone, like others, attempted to settle the perceived contradiction by saying the temptation applied only to the humanity of Jesus. What is needed is a passage that justifies that position.

Jesus, in his teaching, left no room for misunderstanding regarding his origin and identity. In claiming to be the bread of life he declared: "For I have come down from heaven"

(John 6:38). That placed him in the eternal realm as a member of the Godhead (deity).

The Word Became Flesh

When John wrote “the word was God” but hastened to add, “The word **became** flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), what are the implications? When this is placed beside Paul’s statement in Philippians 2, the obvious conclusion is that Jesus temporarily emptied himself of deity in order to become a human being and live among us. This position is consistent with other Scriptures that address the subject. For example, John quotes Jesus as saying: “God is Spirit” (John 4:24). However, at another time, Jesus said: “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39, NASV). If God is spirit and a spirit does not possess flesh and bones as Jesus most assuredly did, then what conclusion is to be reached? Isn’t Jesus essentially saying his deity had been relinquished, albeit temporarily? This is one of the problems that cannot be ignored by those who insist that Jesus was fully God and fully man while living in his human body.

Jesus Always Had the Father’s Approval

The Gospel accounts are consistent in showing that Jesus’ mind-set clearly was to do the Father’s will. Every word, thought and action was focused to that end. It stands out in the event when, as a young boy at age 12, he accompanied his parents to Jerusalem. Remember how he remained behind in the temple when the family set out to return home? Once it was determined that he was not among the travelers, his parents doubled back to

find him in the temple asking and answering questions fielded by the leaders. When asked why he had tarried, his answer was: “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). The KJV translates “about my Father’s business?”

At another time, the religious leaders presented to him a coin, a denarius, used to pay the poll tax. When the question was raised regarding the lawfulness of paying the tax to Caesar, Jesus responded: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 22:21). Matthew comments that upon hearing this, the Pharisees marveled and turned away. Such wisdom coming from the lips of an uneducated person boggled their minds.

In his discourse on the “bread of life,” Jesus declared that he came “not to do my will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). In explaining how the Father who sent him was always present, he stated: “I always do what pleases him” (John 8:29).

The four Gospels contain numerous accounts and statements similar to the above. In every instance, the religious Pharisees tried with no success to catch him in a single inconsistency, only to find that he was always true to his purpose and faithful to his mission.

Claims Made By Jesus

Matthew records Jesus as saying: “All things have been committed to me by my Father” (Matthew 11:27). It is obvious from these words that Jesus was relying on the Father for assistance. If, as claimed by some, Jesus, in human form, was fully God, why did he give credit to the Father for handing all things over to him? There is no mistaking that Jesus did claim to be the “Son of God” (John 10:36, NASV), but at no time did he claim to be God. Now, it is true that the people accused him

of claiming to be God. When asked why they would attempt to stone him, they answered: “because you, a mere man, claim to be God” (John 10:33). Perhaps his claim to have come down from heaven led to their accusation regarding his being God. He did say: “I came from God and now am here” (John 8:42).

Jesus’ discourse on being “the bread of life” was puzzling to the Jews. Matthew quotes him as follows: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). Later it is stated: “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world” (v. 51). It is clear now to the reader that Jesus was referring to his death on the cross, but the Jews misunderstood and were ready to accuse him of cannibalism.

Another statement John attributes to Jesus that many, even today, find troublesome is, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). If we accept this teaching, we are compelled to agree that the way to God is through Jesus Christ. If this offends some, they should be certain they understand who is the author of the claim.

Jesus further claimed to be “the light of the world” (John 8:12). Peter wrote that he left us an example to “follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). This leaves no room for following the voice of strangers.

Finally, he claimed to be “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). The remainder of this context places the focus for eternal life completely on Jesus Christ.

What stands out so clearly in the previous claims is the deliberate and concise manner in which they are stated. Jesus claimed to be “*the way*,” “*the light*,” “*the bread*” and “*the resurrection*.” He used the definite article before each thought, leaving no room for competition: It is Jesus or no one. True, this places him in a category all to himself. No other human being can lay claim to such power and authority. Never forget that he accredited his power and authority as originating with his Father (Matthew 28:18).

¹ Avon Malone, *Press to the Prize, Studies in Philippians*, (Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1991), 55.

Study Guide

Lesson Four

Reference page 95 in book

Deity—Humanity of Jesus, Part 2

When Peter was at the household of Cornelius, he made a statement that sheds light on Jesus' true nature while living as a human being. Following John's teaching on baptism in Judea and Galilee, he states: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power" (Acts 10:38). If Jesus were "fully God," why did he need to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and power? The same verse concludes by informing us that following his anointing, Jesus went about "doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." It is clear that he drew his power to heal from the Father's presence.

Ways He Differed from Us

The fact that immediately grabs our attention is that Jesus had no human father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by Joseph (see Matthew 1:18). This was what Mary found so perplexing. Small wonder that Mary responded to the angel who informed her that she would bear a son: "How will this be since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34).

Jesus knew he had "come down from heaven" (John 6:38), which made his relationship with the Father unique. He knew that whatever he requested of the Father would be granted,

even to "twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:53). The line of communication was open directly to the throne of God. Unlike us, he did not need a mediator to intervene on his behalf (read John 17 and compare 1 Timothy 2:5) because he never sinned.

Neither time nor distance hindered Jesus from performing miracles when he deemed it appropriate (read John 4:50). There is the occasion when Jesus' opponents questioned Peter about paying the temple tax. Jesus told Peter to go to the lake, toss in his line and look in the mouth of the first fish he caught. There he would find a four-drachma coin that would suffice to pay the tax for himself and Peter (see Matthew 17:24–27).

While traveling in Galilee, Jesus spoke to his disciples regarding Lazarus' illness. The disciples realized it would not be safe for them to return to Jerusalem, so they commented that if Lazarus is only ill he will recover; consequently, they discouraged Jesus from going to Bethany. This prompted the Master to say: "Lazarus is dead" (John 11:4). What is significant is that Jesus did not need to be present in Bethany to know Lazarus had died.

A similar event happened prior to his betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane. After spending considerable time in prayer, he said to his disciples: "Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer"

(Mark 14:42). It is true that Judas and the mob were coming at a distance, but no one was able to see them. Apart from the fact that God supplied him with power and insight to know these things, we would be at a loss for an explanation.

Ways He Was Like Us

Jesus possessed all of the qualities of a human being. His birth to the virgin Mary was unique, but, other than that, his development until delivery was no different from yours and mine. He grew into manhood through the same process that every child does (read Luke 2:40–52). His human body required the same physical needs as ours: food, water, rest, relaxation and sleep. He got hungry, tired and weary from physical exhaustion. He was endowed with all the physical senses: sight, smell, touch, taste and sound. His body, like ours, was subject to feelings. If his flesh was cut, he bled (John 19:34).

On occasion he expressed strong feelings of emotion, as when Lazarus died. Probably the most acute example of emotion was heard while he was hanging on that cross. Matthew states that he “cried out in a loud voice, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

The Hebrew writer explains that he was “tempted in every way just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). (Remember: God cannot be tempted with sin [James 1:13]). We know that following Jesus’ baptism, Satan was permitted to tempt him during the 40-day period of fasting (read Matthew 4:1–11). These examples by no means exhaust the list but are sufficient to show that Jesus shared fully in our humanity.

Problems with Fully God–Fully Man Position

To say that Jesus was “fully God” while living as a human being raises the question of God dying. That Jesus died on the cross and was later buried in a tomb cannot be disputed (see Mark 15:43–46). Indeed, **God was not on that cross nor had he forsaken his Son** (see Matthew 27:46). It was imperative, however, that the Father in heaven maintain silence, temporarily, so that his Son, who had lived a perfect human life, could complete the act of **justifying** and **redeeming** the human race.

Temptation is an additional problem that cannot be ignored. James wrote: “God cannot be tempted by evil” (James 1:13). Yet we know that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are (see Hebrews 4:15). Those who maintain that Christ was “fully God” while upon the earth would obviously claim that this refers only to the “human” Jesus. A Scripture justifying this position would be helpful. To this day, I have failed to find one.

Another Scripture that is puzzling to some is found in John 14, where Philip requested, “Lord, show us the Father” (v. 8). Jesus replied: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (v. 9). This would appear to contradict the statement in John 1:18, where Jesus declared, “No one has ever seen God.” It is clear from the rest of the sentence that he is referring to human beings and not to himself. This is a question that begs for an answer. “In what sense did seeing Jesus amount to seeing the Father?” Obviously it is not a reference to God’s true essence, since “God is spirit” (John 4:24) and “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39, NASV). It, undoubtedly, is referring to his essential nature, namely,

holiness, righteousness, goodness, love, kindness, grace and compassion. These are qualities the disciples had seen in Jesus. So, it could be said that, in this sense, they had seen the Father.

Jesus' Resurrection Accomplished by the Father

All of the New Testament writers attribute Jesus' resurrection to God the Father. Luke quotes Peter as saying: "God raised him from the dead" (Acts 2:24, 32). For additional passages, see the following: Acts 5:30–31, 10:40, 13:30; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 1:20. In all these instances, the Father is credited with the action. Peter goes further to say: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). This is consistent with Paul's comment when he wrote that God exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name superior to all other names (see Philippians 2:9–11).

Jesus Did Not Know the Time of His Return

According to Jesus' own words in Mark 13:32, no one but the Father knew the "day or hour" of his return. Certainly deity is not

limited in knowledge, yet Jesus emphatically stated while living on the earth that the Son did not know. If he did not know, what does this tell us regarding his deity while living on the earth?

Some have attempted to resolve the problem by distinguishing between the expressions "Son of man" and "Son of God." They reason that when Jesus uses "Son of God" he is referring to his deity, whereas reference to "Son of man" identifies him with his humanity. A careful examination of the Gospel accounts reveals that Jesus generally referred to himself as "Son of man." When asked by the crowd if he were "the Christ the Son of God?" (Matthew 26:36), Jesus answered: "Yes, it is as you say." Then follows: "In the future you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (v. 64). If a distinction were to be made, here was the ideal opportunity to clear up the confusion. It did not happen, which does not say much for the supposed difference.

When the above thoughts are carefully examined, it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus temporarily laid aside his deity in order to become a human being.

Study Guide

Lesson Five

Reference page 125 in book

God Justifies Human Beings, But How?

A quick look at Romans 8 reveals that *God is the one who justifies the human race*. The apostle words it as follows: “Those he called, he also justified, those he justified, he also glorified... It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:30–31). There is no mistaking from this passage **who** is responsible for our justification. The only matter for consideration is **how** God accomplishes the act.

Frequent Old Testament Usage

The words “*justify*,” “*justification*” and “*righteousness*” appear early and frequently in Old Testament history. They are used in the Jewish legal system. Deuteronomy 25 is a good example. Men took their disputes to court and the judge ruled on the cases, “acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty” (Deuteronomy 25:1–2). The English word “innocent” is the Hebrew equivalent for **righteous** and is so translated in NASV. The righteous person is declared justified (innocent) and is free to go, whereas the wicked one is **condemned** and punished because of his guilt.

New Testament Usage

In the New Testament, **justification** and **righteousness** come from the same root word. The noun is *dikaiosisune* (translated: justification, righteousness). The verb is *dikaioo* (meaning: *to justify; to declare righteous*). There is a problem in English translation. We cannot say “*he righteousnesses us*.” Instead, we can only say “he declares, deems, and pronounces us” righteous. We can say, “He justifies us.”

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus used the term “*justify*” as an act of God’s justice. Hear him: “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36–37). The word “acquitted” is correctly translated as “justified” in the NASV. A similar use appears in Romans 2:13, where Paul is discussing the general judgment. He comments: “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.” Here the translator of NIV chose to use the word **righteous**, but both KJV and NASV use “just” and “justification.” Either is acceptable.

The startling fact that grabs our attention is the ease with which Paul moves away from the forensic pattern in describing justification and introduces an **intrinsic** approach to righteousness. That is to say, he has God justifying us (declaring us righteous) *through the faith of Jesus Christ*. As a result, we have access to God's righteousness *because we are in Christ*. It is not, as some suppose, having righteousness imputed to us or infused into our lives. Instead, *we possess righteousness because we are in Christ Jesus*. So long as we remain "in Christ," we have access to all the righteousness of God. This fact will never change unless sin severs our relationship with God. The apostle uses much of the Roman and Galatian letters to develop this concept. In both letters, Paul began by addressing the gospel (Romans 1:15–16; Galatians 1:7). To the Christians at Rome, he identified the gospel as "the power of God for salvation" (v. 16).

He proceeds in the next two chapters to show that the whole of humanity has been brought under the judgment of God. Hear his words: "We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin" (Romans 3:9). In verse 23 he continues: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Jews would have considered this point offensive except for their inability to keep the Law perfectly. Of course, it never was God's intention to justify humanity by works of law but *by the faith of Jesus Christ*. Galatians 3:21–22 comes to grips with this thought:

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scriptures shut up all things under sin, that by the faith of Jesus Christ the promise might be given to those who believe (Confraternity Version, emphasis added, the KJV reads accordingly).

Please observe that our righteousness or justification is not based on law but *on the faith of Jesus Christ*. The remainder of this study is intended to clearly establish this principle.

Evidence for Faith of Christ in Gospel Accounts

It is clear from Jesus' teaching that he came down from heaven to do the Father's will. John quotes him as saying: "I can do nothing on my own initiative...because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30, NASV). It comes as no surprise that he was constantly in contact with the Father.

It is true that the Gospel accounts do not specifically refer to the "faith of Christ" as does Paul in his letters; even so, much of what Jesus did and taught clearly supports this conclusion. It stands out in his prayer life, his miracles and his comments while on the cross.

Prayer Implies Faith

Prayer is a medium by which one submits a request to someone recognized as being superior to one's self. There would be no point to prayer without assurance that an answer would be forthcoming. The time and emphasis that Jesus devoted to prayer gives one reason to conclude that he anticipated an answer to every petition sent up by faith in his Father. He taught his disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). He began his prayers with similar language: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me" (Luke 22:44). "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name" (John 17:11). "Father, the time has come" (John 17:1).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed so fervently that "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:43–44). He earnestly desired for this cup of suffering to pass from him. This has every appearance of prayer offered by faith. The response was sudden and gratifying, for an angel appeared to strengthen him.

Each time Jesus was faced with a major decision, he prefaced it with prayer. Luke records how he spent the night alone in prayer prior to choosing the 12 disciples (see Luke 6:12). His final hour on the cross ends with him crying out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). *Truly, he counted on his faith in the Father to sustain him in his dying hour, to raise him from the grave and to restore him to his original position in the Godhead.*

His Miracles Show Evidence of Faith

Some of Jesus’ miracles clearly demand a faith response. An example is when the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee and a storm came up that was about to sink the boat. Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat, so the disciples hastily woke him with a distressing question: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38). He arose, rebuked the wind, commanded the sea to be calm, and there followed a sudden stillness on the lake. Then Jesus asked, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (v. 40). With the disciples it was a lack of faith, whereas with Jesus, there was complete faith in his Father. He needed only to rebuke the wind with the words: “Quiet! Be still” (v. 39). The wind immediately died down and the sea became perfectly calm.

Matthew’s account of the epileptic boy focuses on the necessity of faith to realize a cure. The father had taken his boy to the disciples requesting that they heal him, but they were unable

to do so. Later, he took him to Jesus. The Lord’s response was, “O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me” (Matthew 17:17). Jesus rebuked the demon, and he immediately came out of the boy. Some time later, the disciples asked Jesus why they were unable to heal the boy. His reply was: “Because you have so little faith” (v. 20). Mark, in his parallel account, quotes Jesus as saying, “this kind can come out only by prayer” (Mark 9:29). So both **faith** and **prayer** were attributed to the removal of the demon. We observed earlier that effective prayer requires a dependency on faith.

Obedience Implies Faith

The voluntary practice of obedience in religion provides evidence of faith and respect for the one to whom obedience is rendered. We know that Jesus was careful to obey his parents (read Luke 2:51). The writer of Hebrews explains that, “although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). Please note that Jesus came by obedience the same way we do, namely, through the teaching and learning process. Finally, there is the apostle’s statement that he became “obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross” (Philippians 2:8, NASV). He was obedient to his earthly parents as well as his heavenly Father.

All of these examples, coupled with the thoughts describing the humanity of Jesus, point toward one conclusion: *Jesus lived by faith in his Father.*

Study Guide

Lesson Six

Reference page 147 in book

Justified by the Faith of Christ, Part 1

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith **of** Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe (Romans 3:21–22, KJV, emphasis added).

It is remarkable what changing one letter in a word can do to its meaning in a sentence. Suppose I send you for my keys with the instruction that they are **on** my desk. You return without them. Why? The answer is simple: I gave you the wrong instructions. I should have said **in** my desk. Changing the letter “o” to “i” made the difference.

In a similar way, by changing the word “of” to “in” in the above Scripture (faith *of* Jesus Christ) gives it an entirely different meaning. To read “faith *of* Christ” places the emphasis on Christ’s faith, but to say “faith *in* Christ” shifts the burden to us. This goes to the heart of our study and will determine how we understand justification. Is it *our* faith that justifies us, or is it *Christ’s* faith? Just a little two-letter word, but what a profound difference it makes.

In Romans 3, the words *righteousness* and *justification* are equivalent in meaning. It was noted earlier that both words come from the same root in the Greek language. In verse 20,

the word **justification** appears in our English versions. In verses 21 and 22, the word **righteousness** is used to express the same idea. It would be very awkward to say he “righteousnesses” us. That is not proper English. So to use the verb form, it becomes necessary to use a prefix (deem, declare, pronounce) with righteous. Fortunately, Paul was not faced with that problem using the Greek language.

When the apostle wrote in verse 22, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith **of** Jesus Christ” (KJV), he placed the emphasis on Christ’s faith, not ours. In my judgment, this translates the Greek accurately. Assuming this to be correct, why have translators of more recent versions changed “faith of Christ” to read “faith in Christ?” The answer, pure and simple, is *theology*. This translation conflicted with their theology. They held (hold) the belief that Jesus Christ, being “fully God and fully man” while residing on the earth, did not live by faith. Never mind that the apostle Paul taught that God “*justifies us by faith of Christ*” in this context and in a number of others that will be mentioned.

What needs to be stressed is there is nothing in the Greek text either by way of grammar, exegesis or theology that justifies the translation “faith *in* Christ” here or elsewhere. It isn’t that translators of recent versions have discovered some new idea

that demands a change in the text. The change is based on faulty theology. It began with Martin Luther, who concluded in his studies of Romans 3 that human beings are saved by faith alone, meaning our faith. Consequently, when he came to Romans 3:28, he added the word *alein* (translation: alone, or only) to his German version. Actually, the word **alone** is not in the Greek text that reads: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (v. 28). Luther added the word “alone” after the word “faith.” It is important to know that up to the time of Luther’s translation, all versions rendered the justification passages as “faith of Christ.” The King James Version of 1611 continued to translate “faith of Christ.”

The *Confraternity Bible* rendered the expression “*pistis Cristou*” as “faith of Christ” in Galatians 2:16. The highly respected Presbyterian scholar James McKnight translated the Epistles in the 18th century and rendered both the Roman and Galatian passages as “through faith of Jesus Christ.”¹

The question going through your mind may well be: “What difference does it make? Isn’t it just a matter of semantics?” If so, rest assured I would not be sitting before this computer for hours preparing this for publication. The fact is, it means everything to us because it gets at the heart of **our** salvation. If you and I could justify ourselves based on our faith, there would have been no need for Jesus to come to this earth or go to the cross. Since we are sinners to the core, we have nothing to offer that will satisfy God’s justice.

Truth is, the theological difference between the “faith *of* Christ” and “faith *in* Christ” is astronomical, for they are poles apart. The “faith **of** Christ” position places the responsibility for our *justification, redemption, reconciliation* and *salvation* squarely where it belongs—on Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God. On the other hand, the “faith **in** Christ” shifts the burden onto us, sinful human beings who are completely incapable of bearing such an awesome load. It bears repeating—the initial grounds for humanity’s justification rests entirely on “the faith **of** Jesus Christ” and not on **our** faith in Christ. We are declared or

pronounced righteous (justified) by God based on the sacrificial offering of his beloved Son on Calvary’s Cross.

The apostle Paul championed this view at length in the Roman and Galatian letters. It is interesting to observe how he approached the matter as constituting *intrinsic* (that is, what is within as a result of being **in** Christ), not imputed righteousness. With Paul, God’s righteousness is available to the Christian because of his relationship with Jesus Christ. The **intrinsic** concept is not to be confused with **imputed** righteousness that implies “transference” of the Lord’s righteousness to sinful human beings. Transference of righteousness would be comparable to one taking a hypodermic needle and injecting medication into the body. The medication passes from one source to another. Similarly, the imputed concept calls for the righteousness of God to be infused into human beings. *It is **not** by **infusing** God’s righteousness into the sinner that he justifies and saves lost humanity, but by transferring the sinner **into** Christ.* The “in Christ” concept is foundational to understanding Paul’s approach to justification.

To the Christians at Corinth, Paul wrote: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Four verses later, he declared that God made Christ “who had no sin to be sin for us, so that *in him* (that is, in Christ) we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Then it is by being *in Christ* that God’s righteousness, in all its richness, is available to us. J.A. Ziesler is right when he states:

We may say therefore, that righteousness exists in the believer only as he is in Christ—he never possesses it, but rather participates in it by faith, in so far as he is “in Christ.” Having righteousness by faith, and having it in Christ are identical; should he cease being in Christ his righteousness would cease, for it exists only in and through this relationship.²

The “faith of Christ” position places the burden for our salvation onto the perfect Lamb of God, who willingly took our place at Calvary.

This View Undermines the Popular Doctrine of Faith Only

Justification by faith **of** Christ nullifies the popular doctrine of “faith only” (referring to human faith), a doctrine that is actually not taught in the New Testament. As previously stated, this teaching was first championed by Martin Luther. It was a reaction to his earlier education in Roman Catholicism with extreme emphasis on indulgences, rituals and the like. It led him to conclude that humanity is justified by faith alone, meaning **our** faith. I repeat, it resulted in his adding the word *alone* to Romans 3:28, but, unfortunately, it is not in the Greek text.

Make no mistake: Faith is our initial response to the grace of God and is vital for salvation. It provides the motivation for repentance, confession and baptism—steps essential to put on Christ and live the new life “in him” (see Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:4). Our faith equips us with assurance and confidence while providing the stimulus to grow in grace and knowledge

of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). That said, we must understand that *our faith contributes nothing* to God’s act of justifying humanity. Paul stated emphatically that God is responsible for our justification (read Romans 8:30, 33). One quick glance at what Jesus taught his disciples regarding faith is sufficient to show the inadequacy of **our** faith to save anyone. It must have pained the Master to have to say to the disciples: “O you of little faith” (Matthew 6:30). To Peter he commented: “You of little faith...why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). If Peter and the other disciples who had lived with Jesus for some three years had doubts, how about the rest of us? Who would deny that our faith is often weak, fickle and may even end up temporarily in unbelief? Ah, such faith is insufficient to justify a single one of us! Nothing short of *perfect faith* accompanied by *perfect obedience* will justify us sinful human beings. Only the Son of God qualifies in all these areas.

If there were no other reason for concluding that Paul is not writing about our faith in passages where he is describing how we are justified before God, this would be enough. Fortunately, there are a number of other very good reasons.

¹ James McKnight, *A New Literal Translation from the Original Greek of all the Apostolic Epistles with a Commentary and Notes*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949), 71.

² J.A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul, A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry*. (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 149.

Study Guide

Lesson Seven

Reference page 155 in book

Justified by the Faith of Christ, Part 2

In the second chapter of Romans, Paul launches into a discussion of the Law to illustrate its inadequacy regarding our justification before God. In verse 13 he states that it is *doers* and not *hearers* of the Law who are declared righteous (justified) by the Lord. The problem, of course, was humanity's inability to keep the Law perfectly. This prompted a quotation from Psalms 14. "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). Then follows: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). The apostle had just stated in verse 20, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight [referring to God], by observing the law, rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

Since both races were under sin and none was righteous, this presented a dilemma regarding which there was no obvious solution under the Mosaic Law. Fortunately, for them and for us, Paul was prepared under the direction of the Holy Spirit to describe their predicament and to present the solution.

Righteousness of God Achieved Through Faith of Christ

Romans 3:21–22 spells out the solution:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is *by faith of Jesus Christ* unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference (KJV, emphasis added).

The expression *by faith of Jesus Christ* gets to the heart of the matter. This is where the debate begins. The question hinges on whether *pistis Christou* is to be translated *faith of Christ* as noted in KJV above, or *faith in Christ*, as rendered by most modern English versions. It is appropriate to repeat for emphasis that up until Martin Luther's time, all versions rendered the *pistis Christou* passages as *faith of Christ*. In producing his German Bible, Luther opted to translate *pistis Christou* as *glaube an Christum*, meaning "faith in Christ." This translation initiated the controversy that continues until the present. (A complete listing of the Greek passages with English translations is found in the book, page 158. It will be important to examine these.)

You also need to be aware that all of these passages have been translated by the KJV as (faith of Christ—Jesus). More recent English versions, following Luther's German translation, have changed these passages to read faith in Christ. The fact that some versions placed a note in the margin indicating the Greek reads "faith of Christ" is evidence that members of the translation committee allowed their personal views to take precedence over their understanding of how the original text should read. This is where the text and their theology clashed, and unfortunately, theology, though faulty, prevailed.

Perfect Faith and Perfect Obedience Essential to Our Justification

Not only did Jesus live by a *perfect faith* he also rendered *perfect obedience* to the Father. Both were essential to satisfy the justice of God. On the other hand, we sinners who have the blood of the Son of God on our hands can't even approach perfection in either category. The message is obvious in Romans 5:19, where Paul is drawing a contrast between Adam and Christ. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [referring to Christ] the many will be made righteous."

When we place this thought along side Hebrews 5:8–9, we are made to marvel at how our Lord subjected himself to the Father's will. Indeed, Jesus learned obedience through suffering while living by faith in his Father.

So, it makes all the difference how we view our justification—whether achieved through faith *of* Christ or faith *in* Christ. If we attribute it to the latter, the burden falls on us. *I find this to be preposterous to think that we who are sinners to the core would be so bold as to conclude that our imperfect faith and obedience can justify us. If, on the other hand, we understand that it is "the faith of Christ" that justifies us, then the responsibility shifts to the perfect Son of God, who paid the debt we cannot pay, even with our lives.*

The Context Favors Faith of Christ Translation

The context surrounding Romans 3:22 favors the translation "faith of Christ." For example, there follows "faith of Christ" the expression "to all who believe." If Paul intended to write "faith in

Christ," referring to our faith, why add "to all who believe?" It really becomes redundant. If, however, his intention was to write "faith of Christ," then to follow immediately with the expression "to all who believe" would serve to clarify the human roll in the process. Our task is to completely trust God with whatever method he uses to justify, redeem and reconcile humanity to himself.

An additional point that supports the "faith of Christ" translation is found in chapter 4, where Paul brings Abraham into the discussion. He reasons from v. 13 that the promise to Abraham and his offspring was not through the Law but "through the righteousness of faith" (NASV). What follows is truly significant. "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring—not only those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the *faith of Abraham*" (Romans 4:16, emphasis added). The expression *faith of Abraham* is almost identical to the text of Romans 3:22. Question: Why do you think translators of recent versions went from "faith in Christ" in 3:22 to "faith of Abraham" in 4:16 since the text is essentially identical? The answer is all too obvious. The thought of placing our faith in Abraham would fail even a child's scrutiny. Isn't it strange what personal theology will lead intelligent people to do?

Paul's Theology Best Explained by Faith of Christ

Any careful examination of the apostle's teaching would leave one without hope of finding a passage that would so much as hint at *our faith* offering support for the act of justification. To the contrary, he writes: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 9:24). It deserves repeating: **If our faith can justify us, then Christ's journey to Calvary was unnecessary and his sacrifice was in vain.** We could simply trust God for our justification and the matter would be settled. What nullifies this approach is God's true nature

coupled with his attitude toward sin. Sin is an abomination to God. God is holy and nothing impure or unclean can enter his presence. Surely we can see where that leaves us, sinners that we are.

Paul wrote the young Christian Timothy and explained that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Then follows the explanation of how this is possible. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (v. 5). The man Christ Jesus, who is the one mediator, took upon himself the sin of all humanity and arranged for our reconciliation to the holy God. It required a *perfect* sacrifice offered by one possessing *perfect* faith, accompanied by *perfect* obedience, to achieve our justification and assure a right relationship with the Almighty. Our task, then, is to trust God implicitly through Jesus Christ and place ourselves at his mercy so as to be a recipient of his marvelous grace.

One of the more recent efforts to defend the translation “faith in Christ” was attempted by Arland J. Hultgren in 1980. He reasoned that Paul never used “*pistis Christou*” accompanied by the definite article (*the* faith of Christ).¹ To make this claim required denying Paul authorship of Ephesians and Philippians. If we granted him these exceptions (which we certainly could not do), his position would not stand careful scrutiny for the simple reason that Paul uses similar expressions (e.g., “grace of God,” “righteousness of God,” “spirit of God”) with and without the definite article (see book page 173 for references). So the presence or absence of the definite article cannot be the determining factor in deciding how Paul intended to use the thought. Other considerations, such as grammar, context and theology, must be carefully examined. Obviously, the apostle felt at liberty to use or drop the definite article with these and similar expressions while intending to convey the subjective meaning (i.e., “righteousness of God,” “grace of God,” “spirit of God,” “faith of Christ”).

Some expositors have attempted to resolve the issue by saying the genitive, “*pistis Christou*,” can be both subjective (faith of Christ) and objective (faith in Christ). A.T. Hanson has championed this position by stating, “The conclusion certainly is that when Paul writes of the ‘faith of Jesus Christ’ he means both Christ’s personal faith during his historical existence and *our* faith in him.”² Granted, this is one approach to a solution, but it amounts to nothing more than a clever way of dodging a critical issue. The fact is, it provides very little to commend it for a serious consideration. An intellectual scholar of Paul’s stature deserves more credit for being able to express himself clearly without double talk. His vocabulary was sufficient to state precisely whatever the Holy Spirit chose to reveal through him. In a way, it is a reflection on the Holy Spirit to imply that he would allow the apostle to clothe a critical point of doctrine in such vague terminology.

Faith of Christ Translation and Our Theology

It is clear from our study that Paul is teaching justification by faith *of* Jesus Christ in Romans 3:21–28. He recognizes Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, as the all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. He alone was qualified to take our place at Calvary. Furthermore, we come to understand that the teaching of “faith only” (meaning *our faith*) is not the basis for our justification in the writings of Paul in Romans or any other book of the New Testament. The point to be emphasized in Romans chapters 3–5 is that **Jesus Christ manifested perfect faith and perfect obedience in the act of justifying humanity**. We come into the picture by obeying the Lord in whatever he commands us to do. Remember his words: “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).

¹ Arland J. Hultgren, *The Pistis Christou Formulation in Paul*, NovT (1980): 248–263.

² A.T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul’s Technique and Theology*, London: S.P.C.K. (1974), 40.

Study Guide

Lesson Eight

Reference page 193 in book

Paul's Treatment of Justification in Galatian Epistle

Paul not only addressed the topic of *justification by faith of Christ* in his short letter to the Galatian Christians, but he devoted more space to this subject than to any other. The problem of circumcision and keeping of the Law was introduced into the churches, soon after their beginning, by the Jewish agitators. This actually caused men like the apostle Peter to withdraw table fellowship from the Gentile Christians; consequently, Paul had to confront Peter to his face. He knew this was going to create havoc between Jew and Gentile Christians and would destroy all hope of unity in Christ between the two races. He went to the heart of the matter by saying:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but *by faith of Jesus Christ* even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by *the faith of Christ* and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16, KJV, emphasis added).

The impossibility of being “justified by the works of the law” (referring to the Law of Moses) is where Paul begins. He immediately follows by stating that it is *by faith of Jesus Christ* (emphasis added). At this point it is important to show how they, as Christians, fit into the picture. This he does by adding: “even we have believed in Jesus Christ,” referring to *our faith*. He doesn't stop there but comes back to repeat for emphasis “that

we might be justified by *the faith of Christ* and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” It would be difficult to state it more clearly.

Unfortunately, because of faulty theology, translators of modern versions, since the time of Martin Luther, have changed the reading in all three of these phrases to read “faith **in** Christ.” There is no justifiable reason for this. What it does is to create the kind of repetition one will not find elsewhere in Paul's writings. It is not what one would expect from an educated person. On the other hand, to state it as it reads in the KJV and Confraternity versions makes for smooth reading and perfectly good sense, both grammatically and theologically, and conforms to the Greek grammar.

Notice how the Confraternity version supports the “faith of Christ” theology.

But we know that man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the *faith of Jesus Christ*. Hence we also believe *in* Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by the *faith of Christ*, and not by the works of the Law; because by the works of the Law no man will be justified (Galatians 2:16).

Without question, the translation committee of the Confraternity Bible must have been under considerable pressure to follow the accepted change to “faith in Christ,” but they did not. The fact

that they did not yield to the pressure is evidence that some of them held strong convictions regarding the accuracy of their translation.

The thought of being justified by the Law had become such a point of contention in the churches of Galatia that Paul just kept hammering away at this principle throughout the letter.

If one believes that Paul wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, then one would expect his words to be carefully chosen so as to avoid confusion. Had he intended to mean faith **in** Christ, he could have used the dative case along with the appropriate preposition to establish that understanding. The fact that he used the prepositions *dia/ek.*, with the genitive case to express the faith *of* Christ and the preposition *eis.*, with the accusative case to speak of humanity believing *in* Christ is further evidence that a clear distinction was intended. For additional information on this point, refer to the book.

Farther along in the chapter, Paul discusses the tragic nature of attempting to rebuild the very system (Judaism) that Jesus sacrificed his life at Calvary to replace. The thought is similar to Colossians 2:14 that reads: “Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” The apostle claimed to have died to the Law so as to live to God, and this prompted the following:

I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith *of* the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

Observe that Paul gave credit to the faith of Jesus Christ for procuring his salvation. It was “Christ in him the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) that guaranteed his new relationship and assured that he could be a recipient of God’s righteousness.

In chapter 3, the apostle addresses the purpose of the Law. He states it was to convict the human race of sin. It further served as a pedagogue (tutor) until Christ came (Galatians 3:19). The problem with the Law was its inability to impart life. It is here that he restates his major premise: “But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith **of** Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Galatians 3:22, KJV, emphasis added). Notice the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled “by faith of Jesus Christ.” To avoid misunderstanding, he concludes it was given to “them that believe.” Both the “faith of Christ” and “believers’ faith” are emphasized in this verse. As if that were not enough to make his point, he continued in verse 24 that the Law became our tutor “to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith” (KJV). The expression “justified by faith” can refer to none other than the *faith of Christ*. The context demands it.

Now, if it seems that the apostle is belaboring the point, keep in mind his audience. These Jewish Christians, along with the antagonistic Jews, who are steeped in religion that has been based on works of law for generations, are finding salvation as a gift of God’s grace to clash with the teachings and practices of their forefathers that have been passed on for generations.

Even for you and me—the teaching we received from our youth is not easy to put aside, and that is especially true of anything pertaining to religion. Intellectually, we may get it, but emotionally, it is very, very difficult to accept drastic change.

Finally, the apostle turns to explain how we get into Christ. He begins in 3:26, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” This translation places the emphasis on **our** faith; however, this may not be Paul’s intent. After studying the grammatical order carefully, Richard Hays states it should read, “For, in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith.”¹ The RSV also uses this wording. If this translation is accepted,

it becomes impossible to be certain regarding **whose** faith is intended. Considering the context, it would seem to favor “the faith of Jesus Christ.”

There is a variant reading in the highly valued Papyri document that has the word “Christ” in the genitive case. Following this order, the passage would read: “For you are all sons of God through the faith of Christ Jesus.” George Howard thinks this preserves either the original wording of the text or an ancient understanding of it. He adds that this reading is supported by the Peshitta Syriac and the Sahidic Coptic.² If accurate, this would be one additional time the apostle saw fit to work the expression “faith of Christ” into his letter.

Additional Scriptures on Faith of Christ

If what has been presented thus far is insufficient to convince one that Paul intended to teach “justification by faith **of** Christ,” then additional material is unlikely to make a difference. Even so, there are three additional passages that will be noted. Two are by Paul and the other is by John. In Ephesians 3:11–12, Paul is discussing the mystery that, for ages, had been hidden in God. He declares that it was to be realized in Christ Jesus. The thought is climaxed with these words: “In him and through *the faith of him* we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (v. 12, emphasis added). The KJV translates “by the faith of him.”

In Philippians 3:9, Paul explains how monetary gain meant little to him compared to gaining Christ and being found in him (vv. 7–9). Then he adds, “not having mine own righteousness which is of the law but that which is through *the faith of Christ*, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (v. 9, KJV, emphasis added). Once again, it is righteousness resulting from Christ’s faith, not the apostle’s. You will recall that *righteousness* and *justification* originate from the same root word.

Finally, in Revelation 14:12, John is commending the perseverance of the saints who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ” (KJV). The expression “faith of Jesus Christ” comes from the Greek και των πιστων Ιησου, literally translated “and the faith of Jesus.” Other versions, including NASV, read: “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” This translation calls for changing the definite article (the) to the pronoun “their.” If John intended to write “their faith in Jesus,” surely he would have used the possessive pronoun along with the preposition or the dative case to avoid confusion.

Isn’t it strange what intelligent people will do to defend a sacred doctrine? It is truly unfortunate that translators of recent versions have seen fit to change the reading in the Scriptures we have examined. There is nothing in the context and certainly nothing in the grammar that justifies the change. In the final analysis, it comes down to mistaken theology.

¹ Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ, An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), 169.

² George Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia, A Study in Early Christian Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd Edition, 1990), 97.

Study Guide

Lesson Nine

Reference page 211 in book

Justified by Faith but Not Faith Only

“You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:24).

Martin Luther, the great reformer, was unable to reconcile the above passage with his understanding of justification in Romans 5:1, which caused him to refer to the Book of James as “an epistle of straw.” Luther’s study of Romans led him to conclude that one is justified by faith alone. Consequently, he added the word “alone” (German, “*alein*”) before **faith** to Romans 3:28. Luther was wrong on two counts. First, he concluded that it is our faith in Christ that justifies (Romans 3:22); and second, Paul never at any time taught that one is saved by faith only. This position put Luther at odds with the teaching in James on justification to where he had no logical answer.

The Book of James opens with emphasis on faith, but not faith alone. He explains how trials serve to test our faith and to teach us endurance (James 1:2–3). He goes further to say that if we lack wisdom, we must petition God for help, but our approach must be “by faith” without any doubting (1:5–6). Next, he admonishes us not to show favoritism with these words: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism” (2:1). That thought is hardly finished before he mentions “rich faith” (2:6) as being a characteristic of the poor, whom God has chosen to be heirs of the kingdom.

It is obvious that James considers faith a foundational principle in the Christian life. Any doubt would be quickly removed with two piercing illustrations. These he prefaces with the question, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith, but he has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” (2:14). James is a practical person with indisputable questions. It may be that some believers among them were teaching the “faith only” principle. If so, he intends to nip it in the bud by showing that profession and performance are not the same. In the first instance, James showcases the person who claims to have faith but has no works to prove it. True, he makes a profession of faith, but does nothing to convince one it is genuine. The apostle insists on evidence from one’s behavior and example. He is looking for proof through deeds and actions. Anything short of this is a mere declaration of faith, void of meaning.

It seems reasonable to conclude that James is familiar with the teaching of the Master: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven: but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). James did not emphatically deny the person’s claim to faith; instead he challenged the statement by asking, “Can such faith; save him?” (2:14). The answer is all too obvious. No way! It reminds one of the question Jesus put to his disciples: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke. 6:46). Or again, “Each tree is recognized by its own fruit” (v. 44).

Interestingly enough, James does not stop with this illustration. He comes right back to talk about a poor, destitute person in need of daily food. This individual approaches a brother with resources sufficient to supply the need, but he fails to respond. Instead, he sends the destitute brother or sister away with the empty verbal blessing: “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed” (James 2:16). Now comes the cutting question: “What good is it?” Now, my 6-year-old granddaughter could answer that one.

We must not overlook the fact that James is talking about people who share a common bond—brothers and sisters in Christ. Some would label it inhumane to turn away a stranger with callous, empty words, but to treat a member of our spiritual family with such gross indifference would be shameful, yes, disgraceful! To say, “bless you” without turning a hand to help would border on hypocrisy. James declares such faith to be dead as a corpse (2:17). If our faith is genuine, it will motivate us to slip on our work shoes, roll up our sleeves and get to the task. The observation has been made that “genuine faith is like calories; you can’t see them, but you surely can see their results.”

The apostle turns next to what our kindergarten children call “show and tell.” It begins as follows: “But someone will say, ‘you have faith; I have deeds’” (2:18). This sounds like what one would expect to hear from a person steeped in Judaism who would feel compelled to emphasize works. The apostle’s answer gets to the heart of the matter: “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (2:18). With James, neither faith alone nor works alone is sufficient—one complements the other. Indeed, it is our faith that motivates us to do good deeds.

It should be noted that translators of the NIV use the word *deeds* for the Greek *εργα* (*erga*), which is a departure from most English versions. It literally means *works* and is so translated in KJV, ASV, NASV, RSV and Confraternity. Why the change

is not clear, but it is likely a case of wanting to tone down the harshness that surfaces in works. James and other New Testament writers use it, so there is no reason for shying away from it.

What James sought to drive home with numerous illustrations, the apostle Paul zeroed in on to the Colossian Christians as follows: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with faithfulness” (Colossians 2:16). The words *live*, *rooted*, *built up* and *strengthened* are all verbs of action and represent faith at work.

Certainly, faith is the beginning point in the pursuit of Christianity. This idea is presented in unmistakable language by Paul when he writes about the gospel being God’s power unto or for salvation (Romans 1:16). Verse 17 continues: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” Our faith activates movement toward God. The writer of Hebrews stated, “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith prompts us to obey the gospel and to live the Christian life. Our faith will ultimately see us to the conclusion—eternal life—and obedience will be present all the way.

To opt for “faith only” is to hold to a very distorted view of New Testament teaching regarding the Christian life. The same is equally true of one who seeks to **work** out his/her salvation apart from faith. Seeking to live by either one apart from the other is like trying to walk on one foot. Eventually, we’ll end up flat on our face in utter despair. It takes active faith followed by loving deeds to please our heavenly Father. The following passages will serve to drive the latter thought home: Matthew 5:16; Galatians 5:6; 1 Corinthians 7:19; and 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2:13 (NASV).

Abraham, an Example of Genuine Faith

James, like Paul, uses Abraham, our ancestor, to illustrate that genuine faith is always accompanied by obedience. He declares that Abraham was considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (James 2:22). Now follows the punchline: “You see that a person is justified by what he does (Greek: *εξεργων*, by works) and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). If, as some say, God had already justified Abraham by “faith alone,” then requiring him to offer Isaac as a test of faith would border on cruelty. Abraham’s obedient faith prompted God to reckon or look upon him as righteous, which means he enjoyed a right relationship with God.

A Contrast of Body and Spirit with Faith and Works

In summing up faith and works, James draws a contrast between the body and spirit, for he says: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26). One would

have to be rather dense to miss his point in that statement. We know the body is lifeless or dead when the spirit departs from it. A dead body is fit only for the burial plot. With this illustration, James makes his point that inactive faith is like a lifeless body—dead being alone. So, it is not works, apart from faith, that is praised by the apostle, but faith accompanied by good works or deeds. Surely it must be clear to us that God despises our pretending to be what we are not. Jesus labeled it for what it truly is—hypocritical—in Matthew 23:13–30.

In bringing it all together, James never spoke disparagingly of faith. He simply illustrated, in various ways, that genuine faith is always accompanied by works of obedience. In no way did Paul contradict this. In Romans 1:5, he declared that he received “grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the *obedience* that comes from faith” (emphasis added). He closes the letter with the thought that “by the command of the eternal God...all nations might *believe* and *obey* him” (Romans 16:26, emphasis added). Add to this Colossians 2:16 and similar teaching from the pen of Paul and there is no logical way one can attribute a doctrine of “faith only” to him.

Indeed, neither James nor Paul so much as hinted that one can be justified by faith or works alone. Neither view is taught nor is either view Scriptural. What both men taught was faith accompanied by obedience.

Study Guide

Lesson Ten

Reference page 239 in book

Justified by Christ's Blood

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him (Romans 5:19).

Not only does Scripture teach that humanity is justified by faith of Christ (Romans 3:22, Galatians 2:16) and by the grace of God (Romans 3:22, 24), but it also states that we are justified by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9).

This comes as no surprise when we recall that blood has always been included as an essential element in the act of atonement, leading to forgiveness of sins. God required Cain and Abel to make an offering to the Lord. Abel's offering was from the "firstlings of his flock" (Genesis 4:4, NASV), which meant the animal's blood was shed and its life was taken.

The Israelites were told that blood was required to make atonement for sins. The Lord explained that the life of a creature was in its blood, and added, "I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11).

Blood Essential to Ratify the Covenant

From Abraham's day forward, God included blood to ratify covenants with his people (Genesis 15:9–21, 17:10–11). The

writer of Hebrews picked up on this thought and wrote: "This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood" (Hebrews 9:18–20). He further states, "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). What was true under the Old Covenant is equally true of the New Covenant. The former agreements were ratified and sealed with the blood of animals. The New Covenant was ratified and sealed with the blood of Christ.

Blood of Jesus Achieved Permanent Forgiveness

The problem with the Old Covenant was its temporary nature, because the blood of animals would not permanently remove sins. When the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year to perform the divine worship, he took blood from the animals that he offered, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. When the offering was completed, the people could claim forgiveness of sins, even though the reality was that the transaction was not complete until Jesus went to Calvary and, once for all times and for all peoples, laid down his life and shed his blood to obtain our eternal redemption. In their case, *it was like a deposit made to an account covered by a future transaction.*

The blood of Jesus was the permanent remedy for sins committed by people under the first covenant. That same blood removes the sins of people of faith and obedience this side of the cross until the end of time according to Hebrews 9:15. It reads:

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins under the first covenant.

Observe that Jesus died as a *ransom* to set the people free from sins committed under the first covenant. *What the blood of animals could not do, the blood of Jesus accomplished once and for all times, securing our eternal redemption.* So it took a *perfect sacrifice* in the person of the Lamb of God to satisfy the justice of God and to cleanse our conscience from sin and death.

Not only is the blood of Christ essential to assure forgiveness of sins when we begin the Christian journey, but it is equally necessary to keep us pure along the way. John the apostle put it this way: “But if we walk in the light...the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The verb, purifies, calls for a present continuous action and means that it is a *daily, continuous* process that is at work in our lives as we daily acknowledge our sins. It was John who reminded us in the last book of the New Testament that Jesus “freed us from our sins by his blood” (Revelation 1:5). There is only one cleansing agent for our sins—the blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing else is able to satisfy God’s justice.

Jesus’ Death Purchased Our Redemption

The words of the American Folk Hymn beautifully portray what our Savior did for humanity that no one else could do.

He paid a debt He did not owe:
I owed a debt I could not pay.
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
And now I sing a brand new song:
“Amazing Grace.”

Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

The word “redemption” in the New Testament comes from the verb *λυτροω* (*lutroo*) and means “to redeem,” “to ransom,” “to purchase a release.” Matthew writes that Jesus came to serve humanity “and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Paul gets to the heart of the matter in the Colossian letter as follows: “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13). He reminded the Christians at Ephesus that all spiritual blessings come from Christ. Then follows: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7).

Martin Lloyd Jones, commenting on Romans 3:24, defined redemption as “the purchase of a release by means of the payment of a ransom price.”¹ Indeed, this clearly describes what transpires in our redemption. Jesus paid the price that purchased our release from the captivating shackles of sin by laying down his life at Calvary. To sum it up, there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), for we are freed “from the law of sin and death” (v. 2).

Ultimate Goal, Reconciliation to God

The entire plan has one goal in mind—our reconciliation to God. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, sin entered their lives, causing separation from the very One responsible for their existence. Except for God’s mercy and loving kindness, humanity would have been consigned to

eternal condemnation. The apostle Paul was reflecting on this when he described us as “objects of wrath” who “were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:3, 5). Even so, there is good news: “But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4–5). This he did in order to “show the incomparable riches of his grace” (v. 7).

In spite of being the offended party, God, as a loving Father, has always longed for the return of his prodigal children. Jesus illustrated this beautifully in the story of the Prodigal son in Luke 15. It concludes: “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). It was this thought that prompted Peter to write of the Lord’s patience that he “does not desire any to perish but wants all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Paul, in addressing the Christians at Corinth, stated that by being in Christ Jesus they became a new creation rendering the old nature void and giving way to the new (2 Corinthians 5:17). He continues: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). By now it should be clear that justifying, redeeming and reconciling sinful humanity to God, so as to renew a harmonious relationship, was only possible by permitting Jesus Christ to take our place at Calvary. *New life comes through being in Christ.*

Freedom in Christ

It truly is exciting to know we have freedom in Christ Jesus. Even so, freedom does not give us license to do as we please. To the

contrary, our primary concern should always be to please the Lord in all matters. We are fortunate to have Jesus as our example. John reminds us that Jesus *always* did what pleased his Father (John 8:29). Our freedom should motivate us to never violate our Lord’s instructions simply because of our desire to please him. We find it easy to submit to his will because we are certain he will never require of us anything that is not for our eternal well being.

Freedom, in the truest sense, means to be released from the tentacles of Satan that ensnare us in his web of sin designed to assure our eternal destruction.

It comes as no surprise that some people have a problem with submission because of unpleasant experiences they or others have had while living under tyrannical force. So, to associate freedom with the word “slave” in any good sense becomes an enigma to such a person. The fact is that we are slaves to someone. It is a question of “to whom?” If we submit to sin, then the devil is in control of our lives. If we submit to righteousness, Christ is in control, which means we are free to do what we please because our intent is to please our Lord in all matters (read Romans 6:16).

In the final analysis, God will never force us to love and serve him. He does use a variety of methods in Scripture to make his appeal and strongly encourages us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33), but the choice is ultimately left to us. Hopefully we shall choose wisely, as did Joshua and his household (see Joshua 24:14–15).

¹ D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3:20–4:25, Atonement and Justification*: (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1976) 60.

Study Guide

Lesson Eleven

Reference page 249 in book

Justified by His Grace

The beloved apostle Paul in writing to Titus, the young man whom he had mentored in the faith of the gospel, said the following: “That being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7, NASV). It was clear to the apostle that everything depended on the grace of God. In addressing the first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul declared: “But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). He was discussing the same thought when he penned these words to the Christians at Rome: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and *are justified freely by his grace* through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23–24, emphasis added). The apostle’s use of the adverb “freely” is significant and most appropriate since there is nothing we could do in a million years of righteous living that could make us worthy of the salvation God so abundantly bestows upon us through Jesus Christ.

The passage that is probably used by preachers more than any other in emphasizing grace is Ephesians 2. In verse 4, we are told it is because of *God’s great love and rich mercy* that he was moved to make us alive in Jesus Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. He completes this thought by adding: “it is by grace you have been saved” (v. 5). This, however, is only the beginning of what he has to share. For he assures these believers that God raised them up with Christ to take their seats with him in the heavenly realms so that he could demonstrate the

incomparable riches of his grace expressed through the kindness of Jesus Christ (read vv. 6–7). But is that all? By no means! Now comes the finale:

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:8–10).

To understand the full implication of this passage, it will be necessary to read or review the chapter beginning on page 249 in the book. The relationship of grace and faith to our salvation is thoroughly examined in that context and will not be repeated here. The thought that stands out is that salvation is God’s gift of grace through faith. *Whose faith* is what you will find discussed in the book.

Jesus Christ Was Grace Personified

The apostle John, in his gospel, chose a unique way of describing how Jesus is the epitome of God’s grace. Here are his words:

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another” (John 1:16). The original language simply reads, “grace upon grace.” It is a way of saying that God’s grace abounds in super-abundance to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Verse 14 declares him to be “full of grace and truth.” Looked at as an acrostic, grace is said to be *God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*. That includes the expense of leaving heaven, becoming a human being, living in a hostile environment on earth, being rejected by his own people, going to the cross and being placed in a borrowed tomb.

It is noteworthy that Paul, in writing to Titus, called it “the grace of God that brings salvation” that has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11). The context is clear that this grace is meant to be Jesus Christ. For he goes on to say that he (Jesus) “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify to himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (vv. 13–14). So the price for our redemption was paid by Jesus Christ when he voluntarily went to that cross on Golgotha’s Hill and offered himself, a perfect sacrifice, for our sins.

Grace Foreign to Jewish Thinking

The Rabbis, as teachers of the Law, had real difficulty understanding grace as God’s free gift to humanity. To them, salvation was dependent on one’s meritorious performance of good works before God’s blessing and approval was assured. It was a doctrine carefully engrained into the minds of the youth from early childhood. Rabbis like R. Eliezer who lived and taught around A.D. 90, when questioned by his students about winning the life of the future, said:

Be solicitous for the honour of your colleagues, and keep your children from meditation, and set them between the knees of scholars, and when you pray know before whom you are standing and in this way you will win the future world.¹

It is easy to see how the apostle’s teaching of salvation “by grace through faith” would conflict with Rabbinical teaching. This ultimately led to a controversy that Paul identified in the Roman letter as “a hardening of the Israelite nation” (Romans 11:25). Without knowledge of this fact, one would have difficulty in following the apostle’s reasoning in Romans and Galatians.

Christianity’s Greatest Challenge

It may come as a surprise to some to hear that the Judaizers were the greatest challenge to the Christian system, since Christianity was cradled in Judaism. It’s true that Jesus was born into a Jewish family. Both Mary and Joseph were of Jewish origin. The apostles were men from Jewish families. The 3,000 people who responded to Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost were Jews, according to Acts 2, not to mention the 5,000 men in Acts 4:14. Up until the time of Philip’s preaching to the Ethiopian nobleman as recorded in Acts 8, the major evangelistic effort was carried on among the Jews.

It was when Paul, Silas, Barnabas, Luke and others began journeying throughout the Mediterranean world preaching a gospel of grace that controversy set in. These men first made a point to visit the Jewish synagogues. Their message met with vigorous resistance because many of the Jewish leaders were insisting that circumcision and keeping of the Law of Moses

(including the ceremonial rituals, burning of incense and the observance of special days) be incorporated into the teaching. In this instance, men from Judea were going down to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas were sharing the gospel with the people and declaring: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). This led to great dissension and vigorous debate among the brethren. The result was the gathering of a Council at Jerusalem, including “the church, the apostles and elders” (Acts 15:4), to resolve the matter.

A solution was not readily forthcoming, since everywhere that Paul and his companions traveled they encountered opposition from the Jews. In writing the book of Galatians, Paul mentions that he had to confront the apostle Peter to his face, at Antioch, because he gave in to pressure from the party of the circumcision and withdrew from having table fellowship with the Gentile Christians (see Galatians 2:1–15). This behavior by Peter is somewhat surprising since he had addressed the Council at Jerusalem with these words: “Brothers, you know that sometime ago God made a choice among you, that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe” (Acts 15:7). Then he continued: “We believe it is through the *grace* of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (v. 11, “they” referring to the Gentiles, emphasis added). Peter’s message, in this instance, was identical to what Paul, Barnabas and the others had been proclaiming. Asking people to break from religious traditions that have identified them for generations is a tall order to say the least. It momentarily sidetracked Peter.

Paul recognized that if the emphasis on meritorious works were allowed to have free course, it would eventually destroy the church. Accordingly, he faced the issue directly early in his ministry. In addressing the Christians at Galatia, he wrote the following:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the *grace* of Christ,

and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6–7, emphasis added).

Farther down he wrote: “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you” (Galatians 4:10–11). In concluding, he wrote this: “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you *have fallen away from grace*” (Galatians 5:4, emphasis added).

The Jewish brethren were insisting on including their rituals and other baggage in their Christian practice. Paul emphatically stated that to do so would cut them off from fellowship with Christ and render them “slaves all over again” (Galatians 5:1). This tension was nearly always present when the brethren went into an area to preach the gospel where a Jewish synagogue existed. It was true at Rome (Romans 11:5–6), Corinth (Acts 18:12–13), Philippi (Philippians 3:2–4), Thessalonica (Acts 20:3), Colossae (Colossians 2:16–18) and throughout the Mediterranean world.

Meritorious Deeds Still an Issue

Some things don’t die easily, and the concept of meritorious deeds being essential to salvation falls into that category. There are some who defend it vigorously and insist that to teach otherwise amounts to heresy. Paul stated emphatically that we are saved by grace through faith and it is not of our doing, rather it is the gift of God (see Ephesians 2:8). Any reason for boasting on our part has been removed as far as East is from West—it’s not of works (v. 9). It is true that we have been created in Christ for good works (v. 10); however, our good works are a demonstration of our gratitude,

thankfulness and appreciation for the Lord's gracious gift of salvation, not a payment for the gift.

The *works* concept was so prevalent in the Roman Catholic faith by the time of Martin Luther that he opposed it mightily in his teaching. As sometimes happens, in opposing the one error, Luther went to the other extreme to teach a doctrine of "faith only," based on the context in Romans 3:28. This teaching spread like wildfire within the Protestant world only to pick up more extreme views as different ones sought to define it. As might be expected, some in seeking to correct the "faith only" principle place too much emphasis on the necessity of good deeds. Finding the middle ground and keeping a balanced view often challenges our best thinking.

We must never lose sight of the fact that, as Christians, we owe everything to the grace of God. Remember Paul's statement to the Corinthians: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). In the second letter he wrote: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). To top it all off, the apostle concluded: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15). The word "thanks" comes from the root word meaning "grace."

There was no forgetting the Lord's response to Paul's request—repeated three times—for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed (2 Corinthians 12:8). God answered: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). Indeed, God's grace is sufficient. Let us live so that it will always be obvious to everyone we encounter.

¹ Quoted from Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1965), 267.

Study Guide

Lesson Twelve

Reference page 291 in book

Preparing for Eternity

We have examined at length what the Lord has done to justify, redeem and reconcile us to himself through Jesus Christ. Now it is vital that we understand what is required of us to be a recipient of God's eternal gift. We've observed that salvation is the Lord's free gift of grace to the human race. Now, it becomes our responsibility to accept his offer, respond to his invitation and lay claim to his gift that has so graciously been set before us. The gift is *free*, but we'll never benefit from it unless and until we willingly accept it.

Perhaps this illustration will help. You could offer me a beautiful mansion near the beach by the Atlantic Ocean. Your offer is genuine and sincere, but until I take title to it and move in, I will never realize any benefit from your generosity.

In a similar way, the same holds true concerning our salvation. It is God's gracious gift to us through Jesus Christ, but we are left with the choice of accepting or rejecting it. The invitation remains open for us to come and dine at his banquet table, with assurance that rest for our weary soul is available (see Matthew 11:28–30).

The Process Begins with Faith

The New Testament is crystal clear regarding what Christians of the first century were told to do in order to seal their covenant

with the Lord. He commanded his disciples to go preach the gospel with this additional instruction: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:15–16). The writer of Hebrews declared: "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome that God's righteousness is realized through a process that begins and concludes in faith (see Romans 1:16–17). So, if we reduce faith to its bare essentials, it involves our believing that God is who he claims to be "and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Now what becomes most interesting is that the apostle Peter, whom the Lord chose to preach the first gospel sermon, on the day of Pentecost, never once mentioned faith to his listeners. For the person who holds to the "faith only" doctrine—that is, "just believe" and all is well—this must be disconcerting. Peter preached the gospel to the thousands of Jews who had gathered from several provinces to celebrate the feast. He reminded them that they had crucified the very one whom God had sent to deliver them from their sin. The grave could not hold him because God fulfilled his promise to resurrect him on the third day, to which the apostles were witnesses. He further stated that "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). These words stirred their emotions to where "they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37). Peter responded: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38).

In answer to the question, “Brothers, what shall we do?” The apostle began where his audience was in their understanding. Their question made it crystal clear that they **believed** his message so that it was unnecessary to say, “First you must believe in Jesus.” Instead, he moved immediately to answer their inquiry. You need to *repent* and be *baptized*, all of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven (see Acts 2:38). Forgiveness of sins was their great need. To obtain this forgiveness required *repentance* and *baptism* in the name of Jesus Christ—action initiated and carried out by faith.

It is strange, indeed, to hear preachers and religious leaders telling people who ask the identical question, “What must I do to be saved?” reply: “Just believe and salvation is assured.” If “faith alone” saves, then Peter misinformed this multitude of people. Certainly, we know better because he was the Lord’s chosen instrument to herald the gospel message to these people who were lost and without a Savior. Furthermore, he was speaking as the Holy Spirit enabled him (Acts 2:4), which is additional proof that his message was the right one. The response must have been overwhelming since some three thousand requested to be baptized (immersed) without delay on that day (see Acts 2:41). Reading to the end of the chapter, we find the Lord “added to their number daily those who were being saved” (v. 47).

Many Examples Recorded in Acts

There are numerous examples of conversion to study in the Book of Acts. There is the Ethiopian nobleman (eunuch) who was taught by Philip, 8:26–39; the Philippian Jailer and his household, taught by Paul and Silas, 16:22–34; Saul [Paul] of Tarsus, taught by Ananias, 9:19, 22:14–16; Lydia and household, taught by Paul, 16:11–15; Cornelius, his relatives and close friends, taught by Peter, chapters 10 and 11. A careful

examination of these conversions will yield some interesting facts. Not all are told to *believe*, still it is evident from their response that they did. In every case they were *baptized*, after which there was genuine excitement and rejoicing (see Acts 8:38–39 and 16:33–34).

Any student of the word knows that Jesus taught the necessity of faith (belief) and baptism (see Mark 16:15–16 and Matthew 28:19–20). He further stated the *good confession* must be made before men (Matthew 10:32). In Luke 13, he emphasized the importance of repentance (vv. 1–5). In the course of his teaching, he covered the entire spectrum—faith, repentance, confession and baptism. His disciples, in fulfilling the Great Commission given to them (see Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15–16) went everywhere preaching the word to people living in sin and calling on them to obey the message. In every case, the people’s conversions were consummated with baptism.

It is important to remember that the New Testament is not like an encyclopedia; consequently, not everything is stated at any one point regarding a subject. It is necessary to collect the stories and examine the parts so as to get the complete picture. What we are given in each case is sufficient information to show clearly when the individual’s conversion was complete.

Baptism Puts One into Christ

The apostle Paul explains the role of baptism in conversion throughout Romans chapter 6 in unmistakable language. The context has him discussing the place of God’s grace in chapter 5. It is clear that some were not following his reasoning accurately and had concluded that if God’s grace abounds in such abundance, nothing else is required. They could just live to their heart’s desire and allow God’s grace to cover their sins. This prompted a question from Paul: “Shall we go on sinning so that

grace may increase?” (Romans 6:1). Notice the abrupt response: “By no means!” (v. 2). In modern parlance, we would say: “Perish the thought!” Note what follows: “We who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (v. 2). He then reverts back in time to the occasion of their conversion with an additional question:

Or don't you know that all of us [observe that he included himself] who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3–4).

A question frequently asked is, “When did they die to sin?” (see v. 2). Verses 3 and 4 declare it to be at the point when they, by faith, were buried with Christ in baptism. **Notice that he identified baptism as a burial (a symbolic participation) into the death of Jesus.** What significance is there to be associated with the death of Jesus? The answer: “It was in the death of Jesus that he shed his blood, which constitutes the cleansing agent.” John the apostle wrote: “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from sin” (1 John 1:7). So, in the act of being buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism, the old nature of sin is buried—put to death—and the blood of Jesus, figuratively speaking, cleanses us from all sin. This results in our being raised to walk in newness of life.

Since the conversion process is surrounded by a host of controversy, it will be helpful to identify the state or condition of people we bury. Every sane person would surely agree that it is a crime to bury people who are alive. In a similar way, Paul in Romans 6 is teaching that “only dead people,” those *dead in their sins*, are candidates for *burial* with Christ in baptism. In this act, one who is dead in sin, dies *to sin* and is raised to walk in newness of life. In verse 6 he has the old nature being crucified with Christ so that the body of sin might be done away with or destroyed. Remember that crucifixion ends in death. Beyond this we are raised from the watery grave of baptism to live the new life in Christ. The finishing touch is put on the process when he writes: “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11). Now, one would require help to misunderstand the apostle's intent.

Baptism, then, is the concluding act, carried out by faith that gets one into Christ where he/she becomes a recipient of all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3) and has access to all the righteousness of God. To sum up, in baptism we reenact the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4). In the Corinthian context, Paul identifies the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as the gospel. It is appropriate then to say that in baptism, one obeys the gospel.

Study Guide

*Lesson
Thirteen*

Reference page 309 in book

When the Books Are Opened

A television commercial has been running for weeks featuring a father and his 8-year-old son having a serious talk. The subject of insurance comes up, which prompts the boy to ask: “What is insurance?” The father replies that it is a way parents arrange to take care of their children if something were to happen to mom or dad. The boy pauses for a moment and then, with an uncertain look on his face, asks: “Do we have insurance?” The father delays his answer for an instant and then replies: “Why yes.” To this the boy responds in a satisfied voice: “Good.”

Strange, isn't it, how multitudes go to such lengths to insure their homes and other valuables, but give no thought to having their souls insured? Jesus was impressing this thought upon his disciples when he asked: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). To be a success in everything relating to this life while neglecting our soul's salvation would be tragic indeed. Scripture is clear in spelling out what we must do (review previous lesson). If we fail, we'll have only ourselves to blame.

All Must Face the Judgment

The writer of Hebrews wastes no time in getting to the point: “And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this *comes* judgment” (Hebrews 9:27, NASV). Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). There is no wiggle

room—**all** will be present. The apostle John, in Revelation, wrote that the books are to be opened, including one containing the record of our lives. A final judgment will take place at that time. Whether the Great Judge utters the words “justified,” “redeemed,” “reconciled” and “glorified” will depend on what is in the book. *If we have trusted in the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ, redemption and salvation will accompany us to our final destination.* There, we'll discover our names inscribed “in the Lamb's book of life” (Revelation 20:15). Praise God!

We Can Be Assured of Salvation

The New Testament gives us every reason to be confident about our eternal salvation. The apostle John removed any doubt as follows:

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:11–13).

With John, there was certainty and no reason for doubt. In like manner, Paul spoke confidently to the young intern Timothy. He

wrote: “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). Later he spoke of finishing the race, keeping the faith with assurance there was reserved for him a crown of righteousness that the Lord would award to him at the final day (see 2 Timothy 4:7–8). *We, like Paul and John, can live with the same assurance by placing our complete trust in the living God through Jesus Christ.*

Finally, there are the words of Jesus Christ:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand (John 10:27–29).

The analogy is clear. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep. He feeds, protects, cares for and guides the flock. No harm can come to us so long as we trust and obey his voice. We have the additional assurance that his Father is looking on with the intent of providing additional security. The only thing that can jeopardize this relationship would be for the sheep (us) to deliberately walk out of the fold and quit listening to the voice of the shepherd. He speaks to us through the Scriptures. Failing to listen will have eternal consequences.

God Earnestly Desires Our Salvation

The Lord does not need to repeat something over and over for it to be true. Even so, when it comes to our salvation and his desire to save us, he paints a variation of pictures to get our attention. There is the story of the Loving Father and the Prodigal Son, the lost sheep, and the lost coin (all in Luke 15).

In addition, there is the direct teaching in 2 Peter 3:9, which states that God does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Not to be overlooked is Jesus’ invitation:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28–30).

We can only conclude from the above that if we perish, there will be no one but ourselves to blame. The message is clear and the invitation remains open for all to be recipients of eternal life.

Heaven, Our Eternal Home

Everything we do in this life should have as its ultimate purpose to equip us for eternal life in heaven with God and his chosen ones. The apostle James had a unique way of getting our attention relating to what truly matters.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (James 4:13–14, NASV).

James is attempting to impress upon us the brevity of life. Since we are assured only the present, we need to make every moment count.

There are some things that cannot be avoided, and death is one of them, unless we happen to be living when the Lord returns to gather up his own to take them to heaven. Should the latter be true, then, Scripture teaches, we shall be “caught up...in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Whichever is true,

a transition from this physical body to one suitable for heaven will take place. Paul confirms this in his letter to the Christians at Philippi:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20–21).

What a blessed thought to know that this often tired, worn, feeble body is to be exchanged for one that is perfect and will always remain in that state. (Praise God!)

The Lord's original intent was to usher us into heaven around his eternal throne where we could love and praise him forever more. Heaven is his permanent residence (see Isaiah 66:1). In John 14:20, Jesus called it "my Father's house." It is where God resides with his spiritual family.

When Jesus left this earth, he said he was going to prepare a place for his people (John 14:2). In time, he will return to take us home to join the multitude of the heavenly host waiting to welcome us around God's eternal throne. There we shall live

forever in peace, harmony, safety, happiness and eternal bliss. It is certain to exel our fondest imagination. The apostle Paul attempts to paint the picture with these words: "*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him*" (1 Corinthians 2:9). This much we can count on—the wonders of heaven will surpass anything known to the human experience. To dwell in an environment where there is *no sickness, no pain, no death, no mourning, no crying, no fears, no dread, no hospitals, no doctors, no fatigue and no separation from loved ones stretches the imagination to the limit, but heaven will provide all this and more.*

When judgment day comes (Hebrews 9:27), my prayer is that our names will be found recorded "in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). We surely can agree that no one will make it to heaven by accident. That leaves us with but one safe course, which is to put our spiritual house in order by accepting the Lord's invitation, responding to his instruction, obeying his commands and following his lead. *Thanks be to our heavenly Father who, because of his great mercy, loving favor and infinite goodness, has arranged through Jesus Christ to justify, redeem and reconcile fallen humanity so that heaven will become our eternal home! Are we ready?*

