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David Searle, Edinburgh

## RÉSUMÉ

*De nos jours, peu de gens savent pourquoi Christ est mort. Il est donc important d'aborder cette question.*

*Il y a plusieurs réponses possibles: i. Parce que Ponce Pilate l'a condamné à mort. ii. Parce que le sanhédrin juif l'a condamné. iii. Parce que Judas l'a trahi. Bien que chacune de ces explications de la mort de Christ ait sa part de validité, la réponse que le Nouveau Testament donne à notre question est que Christ est mort pour nos péchés.*

*Dans notre monde postmoderne, cependant, les gens n'ont pas conscience du « péché ». On considère couramment que le péché consiste en crimes horribles tels que l'incitation à s'adonner aux stupéfians ou le meurtre. Pour cette raison, nos contemporains ne peuvent saisir en quoi ils auraient besoin que Christ soit mort pour eux. L'incarnation ajoute encore à la difficulté, car la gloire de Christ a été voilée par son humanité. En outre, sa mort fut un supplice infamant et repoussant. Tandis que la croix constituait pour les Juifs une pierre d'achoppement, pour la plupart de nos contemporains, la croix est folie. Mais il est mort pour les péchés du fait que nous nous trouvons tous condamnés comme pécheurs devant Dieu.*

*La thèse principale de Paul est la suivante: Nous sommes tous « sous l'empire du péché » (v. 9).*

*J'aimerais subdiviser notre texte en cinq parties:*

*1. Nous sommes tous « sous l'empire du péché » (v. 9). Chacun de nous appartient à l'une des deux catégories suivantes: nous sommes,*

*ou bien « sous l'empire du péché », ou bien « sous la grâce ». Les gens aujourd'hui ont du mal à distinguer ces deux conditions. Ils s'imaginent que s'ils mènent une vie suffisamment correcte, tout va bien pour eux. Ce n'est pas ce que la Bible enseigne.*

*2. Une description de la nature humaine (v. 10-12).*

*L'apôtre écrit tout d'abord: « Il n'y a pas un seul juste, pas même un seul ». Il reprend ici avant tout le Psaume 14, mais aussi le texte d'Écclésiaste 7,20. Il agence ses citations en fonction du message qu'il veut communiquer. Le mot « juste » est en général un terme relationnel dans l'Écriture. Mais il est aussi utilisé dans un sens forensique, ou légal, lorsqu'il se réfère à notre statut devant le Dieu saint. Paul cite divers textes de l'Ancien Testament pour démontrer que, devant Dieu, nous sommes tous condamnés car toutes nos relations sont déficientes. On peut se rapporter à cet égard aux textes de Ps 14,1 et Ép 4,18. Ceci ne peut être compris par les seules capacités de l'intelligence humaine. Paul passe en effet de l'affirmation que nul n'est juste, à celle que nul n'a d'intelligence, puis à celle que nul ne se tourne vers Dieu. Beaucoup de gens font leurs prières par habitude, mais sans véritablement se tourner vers Dieu.*

*Nous sommes tous profondément égocentriques (v. 12). Nous sommes par conséquent corrompus.*

*3. Le péché en action (v. 13-17).*

*L'apôtre Paul considère maintenant la nature humaine en activité. Il utilise tout d'abord une image parlante: « Leur*

gosier est un sépulcre ouvert ». Ce que Dieu voit est aussi repoussant que des cadavres en décomposition dans une tombe. Voilà ce qu'est le péché en action! « Ils usent de tromperie avec leur langue » (une citation de Ps. 5,10). Malgré toutes leurs belles paroles, les gens sont profondément malhonnêtes. « Ils ont sous les lèvres un venin d'aspic » (cf. Ps. 140,4). Il suffit de penser à tant de films et de cassettes vidéo pour s'en convaincre. Paul parle de malédiction. Nous blâmons Dieu pour tant de choses.

Les versets 15 et 16 (cf. És. 59,7) n'impliquent pas que chacun de nous soit un meurtrier. C'est simplement là un commentaire d'ordre général pour souligner que la nature humaine est capable de sombrer dans les abîmes les plus profonds quant à sa manière de traiter les autres êtres humains. Que l'on pense à l'exemple de certaines belles-mères en Inde.

« Ils ne connaissent pas le chemin de la paix » (v. 17; cf. És. 59,8). Ceux qui se trouvent « sous l'empire du péché » ne connaissent pas la paix, le shalom, le bien-être et la santé qui découlent d'une juste relation avec Dieu.

#### 4. La raison de la corruption humaine.

« Ils n'ont pour Dieu aucune crainte » (cf. Ps. 36,2). L'homme postmoderne n'a pas la crainte de Dieu. Il peut respecter Christ en le tenant pour un maître important, mais sans la crainte de Dieu, il ne peut concevoir de raisons nécessitant une expiation. Nous craignons Dieu parce que:

- nous ne sommes que cendres et poussière devant Dieu,
- nous sommes ses créatures ayant pour vocation de lui rendre un culte,
- nous avons la vie, le mouvement et l'être par sa grâce,
- et il est notre juge.

Mais les incroyants n'ont aucune crainte de Dieu et la vision du monde que donne la Bible leur est étrangère.

#### 5. Un verdict dévastateur.

En conclusion de cette section, Paul déclare: « Toute bouche est fermée et tout le monde est reconnu coupable devant Dieu ». Il n'y a pas d'excuses devant Dieu. Devant Dieu, le pécheur n'aura rien à répliquer. Il doit être déclaré coupable.

Voilà pourquoi il fallait que Christ meure. Voilà pourquoi nous devons crier: « Ô Dieu, aie pitié de moi, car je suis pécheur! »

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Da im Schottland von heute nur wenige wissen, warum Christus sterben mußte, ist es wichtig, sich diesem Thema zuzuwenden. Drei mögliche Antworten auf die oben gestellte Frage seien an dieser Stelle genannt:

- weil Pontius Pilatus ihn zum Tod verurteilt hat;
- weil ihn der jüdische Hohe Rat verworfen hat;
- weil Judas ihn verraten hat.

Obwohl wir jeden dieser drei Gründe für den Tod Christi zu einem gewissen Grad anerkennen, gilt es, auf die Antwort des NT hinzuweisen, wonach er für unsere Sünden gestorben ist. Die Menschen unserer postmodernen Welt jedoch kennen kein Sündenbewußtsein. Der Begriff 'Sünde' wird vielmehr

lediglich auf verabscheuenswerte Straftaten wie z.B. Drogenhandel oder Mord bezogen. Folglich ist es ihnen verwehrt, die Relevanz von Christi Tod für ihr Leben zu erfassen.

Die Inkarnation ihrerseits vertieft das Problem, da Christi Herrlichkeit durch sein Menschsein verhüllt war. Darüber hinaus handelte es sich bei seinem Tod um ein überaus schändliches und abstoßendes Ende. Während den Juden das Kreuz Christi ein Ärgernis (skandalon) ist, stellt es für die Mehrheit der Menschen von heute eine Torheit dar. Und dennoch gilt, daß er aufgrund der Sünde starb und wir alle somit vor Gott als verurteilte Sünder dastehen. Ich möchte den Abschnitt aus Römer 3 unter fünf Überschriften betrachten.

1. Die Hauptaussage des Paulus: Wir alle sind 'unter der Sünde' (V. 9). Jeder einzelne von uns gehört in eine der beiden folgenden Kategorien: wir sind entweder 'unter der Sünde' oder aber 'unter der Gnade'. Die Menschen von heute können diese Unterscheidung nicht erfassen, da sie denken, daß sie, wenn sie einigermaßen rechtschaffen leben, aus dem Schneider sind. Aus der Sicht der Bibel jedoch ist dies eine Illusion.

2. Beschreibung der menschlichen Natur (V. 10–12). Paulus beginnt mit den Worten 'da ist keiner, der gerecht ist, auch nicht einer'. Hierbei handelt es sich in erster Linie um ein Zitat aus Psalm 14, doch die Worte enthalten zugleich auch eine Anspielung an Prediger 7,20 (Paulus verwendet Zitate auf eine Weise, die seiner Absicht zustatten kommt). Der Begriff 'gerecht' hat in der Schrift grundsätzlich eine relationale Dimension. Doch abgesehen davon wird er auch auf forensische bzw. juristische Weise verwendet, dann nämlich, wenn er sich auf unsere Stellung im Angesicht eines heiligen Gottes bezieht. Paulus verwendet alttestamentliche Zitate um aufzuzeigen, daß wir vor Gott als Verurteilte dastehen, da alle unsere Beziehungen unvollkommen sind (siehe Ps. 14,2 und Eph. 4,18). Dies ist rein menschlich gesehen unverstänglich. Doch der Gedankengang des Paulus verläuft folgendermaßen: 'da ist keiner, der gerecht ist'—'da ist keiner, der verständig ist'—'da ist keiner, der nach Gott fragt'. Viele beten zwar aus Gewohnheit, doch suchen sie dabei nicht Gott. v. 12: wir alle sind von Natur aus egozentrisch und sind infolgedessen 'verdorben'.

3. Sünde in Aktion (V. 13–17). Paulus wendet sich nun der menschlichen Natur in Aktion zu und beginnt mit einem einprägsamen Bild: 'ihr Rachen ist ein offenes Grab'. Was Gott sieht, ist so widerlich wie eine verrottende Leiche in einem Grab. Das ist Sünde in Aktion. 'Mit ihren Zungen betrügen sie'

(zitiert nach Ps. 5,9). Ungeachtet all ihrer schönen Worte sind die Menschen doch von Natur aus betrügerisch. 'Otterngift ist unter ihren Lippen' (Ps. 140,3). Man vergleiche viele Videos und Filme. Paulus spricht von 'Fluch und Bitterkeit'—für wie vieles machen wir nicht Gott verantwortlich. V. 15f. (vgl. Jes. 59,7) besagen nicht, daß jeder einzelne von uns ein Mörder ist—vielmehr handelt es sich hier um eine grundsätzliche Bemerkung die Fähigkeit der menschlichen Natur betreffend, im Umgang mit anderen menschlichen Wesen bis in die tiefsten Tiefen vorzudringen. V. 17: 'den Weg des Friedens kennen sie nicht' (Jes. 59,8). Frieden, Schalom, Ganzheit und Gesundheit als Folge einer rechten Beziehung zu Gott sind denen, die 'unter der Sünde' sind, unbekannt.

4. Der Grund der menschlichen Verdorbenheit. 'Es ist keine Gottesfurcht bei ihnen' (Ps. 36,1). Der postmoderne Mensch kennt keine Gottesfurcht. Er mag Christus als einen großen Lehrer respektieren, doch, der Gottesfurcht ermangelnd, sieht er keine Notwendigkeit für Sühne und Wiedergutmachung. Wir hingegen fürchten Gott, denn

- vor ihm wir sind nur Staub und Asche;
- wir sind, als seine Geschöpfe, dazu geschaffen, ihn anzubeten;
- in seiner Gnade leben, weben und sind wir;
- er ist unser Richter.

Diejenigen jedoch, die noch nicht zu einem neuen Leben erweckt worden sind, haben weder Gottesfurcht noch ein biblisches Weltbild.

5. Das vernichtende Urteil. Paulus beendet den Abschnitt mit den Worten 'damit allen der Mund gestopft werde und alle Welt vor Gott schuldig sei'. Vor Gott gibt es keine Ausreden; jeder Sünder wird im Angesicht Gottes verstummen. Schuldig! Das ist der Grund, weshalb Christus sterben mußte. Das ist der Grund, weshalb wir nur flehen können: 'Gott, sei mir Sünder gnädig'.

I was brought up and educated in Scotland, a small country which lies to the north of England. Many people don't even know Scotland exists (especially Americans who tend to call the United Kingdom 'England'). In my boyhood, most people in Scotland would have been very theologically aware. They had inherited, after all, the tradition of John Knox's teaching. So if you had asked the average Scot fifty years ago, 'Why did Christ die?' you would have received a moderately competent answer. Not so today. In my country, very few people would have any idea at all as to why Christ died. I want to devote this first address, therefore, to considering this question.

When we turn to the accounts in the NT of the crucifixion of Jesus, we can identify several different answers to the question, 'Why did Christ die?' The *first* one would be that he was crucified by Pontius Pilate. Pilate knew perfectly well that Jesus was innocent<sup>1</sup> But he did not want to decide either for or against Jesus. He wanted to release him, but he also wanted to satisfy the crowd. Failing to solve his dilemma, he took water and washed his hands to try and demonstrate his innocence.<sup>2</sup> But the truth was he was a coward, and so his action is remembered in the Creeds, *Suffered under Pontius Pilate*.

A *second* answer to the question would be to say that Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin killed Jesus. When Jesus said to Pilate, 'the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin' (Jn. 19:11), he was perhaps referring to Caiaphas since he used the singular. The people of Jerusalem were also implicated as Peter made very clear in his early sermons.<sup>3</sup> Christ was threatening the priests' authority and making claims for himself which they deeply resented. So they tried to get rid of him.

Yet a *third* answer to our question might be that it was Judas Iscariot who had Jesus killed when he betrayed him out of covetousness. While it is true to say that he was prompted to betray Jesus by Satan, and did so after Satan 'entered into him',<sup>4</sup> nonetheless his action was 'wickedness'.<sup>5</sup> He therefore carries heavy responsibility for the death of Jesus.

While there is clear biblical evidence to support all of these three answers, I want us to consider a *fourth* answer to the question, 'Why did Christ die?' **He died for our sins.** We could consider this statement as amply illustrated by the first three answers already given: Pilate's cowardice is shared by everyone of us, for we too have all tried to appease the enemies of Christ and have failed to take our stand for him; we too have acted in resentment of his imperial claims which threaten our self-reliance and self-righteousness; we too are motivated by covetousness and all of us have acted in our own material interests to the detriment of his claims upon us. The case against us is clear as sharers of the sins of those who had him killed.

However, our concern must be for men and women today who appear to have little or no awareness either of the fact of their sin or of the need of the death of Christ for their sin. In our postmodern society, sin is apparently restricted to paedophiles, murderers, rapists, terrorists, drug pushers, those who mug defenceless old ladies and those who swindle banks out of millions of pounds. Ordinary people are seemingly OK. They please themselves and do their own thing on the widely held assumption that anything and everything about their lives is quite acceptable as long as they are not paedophiles, murderers, rapists, terrorists, drug pushers, muggers of old ladies or embezzlers. It seems to me that we Christians have seriously failed in presenting to our generation the reason why Christ died.

It might be argued that part of the problem why people do not consider the death of Christ with any seriousness is the Incarnation itself. After all, our Lord made himself nothing and took upon himself the nature of a servant.<sup>6</sup> As Isaiah expresses it, 'He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him' (53:2). It is not therefore immediately obvious to people that this Nazarene carpenter turned teacher might be very God!

The manner of his death increases the problem. While it has become fashionable to sentimentalise Christ's death, the reality was very different. He hung in shame, his nakedness exposed to public gaze. Scholars tell us that those who were crucified could not control their bodily functions, but urinated and defecated down their legs. Little wonder then that our modern man and woman fail to see anything of value or relevance in the death of Christ. It was truly a disgusting death. There have been plenty of deaths which have impressed the world far more by their heroism and nobility.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing . . . a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1:18,23). Our postmodern person sees the foolishness of Christ's death. It takes a Jew to recognise in the cross 'a stumbling-block' (σκανδαλον) because the Jew is far more aware than most of the nature and holiness of God. The Jew has been trained to know something at least of what constitutes sin and guilt. The Jew knows that God claims total authority over us as his creatures. He knows that God has laid down laws for human behaviour and strict regulations about the way to approach himself. The stumbling-block for the Jew is that only by this hideous, cursed death can he be justified before a righteous God.

The dominant reason for Christ's death was that Jew and Gentile alike stand condemned as sinners. In Paul's words in Romans 3:19, Every mouth is silenced and the whole world is accountable before God. We have been separated from God by our sin. Let's consider all too briefly these words we read together.

### 1. Paul's main proposition: *We are 'all under sin'* v. 9.

I want to divide Romans 3:9–20 into five main parts. The first is his statement in verse 9. In these words, he is summarising his argument from 1:18, but also anticipating his statement in vs. 19–20. After making certain categorical statements in ch. 1 about non-Jews, he has

discussed at length the position of the Jews. His conclusion is unequivocal: Jews and Gentiles alike are 'all under sin'. In v. 19, he uses a similar phrase, 'under the law'. For our purposes just now, we can take these two phrases as approximately synonymous. So what does he mean by this phrase, 'under sin'?

In the Bible, there are two conditions that people may be in, and only two: You are I are either 'under sin' or 'under grace'. The Bible doesn't ask whether or not we are good people, kind to our neighbours, pleasant in our temperaments, well thought of in our communities. It asks, Are we under sin or under grace? Are we citizens of the kingdom of this world, or are we citizens of the heavenly city whose architect and builder is God?

This is precisely where people go wrong today in our postmodern society. Their concern is entirely about pleasing themselves, appreciating the good in others, being tolerant of various cultures and beliefs and having mutual respect for any and everyone whatever their creed. There is of course much to be commended in that kind of tolerance. But the postmodern tolerance fails to diagnose and recognise the truth about our relationship with the Lord God. It fails to see that we all stand condemned because we are under sin. We are born that way. In Paul's phrase elsewhere, we are 'in Adam'.<sup>7</sup> We are born with sin in us, our humanity contaminated by sin.

That, then, is the apostle's proposition, that as a result of the Fall, the condition of every single man and woman in this world is that all are 'under sin'. Let's hurry on to the next stage of his argument:

### 2. A description of human nature vs. 10–12.

He begins, 'There is no one righteous, not even one.' Here Paul is quoting mainly from Psalm 14, but also alluding to Ecclesiastes 7:20. He arranges his quotations to suit his purpose.

The word 'righteous' is complex as you well know. I hold that it generally carries a relational meaning. The person is

righteous who is in a good relationship with others. Scripture is concerned with two great relationships and possibly a third. The first is that vertical relationship between each one of us and God. The second is the horizontal relationship between ourselves and others, whether wife or husband or children or neighbours or employer or colleagues at work. The possible third relationship is the inward relationship we have with ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

But this whole word group is also used in the Bible in a legal or forensic sense. It then refers to our status or standing before a holy God. While I myself incline to the view that throughout this chapter the relational meaning of righteousness obtains, for reasons which will become apparent as we proceed, the arguments for a forensic connotation also are overwhelming. So the apostle uses the OT quotations to declare that before the Judge of all the earth, those under sin cannot stand before God for their relationships are all in some way deficient, most all their relationship with him.

This may seem to our postmodern person to be too sweeping a statement. But the plumb-line of the divine standards leaves us without any argument. We are to love the Lord our God with all our soul and heart and mind and strength, and we are to love our neighbours as ourselves!<sup>9</sup> And however men and women may *feel* about it—and what an emphasis today on ‘feelings’!—the divine standard cannot be gainsaid.

Paul continues with his remorseless logic: ‘There is no one who understands, there is none who seeks God . . .’ (Ps. 14:2 = Ps. 53:2.) Elsewhere he states, ‘They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts’ (Eph. 4:18). He is saying that sin has affected our mental capacity to grasp the truth of God. This condition of having a darkened mind, that is, a mind clouded over so that the simplest truths of the Gospel are completely meaningless, leads to separation from God, flowing as it does from ignorance about him because the heart has been hardened.

Have you on occasion tried to explain the truths of the Gospel to people of exceptionally high intelligence? But no matter how much you try, the simplest facts of the Gospel are beyond their understanding. Truths which little children can understand are apparently beyond the grasp of highly intellectual people.<sup>10</sup>

But that is not all. This general condition of those under sin means also that men and women do not even seek God. They neither know him nor *want* to know him. See the way in which the apostle’s mind is working, and the way in which he orders his quotations from the OT. There is an inexorable logic about his thought. First, there is none *righteous*. Then, sinners are unrighteous because they do not *understand* these things. Now, sinners have no understanding because they do not *seek* God.

Those who have been pastors will know that there are many good people in the world who have been taught to pray regularly. They attend their churches conscientiously. They are very religious. But they are not seeking God. Not, that is, in the way the Psalmist was seeking God when he said, ‘As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God’ (Ps. 42:1). There are many looking for peace of mind, or for self-justification. But by nature none of us seek God. Men and women do not set their hearts to enter his presence, to find him, to come before him in worship, longing for him above everything else. I believe it would be true to say that to approach the living God and bow down in his presence is about the last thing that those outside of Christ ever want to do.

By nature we resent him. By nature we say, ‘Get out of my life and leave me to run my affairs the way I want. Keep away from me, God. I want no interference from you.’ So that when someone does begin to seek after God, there has been a complete change in direction and that can only be accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. But now on to verse 12.

At this point, Paul follows almost exactly the LXX in quoting from Psalm 14:2.

Look at what the Psalmist says. First that we have all gone out of the way. It follows, does it not, that if we do not seek God or understand him we are going to go in the opposite direction to that in which he commands us to go. God's way in matters of morality points along a narrow road, yet a safe road designed for our blessing. But we deliberately take a different road devoted to self-satisfaction irrespective of the effect on others. My way, my will, my opinions, me, my, mine.

The next statement is that as a consequence of this self-seeking and going our own way we have become worthless. NIV in Psalm 14 translates the Greek as 'have become corrupt', whereas here it translates the same word 'have become worthless'. In secular Greek, this word was used of food or milk that had gone off. Have you ever left something in the back of the fridge at home and forgotten all about it. Weeks later, you notice it and see it has become mouldy and foul. That's one way in which the word was used. Another way it was used was of a dog's barking when there is absolutely no reason for the dog to bark—you know how some dogs bark for barking's sake: they are a public nuisance, barking at the moon, or at shadows, or at a passing bird.

It's a strong word, amounting to a devastating comment on our human condition. However, we must not do the apostle or the Psalmist an injustice. They are not saying that people cannot perform some useful or good or noble deeds. They are not saying that those 'under sin' cannot compose beautiful music, or write fine books, or paint skilful portraits. Their concern is to speak about our standing before God. They are saying that in the sight of our Creator we are morally useless, altogether rotten and corrupt—every single one of us, without exception. No matter what handsome, pleasant, well-intentioned people we are—all we are and all we do is worthless before God.

### 3. Sin in action vv. 13-17

Paul now moves in his thought from his description of fallen human nature to that

fallen human nature *in action*. One commentator writes that Paul now 'holds before [us] the most terrifying mirror that [we] have ever looked into in [our] lives.'<sup>11</sup> Just brief comments on each of these devastating statements.

'Their throats are open graves . . .' (Ps. 5:9). Some years ago, some young people in my church were away for a week-end in the hills. A group of them were walking on the moors, when they stumbled on a human body that was in an advanced state of decomposition. A man had been out walking in the hills alone when he had taken a heart attack and fallen down and died. That had been many months before. Those young people, all of them still at school, were shocked and nauseated to see this rotting human corpse lying across their pathway. The smell was foul.

This little phrase says that if we look into the mouth of a man or woman and see what God sees, the sight is as revolting and nauseating as the rotting remains of some corpse. It is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks.<sup>12</sup> That is sin in action! Those who do not understand or seek God but go their own way and have become worthless. Their hearts are like open graves with all the putrefaction they contain.

'Their tongues practise deceit' (still from Ps. 5:9). We haven't time to bring out the tragic truth of these words. But we all know how deceitful human nature is, how we say one thing and mean another, how people seem to be so charming when in their hearts they are cursing the moment they met you! High society is the same. Lovely words of warm friendship, but as soon as the other's back is turned, the most biting, vicious comments! And oh! how we twist our explanation of events to show ourselves up in the best possible light! We are unable to help ourselves as our tongues practise deceit.

'The poison of vipers is on their lips' (Ps. 140:3). 'Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness' (Ps. 10:7). One thinks of the media, of the magazines produced for adolescents and the tv and cinema films. What venom is injected into those whom the fangs of the media bite! This modern



serpent is as cunning as the old serpent that seduced Eve. The message seems reasonable, the suggestions attractive, but hidden under the lips is deadly venom which will ultimately kill the victim.

What about the cursing and bitterness to which Paul refers? Note that we are not to understand that he is saying that those under sin constantly use foul language. Not that. Let me remind you again that his concern is our relationship to God. Here he saying that the natural man or woman does not submit to God. When something goes wrong, some disaster or illness strikes, if men's thoughts turn to God at all, it is to curse him bitterly. This is part of that resentment against God which lurks in every human soul. We blame him for our mistakes. We blame him for the suffering in the world. 'How can there be a God when the people of Sudan suffer so much?' we ask.

Verses 15 and 16 (Is. 59:7), do not mean that every one of us is a murderer. Rather it is a general reflection and comment on the capability human nature has to sink to the deepest depths of depravity and shame in our treatment of other human beings. One has only to turn on the tv news to see intense suffering in a score of places across this world as those who have the power of life and death over others inflict suffering on them. Last year I visited India and was shocked to read each week in the *Indian Times* of mothers-in-law who murdered their daughters-in-law in order to find for their sons another bride who would bring a fresh dowry with her. These were not vicious, hardened criminals, these mothers-in-law. Rather were they fallen human beings who saw the opportunity of riches by killing defenceless young women who were in their power. I understand that Indian prisons hold astonishingly high numbers of such women who have been convicted of such murders. And they are only the ones who have been caught! More recently, we have seen the devastation in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam.

The last sentence in this section: v. 17, 'The way of peace they do not know' (Is 59:8). Peace, *shalom*, that wholeness and

health which flows from a right relationship with God and permeates every level of our living and thinking—such peace is unknown to those 'under sin'. How could they have *shalom*? They do not understand the ways of God; they do not seek him; they do not know him. Rather, they resent him and are hell-bent on going their own way. How could they have peace when they are far from him?

#### 4. The reason for this human corruption

'There is no fear of God before their eyes.' The full quotation from Psalm 36:1 reads: 'A burden is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: there is no fear of God before his eyes.' Now this is a most significant statement of Scripture. We must not lightly pass over it. It is at this point we come to the heart of the problem in bringing the Christian message to postmodern society. Your postmodern person has no fear of God. He may respect Jesus as a great teacher. He may be interested in attending a Christian service to hear about Jesus Christ. She may even attend a home Bible Study Group to investigate the Christian faith. I have known many who have done this and have found themselves deeply impressed by the teaching of the Gospels. But there is still as yet 'no fear of God before their eyes'. And until they begin to know the fear of God, there is no reason for the Cross of Christ. Let me explain why.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'<sup>13</sup> You recall how when Adam and Eve first sinned, they hid themselves because they were afraid. You remember how when they were expelled from God's presence that an angel with a flaming sword which turned every way stood at the entrance to the Garden. You remember how when Abraham prayed for the two cities of the plain, he said, 'I have been so bold to speak to the Lord, I who am nothing but dust and ashes.' You remember how when Jacob awoke from his dream he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place. This is none other

than the house of God, the gate of heaven.' You remember how when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, he hid his face for he was afraid to look on God. So we could go on. Why this fear of God? Why?

I would suggest four reasons. *First*, because God is God and we are but dust of the earth. We are mere worms compared to his incomparable glory and majesty. *Second*, because we his creatures are made to worship him. And remember the meaning of that word worship is 'serve'. Some Christians order God about as if he were a kind of genie of Aladdin's lamp who is there to be brought up on demand and told what to do for their comfort. How false and how wrong. He has made us for himself. Our proper posture before him is to bow low at his feet, to hide our faces and say, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' *Third*, our lives are sustained by God and all our days are numbered in his book. If he was to withdraw from us his hand of providence for just one moment, we would cease to exist. We live and move and have our being by his grace. And *fourth*, he is the Judge of all the earth who will demand an account of how we steward our days and years and those gifts with which he has endowed us.

But unregenerate men and women have no fear of God. They may believe in him in an intellectual kind of way, assenting to the possibility or probability of his existence in some form or another. But they do not bow before him as their Creator and Lord, ever to be worshipped and adored in holy fear. And herein lies the root of sin. Whether that sin be selfishness, rebellion against the laws of God, deceit, crookedness, failure, or unbelief—whatever expression sin may take, at the root of it lies this absence of fear of God.

I was speaking to a friend recently whose parents had worked for many years in China. He told me that his father discovered there were two Bible books which when read by Chinese led them to faith in Christ—Genesis and Romans. Why these two books? Because they both present a Biblical world view. That is

what our postmodern society has lost. And that is why there is no fear of God before their eyes.

## 5. The devastating verdict

In conclusion, see how Paul ends this section: 'Every mouth is silenced and the whole world is held accountable to God.' There will be no excuses or arguments before the Judge of all the earth. There will be no discussion of our sins. No blaming someone else as Adam did in the Garden, and then Eve did. No protestations of innocence. Sinner man, sinner woman, standing before Almighty God will not have a word to utter. Before that sea of crystal that surrounds the throne, encircled by the heavenly beings adoring and praising God, the sinner will be utterly lost for words. Speechless, like the man without the wedding clothes.

Guilty before God! Brunner has written, 'Guilt is that element in sin by which it belongs unalterably to the past, and as this unalterable element determines the present destiny of each soul.'<sup>14</sup> Guilt means that our past can never be made good. Indeed, we only truly conceive our lives as a whole when we see them in this dark shadow of guilt.

And that is why that terrible, hideous, shameful death of Christ had to be. That is why the Lord of Glory broke into time and history, and carried on his spotless soul all my sin, all my rebellion, my ignorance and darkness, my rebellion, my perversity, my deceit, my pride, my uncleanness, my failure, the poison and venom in my heart. He died for our sins.

Let us then prostrate ourselves before him in dust and ashes. Let us fall before him and cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

Approach, my soul, the mercy seat, where  
Jesus answers prayer,

There humbly fall before his feet, for  
none can perish there.

Thy promise is my only plea; with this I  
venture nigh:

Thou callest burdened souls to thee,  
and such, O Lord, am I.

Bowed down beneath a load of sin, by  
Satan sorely pressed,

By war without and fears within, I  
come to thee for rest.

Be thou my Shield and Hiding-place,  
that, sheltered near thy side,

I may my fierce accuser face, and tell  
him thou hast died.

O wondrous love! to bleed and die, to  
bear the cross and shame,

That guilty sinners such as I, might  
plead thy gracious Name!

*John Newton, 1725–1807*

## Notes

- 1 Jn. 18:38.
- 2 Mt. 27:24.
- 3 Acts 3:12ff.
- 4 Jn. 13:2,27.
- 5 Acts 1:18.
- 6 Phil. 2:
- 7 Rom. 5:12ff, 17ff; 1 Cor. 15:22.
- 8 Acts of righteousness in Matt. 6:1 are evidently in these three areas: the horizontal, i.e., giving to the needy, the verticle, i.e., prayer, and the inward, i.e., fasting. See vs. 2–18.
- 9 Matt. 22:36–39.
- 10 Matt. 11:25–27.
- 11 D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 2:1–3:20*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1989, p. 210.
- 12 Matt. 12:34.
- 13 Prov. 1:7.
- 14 Brunner, *The Mediator*, Lutterworth, London, 1934, p. 443.

- **The Cross of Christ 2**
- **The Righteousness of God Romans 3:21-22**
- **La croix de Christ et la justice de Dieu (Romains 3:21-22)**
- **Das Kreuz Christi und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes (Römer 3:21-22)**

## RÉSUMÉ

*Il arrive qu'un médecin émette un diagnostic incorrect et cela peut avoir de graves conséquences. Ce n'est pas le cas de l'apôtre Paul. Il ne se presse pas pour nous amener à la question de la foi en Christ, mais il pose des fondements solides et sûrs. Nous avons là quelque chose à apprendre de lui.*

*« Mais maintenant » (3.21) . . . Après avoir parlé de notre corruption et de notre culpabilité devant Dieu, Paul dit avec soulagement: « Mais maintenant . . . », Christ est venu! La croix représente le grand tournant de l'histoire humaine. Remarquez l'indication temporelle véhiculée par ces mots: « Mais maintenant ». L'œuvre de Christ est un fait historique et non une pure théorie.*

**1. L'Évangile est théocentrique.**  
*Nous sommes en train de devenir de plus en plus centrés sur nous-mêmes, y compris dans les Églises évangéliques: la grande relation je-tu tend à être remplacée par la relation je-moi. Il n'en est pas ainsi avec Paul. Il écrit: « Mais maintenant, la justice de Dieu a été manifestée ». Il place Dieu au centre. Le salut commence avec Dieu.*

*Je pense que l'expression « justice de Dieu » se réfère à la fois à l'attribut de Dieu qu'est la justice et à la justice qui nous est imputée. L'attribut de Dieu qu'est sa justice comporte à la fois une justice passive et une justice active: il concerne à la fois les relations divines au sein de sa Personne et ses relations avec nous, son peuple. Cependant, le mot 'justice' est aussi employé dans un sens*

*forensique ou légal. Paul vient de parler de notre culpabilité devant le juge, en considérant que le monde entier a des comptes à lui rendre. Maintenant, il parle d'un Dieu qui acquitte le coupable. Le salut est trinitaire et théocentrique.*

**2. Le but de la loi.**

*Paul écrit: « sans la loi a été manifestée la justice de Dieu, attestée dans la loi et les prophètes ». On peut d'abord définir la loi comme tout le système judaïque d'observances cérémonielles et culturelles tel qu'il est institué dans l'Ancien Testament. Il s'agit de la loi vue comme un ensemble de commandements ou comme exigeant la production d'œuvres.*

*Calvin a défini trois usages de la loi. Premièrement, elle convainc de péché, deuxièmement, elle réfrène le mal chez l'incroyant, troisièmement, et c'est là son usage principal, elle fait connaître au croyant la pensée et la volonté de Dieu. Il est important de réaffirmer ces choses à l'heure actuelle, pour éviter deux erreurs, d'une part l'antinomisme, et, de l'autre, l'idée selon laquelle la première alliance aurait été une alliance des œuvres qui aurait échoué. Dans les deux cas, on perd de vue le but principal de la loi.*

*La loi annonçait prophétiquement la venue de la grâce en Jésus-Christ. Jean parle littéralement d'une grâce à la place d'une grâce (1.16). En effet, lorsqu'on comprend bien la loi en tenant compte de sa fonction prophétique, on la voit comme une grâce donnée au travers de la loi divine. La grâce plus grande qui est venue par Jésus-Christ a remplacé la grâce de la loi. Il y a trop*

peu de prédicateurs de nos jours qui connaissent l'enseignement de la loi dans l'Ancien Testament. Cela est pourtant nécessaire à la compréhension de l'œuvre de Christ.

3. *Le salut est plus que le pardon. Le message du pardon est glorieux et merveilleux, mais la portée de la croix ne se réduit pas à cela. Il y a aussi la justice de Dieu et cette justice imputée par Dieu. Cet enseignement est source d'encouragement et de force: notre relation avec lui est rétablie et notre statut en sa présence est celui d'hommes et de femmes qui sont, non seulement acceptés, mais aussi accueillis favorablement, à bras ouverts.*

4. *Par la foi en Jésus-Christ pour tous ceux qui croient. Il nous faut définir la foi, car la confusion règne à ce propos. Je conçois la foi comme comportant trois éléments. Premièrement, la foi implique la compréhension de la vérité. En Ép 4.17–24, Paul utilise de nombreux vocables appartenant au domaine cognitif. La foi comporte le savoir de certaines choses au sujet de Jésus-Christ. Deuxièmement, la foi est soumission à cette vérité. On se souvient de la manière dont Saül de Tarse s'est soumis à Christ: « Qui es-tu, Seigneur ? »*

*Troisièmement, la foi est confiance: elle consiste à s'en remettre à la miséricorde et à la compassion de Dieu en Christ.*

*La foi selon ces trois aspects est produite en nous par le Saint-Esprit de Dieu, car, sans lui, nous sommes morts dans nos péchés.*

5. *Le péché et la gloire divine (v. 23). Alors que la forme verbale « tous ont péché » est un aoriste, le verbe suivant « et sont privés » est un présent, ce qui implique que nous demeurons dans cet état. On peut remarquer le lien établi ici entre la gloire de Dieu et le péché. J'ai rencontré au moins huit façons de rendre compte de cette connexion unique. Leon Morris écrit: « Les commentateurs tendent à importer leur propre compréhension dans ce texte ». J'ai ma suggestion personnelle. Le langage que Paul va employer est celui du sacrifice, qui nous oriente indubitablement vers la pensée de la croix. Or Jean, dans son Évangile, considère la mort de Christ—avec tout ce qu'elle a d'infamant—, comme une glorification! Voilà qui constitue pour les Juifs une pierre d'achoppement, et qui est une folie pour les païens: la gloire est que Dieu était en Christ pour réconcilier le monde avec lui-même, le Dieu juste était à l'œuvre pour obtenir la justice pour les coupables.*

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Ärzte stellen von Zeit zu Zeit falsche Diagnosen, die tragische Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen können. Auf Paulus trifft dies nicht zu! Er ist keineswegs übereilt in seinem Anliegen, uns zum Glauben an Christus zu führen, sondern legt zunächst eine solide und sichere Grundlage. Wir sollten von seinem Beispiel lernen.*

*Römer 3,21: 'nun aber . . .' Auf die furchtbare Bloßstellung unserer Niederträchtigkeit und Schuld vor Gott folgt der befreiende Aufruf 'nun aber . . .'. Christus ist gekommen! Das Kreuz ist der Wendepunkt der Menschheitsgeschichte. Die Worte 'nun aber . . .'*

*implizieren ein zeitliches Geschehen, d.h. das Werk Christi ist eine historische Tatsache, nicht eine Theorie.*

1. *Das Evangelium ist theozentrisch. Wir alle, die evangelikalen Gemeinden eingeschlossen, werden immer egozentrischer; es geht uns nicht mehr in erster Linie um die Ich-Gott-Beziehung, sondern nur noch um uns selbst. Paulus jedoch beginnt mit den Worten 'nun aber ist . . . die Gerechtigkeit Gottes offenbart'. Gott steht im Mittelpunkt; die Erlösung geht von ihm aus. Der griechische Text liest wörtlich 'die Gerechtigkeit Gottes' (Luther übersetzte dies mit 'die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott*

gilt'). M. E. meint der Begriff beides, die göttliche Gerechtigkeit als Eigenschaft Gottes als auch die Gerechtigkeit, die, von Gott kommend, uns zugerechnet wird. Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes als göttliche Eigenschaft bezieht sich sowohl auf die 'iustitia passiva' als auch auf die 'iustitia activa' und verweist somit auf die Beziehungen innerhalb der Gottheit als auch auf Gottes Beziehung zu seinem Volk. Darüber hinaus jedoch wird der Begriff Gerechtigkeit auch in einem forensischen (juristischen) Sinne gebraucht. Paulus hatte aufgezeigt, daß wir vor dem göttlichen Richter schuldig sind—die gesamte Welt ist Gott verantwortlich. An dieser Stelle nun verweist Paulus auf einen Gott, der die Schuldigen freispricht. Obwohl die Erlösung eine trinitarische ist, ist sie doch auch zugleich theozentrisch.

## 2. Der Zweck des Gesetzes.

'Nun aber ist ohne Zutun des Gesetzes die Gerechtigkeit Gottes offenbart, bezeugt durch das Gesetz und die Propheten.' Mit dem Gesetz ist zunächst einmal das System des jüdischen Zeremonialgesetzes gemeint, wie wir es in den Schriften des AT finden. Calvin unterschied drei Anliegen des Gesetzes: erstens, von Sünde zu überführen, zweitens, die Nichtwiedergeborenen vor Sünde zu bewahren, und drittens, die Gläubigen über den Willen Gottes zu informieren. Diese Einsichten sind auch heute noch von Bedeutung, indem sie uns vor zwei Irrtümern bewahren können, nämlich den des Antinomismus einerseits sowie der Auffassung, wonach der erste Bund ein Bund der Werke war und als solcher versagt hat, andererseits. Beide Irrtümer vermögen nicht den bedeutendsten Zweck des Gesetzes zu erkennen, nämlich den, auf prophetische Weise auf die zukünftige Gnade in Christus hingewiesen zu haben. In Joh 1,16 heißt es wörtlich 'Gnade anstelle von Gnade' (charin anti charitos). Das Gesetz, richtig verstanden (einschließlich seiner prophetischen Funktion), war Gnade, und zwar eine durch das göttliche Gesetz vermittelte

Gnade. Die größere Gnade aber, die durch Christus kam, ersetzte die Gnade des Gesetzes. Nur wenige Prediger von heute sind mit dem alttestamentlichen Verständniss des Gesetzes vertraut. Dies jedoch ist erforderlich, wenn wir Christus und sein Werk verstehen wollen.

## 3. Erlösung beinhaltet mehr als nur Vergebung.

So großartig und wunderbar die Botschaft von der Vergebung ist, das Kreuz verweist auf mehr noch, nämlich sowohl auf die Gerechtigkeit Gottes als auch auf die Gerechtigkeit, die, von Gott kommend, uns zugerechnet wird. Diese Botschaft ist eine Quelle der Ermutigung und Stärkung: unsere Beziehung zu Gott ist wiederhergestellt worden und unser Status vor ihm ist nun der von Männern und Frauen, die nicht nur angenommen, sondern willkommen geheißen und von Gott liebevoll in die Arme geschlossen worden sind.

## 4. Durch den Glauben an Christus gilt sie allen, die glauben.

Es ist notwendig, den Begriff 'Glauben' zu definieren, da er oft mißverstanden wird. M. E. vollzieht er sich in drei Schritten. Erstens ist Glaube ein Verstehen der Wahrheit, wie die in Eph. 4,17-24 verwendeten kognitiven Begriffe deutlich machen. Wir müssen bestimmte Fakten über Jesus Christus wissen, bevor wir glauben können. Zweitens bedeutet Glaube, sich dieser Wahrheit zu unterwerfen. Man erinnere sich, wie Saulus von Tarsus sich Christus unterwarf: 'wer bist du, Herr?' Drittens beinhaltet Glaube Vertrauen. Vertrauen bedeutet, sich ganz auf das Erbarmen und Mitleid Gottes in Christus zu werfen. Alle drei Stadien des Glaubens werden vom Heiligen Geist Gottes initiiert. Ohne ihn sind wir tot in unseren Sünden.

## 5. Sünde und die Herrlichkeit Gottes (V. 23).

Die Zeitform des Verbs 'ermangeln'

*drückt aus, daß wir fortgesetzt der Herrlichkeit Gottes ermangeln. Auffallend ist hier die verblüffende und einzigartige Kombination von Herrlichkeit und Sünde, für die mir mindestens acht Erklärungen begegnet sind. Leon Morris bemerkt in diesem Zusammenhang, daß 'die Ausleger dazu tendieren, jeweils ihre eigene Bedeutung in die Passage hineinzulesen.' Ich möchte hier einen eigenen Vorschlag anbringen. Paulus wird im Anschluß an*

*unsere Stelle Opferterminologie verwenden und uns unzweideutig zum Kreuz weisen. Johannes seinerseits in seinem Evangelium verstand den Tod Christi—all seiner Schande ungeachtet—als Herrlichkeit. Den Juden ein Ärgernis und den Heiden eine Torheit, besteht die Herrlichkeit darin, daß Gott in Christus die Welt mit sich versöhnt hat; der gerechte Gott handelte in Gerechtigkeit, somit Gerechtigkeit für die Ungerechten erwirkend.*

I have a close friend who just two weeks ago received very bad news from his doctor. A young man with two sons still at school, for ten years he has been treated for an illness he didn't have—through a wrong diagnosis. The truth was he had a brain tumour which has now been discovered but which is now inoperable. How would you feel if your doctors made that kind of wrong diagnosis? Not so Paul. He has been demonstrating to us beyond any possible argument that we stand in the presence of the Judge of all the earth as guilty sinners, our mouths shut, all our words silenced, deserving nothing but eternal punishment. However, unlike my friend's doctors, Paul has exciting news of how we guilty sinners may be saved from condemnation!

Now I am speaking to you as one who has been in the pastoral ministry for over thirty years. I have become persuaded that too many preachers can be in too much of a hurry to bring people to the point of commitment to Jesus Christ. Any building is only as good as the foundation on which it is built. Likewise, we need a solid foundation when we are seeking to build the life of God in the souls of men and women. Paul has been preparing that foundation by cutting away those false ideas we have about ourselves until he is down to the bedrock of the reality of our condition in the sight of God.

Some of you may train those who are going to be preachers. Teach them to observe the apostle's method and to learn from it. Teach them to prepare the ground well and in their preaching to demonstrate from the Word of God that we are

all accountable to God, and that we have no means of repaying our massive debt! Teach them to be thorough and to follow closely the great apostle's method.

Romans 3:21 begins: 'But now . . .' From that devastating verdict of our guilt before God, Paul turns to the passion of his life and work: *Jesus Christ has come*. Jesus Christ has lived and has died and his Cross is all Paul's boasting. He is now turning our minds to the meaning of the Cross and the work accomplished there. So with immense relief, having been broken by his exposure of our vileness before God we hear him cry, 'But now!' There is a shining hope! There is a way! The way of the Cross. The Cross is nothing less than the turning point in human history. 'But now!' There is another implication here which we should not miss. It is a point the apostle never tires of making in his exposition of the Gospel. He is implying in these two little words that what he is setting out is not some theory he has dreamed up. This is not a new philosophy, a new school of thought he is propounding. 'But now' means he is referring to historical fact. Jesus Christ has been born a Man, has lived and has died and been raised from the dead. The Cross stands as an historical event! We must not miss that implication of the temporal force of the words 'But now'.<sup>1</sup> So we come to the main burden of the verses for today.

### 1. The Gospel is theocentric

Recently I spent an evening with good friends who wanted to tell me about the

exciting things happening in their church. As I listened, my heart sank, as it became increasingly apparent to me that this lively congregation was wandering further and further away from the teaching of Scripture. As gently as I could, I suggested certain things they were saying were distorting and changing the meaning of the NT. They brushed my comments to one side and said, 'We don't bother about things like that. We're not purists like you!'

I can only speak for Scotland and Ireland, the two countries in which I have ministered. I have to say that thinking and worship and singing and preaching are becoming less and less theocentric. Instead of the 'I-Thou' relationship, we have the 'I-me' relationship: how *I* feel, whether *I* am comfortable with what's going on, whether it appeals to *me*, whether it suits *my* needs at this moment. Not so Paul's theology of the Cross! He begins, 'But now a righteousness from God . . . has been made known.' God is at the centre. Salvation begins with God. The Saviour is the Mediator between *God* and man. Christ brings us to *God*. It was God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. And now, in the Cross of Christ, it is the righteousness of God which has been made known.

Think about this phrase translated in the NIV as 'a righteousness from God'. You will know that many of the commentators want to translate it as the NIV does, 'a righteousness *from* God', understanding the phrase here to refer to a righteousness God imputes to sinners. Personally, I prefer to understand this phrase with those commentators who read it as referring *both* to the attribute of God's righteousness, and then, on the grounds of that attribute, to the righteousness which he imputes to sinners.<sup>2</sup>

I don't want to enter into the debate that has been going on for some years now about the relationship of righteousness to law and whether here Paul is referring to the means of 'getting in' to the covenant (as E. P. Sanders has argued<sup>3</sup>). That is not my purpose. Rather I will restrict myself to a brief comment on the meaning of the

word 'righteousness' which I understand Paul here uses with a dual connotation: first referring to *our relationship with God and his relationship with us*.

I hold that δικαιοσύνη is predominantly a term of relationships.<sup>4</sup> Our God is righteous towards himself and therefore in his activity is righteous. (We may distinguish these two as 'iustitia passiva' and 'iustitia activa'.) This means he is also righteous towards us his wayward creatures. On the one hand, in his righteousness he must deal justly and severely with the guilty. On the other hand, because of his righteousness, he has provided in his mercy—also an aspect of his righteousness—a righteousness which is available to the unrighteous! That is, he has provided us with the means by which unrighteousness can be put away so that we enter into a right *relationship* with him.

However, righteousness—complex concept that it is—has a second meaning for it cannot only be understood of restored relationships. It is also used in a legal sense in this passage of *our standing before a holy God*. Paul's argument requires it to be so. He has spoken of our guilt before the Judge—the whole world is accountable to God. Now he speaks of a God who acquits the guilty!

Salvation, then, is theocentric. Trinitarian, yes—how could it not be? But nonetheless, essentially theocentric. It is *God* with whom we have to do. It is *God* the first Person of the Trinity who initiates our salvation. The great theme of this whole discourse of Romans is 'the righteousness of God'. In our thinking, our writing, our preaching, our worship and praise, let us never forget that, and let us maintain this biblical emphasis of theocentricity.

## 2. The purpose of the law

Paul writes that 'the righteousness of God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify'. We must first define law. I take it Paul uses the word in the sense of the whole Judaistic system of ceremonial



observances and worship laid down in the OT Scriptures, law therefore 'as commandment or as constraining to and producing works'.<sup>5</sup> This is clearly Paul's meaning, following as it does on his comments on law in the previous verse where he has stated that 'no one will be declared righteous by observing the law'. However Paul qualifies this comment by hastening to remind us the Law testified to this righteousness of God. It is necessary, therefore, to remind ourselves of the purpose of the Law.

According to Calvin, the Law had a threefold purpose. First, 'while it shows the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness . . . The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both. . . .' Thus it constrains us to seek for grace.

'The second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats of the law.' The unregenerate need 'a bridle to restrain them from so slackening the reins on the lust of the flesh as to fall clean away from all pursuit of righteousness.'

'The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper use of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.' It will enable them to learn the nature of God's will for them and confirm their understanding of that will. It will also rouse them to obedience and draw them back from the slippery paths of transgression.<sup>6</sup>

Calvin gives us a good start in seeking to understand how the Law (and Prophets) testify to the righteousness of God. If we accept Calvin's comments then here is a powerful incentive to Christians to continue to study and to teach the Law. Men and women need it to warn, inform, convict, and condemn them. The profligate need it to restrain them. Believers need it to reveal the will of God to them.

Such insights into the purpose of the law are as important today as they have ever been on account of two common errors which are being widely taught in many churches. First we have a re-emergence of antinomianism so that in many pulpits a cavalier and uninformed attitude to the holy law of God is being conveyed to Christian people. The argument goes that because Christ is the end of the law<sup>7</sup> (and 'end' is understood solely as 'termination' and not as 'fulfilment'), the only remaining law is love—and of course, as with much erroneous teaching, there is an element of truth there. But without the restraints and clear teaching of the will and mind of God contained in the law, this law of love tends to have few boundaries and can lead to an acceptance of standards which are far removed from biblical teaching.

A second error is the teaching which says that the first covenant was a covenant of works intended to provide righteousness before God for those who kept it. However, that first means of righteousness failed, though apparently, in theory at least, it might have succeeded if only men and women had been more obedient. Its failure was why God sent his Son to make a second (and this time a successful) attempt to provide a means of attaining righteousness.

Not only are both strands of teaching woefully wrong, but both fail to grasp the purpose of the law. Both fail to recognise in what ways the law is still 'holy, righteous and good' (Rom. 7:12). Perhaps, however, the most serious flaw in such teaching is the failure to grasp the prophetic function of the law in pointing to the promised righteousness of God in Christ crucified and risen. It is to that prophetic aspect of the law that Paul is pointing us here—'to which the Law and the Prophets testify'.

The law fulfils a prophetic function in that it contains the promise of our redemption in Christ. The moral law can be taken as a portrait of Christ, for he fulfilled it perfectly. The ceremonial law is most certainly foreshadowing Christ through the whole sacrificial system and

the approach to God in the worship of the Tent of Meeting. Recall how Moses was instructed to make everything in the Tent of Meeting according to the divine instructions,<sup>8</sup> for all the gifts, sacrifices and worship offered in the earthly sanctuary were 'a copy and shadow of what is in heaven' (Heb. 8:5). Even the civil law holds the promise of the divine righteousness to be made available through Christ the King and Head of the Church, for when it was given the inescapable implication was that Israel was a theocracy ruled by God as King.

Our English NIV—probably one of the most widely used among Christian people in the English speaking world—has some passages which are unfortunate in their translation, to say the least. Perhaps the worst of these is in John 1:16: 'From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.' It really does make the fullness of Christ's salvation sound rather like an American tele-evangelist's appeal. The Greek phrase '*charin anti charitos*' is literally 'a grace in place of a grace'. Because the law, rightly understood along with its prophetic function, was grace through the divine law. The greater grace that came by Christ replaced the grace of law.

So Calvin writes of the law and its sacrificial system: 'For what is more vain or absurd for men to offer a loathsome stench from the fat of cattle in order to reconcile themselves to God? Or to have recourse to the sprinkling of water and blood to cleanse away their filth? In short, the whole cultus of the law, taken literally and not as shadows and figures corresponding to the truth, will be utterly ridiculous. . . . God did not command sacrifices in order to busy his worshippers with earthly exercises. Rather he did so that he might lift their minds higher.'<sup>9</sup>

My disappointment in my work among pastors and preachers is to find that over 90% of them know little or nothing of the law and therefore understand little or nothing of how the law bears witness to Christ. I am indebted to a godly mother who would spend at least an hour every Sunday afternoon in concentrated Bible

Study with her children, taking us painstakingly through the books of Moses and faithfully relating them to the NT and especially to the Epistle to the Hebrews. How much richer and fuller my own reading and appreciation of the grace of God in Christ has been on account of that early training. So do not neglect your study of the Books of Moses. Remember that on the Emmaus road, the Risen Christ began with Moses to expound to Cleopas and his companion those things concerning himself. How I long for the reality of such exposition to be heard in our churches.

### 3. Salvation is more than forgiveness

We have in English a great classic on the Christian life, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. In it, he depicts the sinner under deep conviction, dressed in rags and with a huge burden on his back, slowly toiling his way up the hill called Calvary. At the top of the hill, Pilgrim reaches a Cross and he stands and gazes on the One hanging there in shame and suffering. As he comes to the realisation that this Jesus is there for him, his burden is suddenly loosed from his back and rolls down into the empty tomb and he sees it no more. Pilgrim cries, 'Blest Cross, blest sepulchre, blest rather be the Man who there was put to shame for me.'

Forgiveness! What a glorious message we have to proclaim, that guilty sinners, weighed down with the burden of their guilt, can be washed and made clean; that through the death of Christ God forgives not only past sins, but present and even future sins, for the effects of the Cross are not just retrospective but also prospective. So many of our hymns exult in this cleansing of the blood of Christ.

There is a fountain filled with blood  
drawn from Emmanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
lose all their guilty stains.

God's forgiveness is so remarkable that he does not even remember any longer the offences we have committed against him!<sup>10</sup>

But there is more to our salvation than forgiveness, glorious and wonderful though that forgiveness is. And when preachers and evangelists expound salvation and the Cross only in terms of forgiveness, they are missing out an important and strengthening aspect of the Gospel. They are neglecting the righteousness of God and that imputed righteousness from God. Nor is this merely a matter of semantics, a splitting of hairs, the pursuit of minutiae. Here is an aspect of our salvation which is surely one of the most immense comforts and encouragements that any child of God can ever be offered.

Think of it. God in his righteousness confers his righteousness upon guilty sinners. The omnipotent, almighty, faithful, ever blessed, eternal God, before whom the heavenly creatures veil their faces and fall down in adoration and worship, this God acts on our behalf and in perfect righteousness declares that those who have faith in his Son are also righteous. Our relationship with him is restored and our status in his presence is that of men and women who are not merely accepted, but are welcomed and embraced. As we stand before the holy God, surrounded by that sea of crystal, not a trace of sin or deceit or rebellion or pride or uncleanness is reflected in it. We have our place eternally as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

#### **4. Through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**

There are many definitions of faith. As a young man, I listened to preachers trying to describe faith and I often found myself perplexed. Perhaps the most vivid memory I have in this connection is hearing Billy Graham, the American evangelist, describing faith in Christ as being like trusting your weight to a chair and sitting on it. Some years later, I came across Brunner's definition of faith which I found the most helpful I had come across to that point in my spiritual life.<sup>11</sup> However, I shall attempt a definition now which will also serve to make several

points I regard as important for preaching in our day. My definition of faith sees it as consisting in three stages.

First, faith is an understanding of the truth. Recently I heard a radio broadcast service by a well-known British evangelical organisation. It was a wonderful opportunity to say something significant to the listening millions about the Cross of Christ and its meaning for sinners. But I was deeply disappointed in what I heard. As far as I can remember, the listeners were simply urged to say a prayer and promised they would find Jesus there to help and answer. Little or no truth of the Gospel, far less of Christ's death, was conveyed during the 40 minute broadcast. But yet, without some understanding of the Gospel, there cannot be any faith—at least not in the biblical sense of faith.

Let me illustrate this to you from the NT. In our first study, I pointed out that in Ephesians 4:17–24 Paul speaks about the condition of those outside of Christ. He then deals with the condition of those in Christ. I want you to notice how many words he uses which have a clear cognitive reference. He speaks in verse 17 about the futility of unbelievers' thinking. In verse 18, he goes on to say that they are darkened in their understanding and this is because of the ignorance that is in them. True, he covers more than the darkened state of their minds in those three verses, for he refers also to their hardness of heart, their separation from the life of God and the free rein which their passions have in rushing headlong further and further away from God. But we cannot fail to notice his clear references to darkened minds and ignorance of God.

In verses 20–21, the mood changes as he turns to those who are in Christ and he says this: 'You however did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught of him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.' Hearing implies listening to knowledge being imparted. Being 'taught' explicitly states that. What were they taught? 'The truth that is in Jesus.' Their faith had begun with knowledge of the Gospel being imparted to them.

The verb 'know' in verse 20 refers primarily to coming to know with the mind. Its reference is to learning as a disciple, a pupil, because an indispensable prerequisite of entering into that relationship is some knowledge of the truth.

The second stage of faith is submission to that truth. Recall how on the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus was confronted by the risen Lord, who told him that he was finding it hard to kick against the goads. Saul knew much of the teaching of Christ and his death. The probability of his being a student in Jerusalem during Jesus' earthly ministry has been established.<sup>12</sup> He could well have listened to Jesus and the debates of his fellow Pharisees about this Nazarene. But though he undoubtedly had some knowledge of the truth, he was refusing to submit to it. He was desperately resisting it. Now Christ confronts him and he asks, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'Lord!'-that first admission of surrender to the imperious claims of Jesus Christ on his life. And then he obeys the instructions Christ gives him.

We have an English hymn which goes like this as it speaks eloquently of this surrender of faith:

Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall  
be free;  
Force me to render up my sword, and I  
shall conqueror be.  
I sink in life's alarms when by myself I  
stand;  
Imprison me within Thine arms, and  
strong shall be my hand.<sup>13</sup>

The third stage of faith is trust. And by trust we mean a throwing of ourselves upon the mercy and compassion of God in Christ. We cast away every crutch on which we have leaned in our spiritual lameness and we rest all our weight on Christ alone. Again, we have so many hymns which express this so clearly:

Other refuge have I none; hangs my  
helpless soul on Thee;  
Leave, ah! leave me not alone; still  
support and comfort me.  
All my trust on Thee is stayed; all my  
help from Thee I bring;

Cover my defenceless head with the  
shadow of Thy wing.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, all three stages of faith are initiated and inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. It cannot be otherwise. Until he works within us, we are dead to God, resentful of his claims and even enemies and hostile towards him. The Spirit must therefore do his creative work in us, and it is a creative work as David says in Psalm 51:10, 'Create ("bara", ex nihilo) in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'

Those who win souls are wise. Alas, it seems not many of us have that wisdom. But surely the wisdom to win souls for Christ must come from some understanding of faith and the necessary components of faith which God asks us to establish in people as we co-operate with the Spirit in his work of grace in their lives.

## 5. Sin and the divine glory

We come to the final verse we consider this morning. It's a verse I learned as a child (along with Romans 6.23). 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' There are two points we should notice about these words.

The first is that Paul uses the aorist when he says, 'all have sinned', clearly meaning that our sinful actions are in the past and are in a sense complete in earning us that awful verdict of guilty! However, his next verb is in the present tense and should be read with the sense, 'we are falling short of the glory of God', or 'we continue to fall short of the glory of God'.

The second point to notice here is the intriguing connection the apostle makes between our sin and the divine glory. As far as I can ascertain, such a connection is not made anywhere else in the NT. I have found at least eight suggestions in various commentators as to precisely what Paul here means by God's glory. Leon Morris writes: 'Commentators tend to read their own meaning into the passage.'<sup>15</sup> That being so, I am tempted to be so bold as to offer yet another suggestion as to why Paul should make this

connection between our sin and the divine glory.

Of course it is self-evident that since God is of purer eyes than to look on sin, we fall short of his radiant glory. That goes without saying. But remember that the apostle's great theme is the righteousness of God and that he is going to show how the righteous God has acted decisively to confer righteousness on guilty sinners through the Cross of Christ. The language he is about to use is the language of sacrifice and is pointing us unerringly to the Cross.

How did our Lord describe his shame and degradation when he was to hang in anguish in his darkest hour on that Cross? To our amazement and wonder, he described it as his glory! It was the moment when God would glorify him. At the last supper, as Judas took the bread and went out into the night, what did the Lord Jesus say? 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him' (Jn. 13:31).<sup>16</sup> What is this we have, that glory shines from the blackness and horror of the Cross of Christ—to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness? Surely the glory is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, the righteous God acting in righteousness, providing a righteousness for the unrighteous. The divine glory is that in his righteousness he justifies the wicked!<sup>17</sup>

And so with yet another of our hymn writers, we sing,

And can it be that I should gain an interest  
in the Saviour's blood?

Died He for me who caused His pain—for  
me, who Him to death pursued?

Amazing love! How can it be that Thou  
my God shouldst die for me?

## Notes

- 1 On the temporal force of 'ὑνιδε', see C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1975, p. 199.
- 2 Many commentators take δικαιοσυνη θεου here as referring only to the righteousness which God confers on sinners through the

death of Christ. So Luther (following Augustine), Robert Haldane, Wm. Hendricksen, D. M. Lloyd-Jones, Leon Morris, John Murray, *et al.* Understanding the phrase both as an essential attribute of God and, consequent upon that attribute, as the standing he confers through the death of Christ are Barth, C. K. Barrett, F. F. Bruce, Sanday & Headlam, *et al.* Note however that C. K. Barrett understands the righteousness which God confers upon sinners as essentially eschatological, *Comm. in loc.*

- 3 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, SCM, London, 1977, p. 544. See also, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, SCM, London, 1985. Also, N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991.
- 4 Leon Morris argues 'righteousness' is essentially a forensic term: *The Apostolic Teaching of the Cross*, Tyndale Press, London, 1955, ch. 7; see also *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988, Additional Note A, p. 100ff. For examples of those who hold 'righteousness' to be essentially (though not exclusively) a relational term, see: David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, CUP, 1967, p. 83; Alister McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, Marshall Pickering, Basingstoke, 1988, p. 24, and also his *lustitia Dei*, CUP, 1986, Vol. 1, pp. 1–36ff.
- 5 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London, 1967, p. 110.
- 6 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.6–12.
- 7 Rom. 10:4
- 8 Heb. 8:5, cf. Exod. 25:40.
- 9 *Idem*, 2.7.1.
- 10 Jer. 31:34.
- 11 Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pp. 162ff., etc.
- 12 See W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth*, London 1962, quoted by J. Jeremias in *The Expository Times*, The Key to Pauline Theology, Vol. LXXVI No. 1, October 1964, p. 27.
- 13 George Matheson, 1842–1906.
- 14 Charles Wesley, 1707–88.
- 15 *Idem*, p. 177, Note 111.
- 16 See also, Jn. 1:14; 11:4; 12:23, 28; 13:32; 17:1, 24 etc.
- 17 Rom. 4:5.