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Man's Great Dilemma and God's Greater Provision: The Doctrine of Justification and its Necessary Role as the Foundation for Understanding Romans 6

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2013

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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ABSTRACT

All of mankind faces a great dilemma, whether they realize it or not, regarding their state of depravity in sin. No man could ever devise a solution for the problem; even great philosophers have been stumped over how a righteous God could possibly save sinners. Yet God's answer to man's dilemma is the death of Christ, whereby He has made the way to declare man righteous while remaining righteous Himself. The marvelous truths presented in Romans go even further to reveal that not only has righteousness been provided, but those who have been identified in the death and resurrection of Jesus also share in His new life and are free from the power of sin that once ensnared them (Romans 6). Thus, Paul presents within the epistle of Romans a detailed revelation of man's depravity, God's salvation, and the call to walk in the righteousness that the justified have received through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Man's Great Dilemma and God's Greater Provision: An Exposition of the Doctrine of Justification and its Necessary Role as the Foundation for Understanding Romans 6

INTRODUCTION: ROMANS AND THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Five hundred years before the coming of Christ, Socrates addressed Plato with a sobering dilemma. He observed, "It may be, that the Deity can forgive sins, but I do not see how."¹ Although these two men are regarded as some of the most perceptive philosophers to have ever lived, even they were dumbfounded and unable to comprehend how a righteous God could justify the sins of mankind. Here one sees how the Scriptures tower over the wisdom of man at such great heights that the distance between them could never be measured. For the one who embodies wisdom is the author of Scripture and the wisdom of more than a thousand generations of great, yet finite, philosophers could never match, nonetheless approach, the infinite wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18-2:16).² H. A. Ironside rightly observes, "Apart altogether from the question of inspiration we may think of [Romans] as a treatise of transcendent, intellectual power, putting to shame the most brilliant philosophies ever conceived by the minds of men."³ Thus the Scriptures must be searched and studied to find the solution to man's greatest and seemingly unsolvable problem.

Thousands of years ago Job faced the dilemma in asking, "How can a man be righteous before God?" (Job 9:2).⁴ For if man is fallen, corrupted by sin and incapable of delivering himself from its bondage, how then, can a God who is holy, undefiled, and righteous, forgive sinners without laying aside or contradicting aspects of His nature?

¹ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1928), 15.

³ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 7.

⁴ All Bible quotations taken from the New King James Version.

How can a God who is just allow the relationship broken in Eden to be restored unless sin is dealt with? The problem of sin is that it produces death. Yet physical death is preceded even by spiritual death, which occurred within Adam and Eve immediately when they sinned in Genesis 3. Following that moment in history every human has inherited a sinful nature, is spiritually dead, and has to face the reality of physical death. Donald Grey Barnhouse explains with clarity, “As physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body, spiritual death is the separation of the soul and spirit from God.”⁵ How can a righteous God restore the relationship with carnal man, remove his sin and defeat the power of death, when His nature demands that sin be held accountable for?

The answer to so great a dilemma has been systematically set forth by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans. For he reveals how those who are spiritually dead can receive life and righteousness through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul was a man with unique qualifications that God chose to write such an important epistle. Though he counted his qualifications as *dung* in comparison to knowing Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:7-8), he was well prepared to present such a systematic revelation of the righteousness of God in so many ways pertinent to the Christian life. The epistle to the Romans lays bare before the saints what has been accomplished in salvation and further reveals their call to holy living in the power of the Spirit. As McClain explains, “[Romans] is the place where we find Christ set forth as the propitiation which justifies us and enables us, through faith in his blood, to go on in Christian truth.”⁶ Paul lays the

⁵ D. G. Barnhouse, *Romans Volume I: Man's Ruin* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 210.

⁶ Alva J. McClain and Herman Arthur Hoyt, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace: The Lectures of Alva J. McClain* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1989), 15-16.

foundation of the sinner's need for righteousness and the righteousness that has been provided through Christ before moving onto the revelation and explanation of the new life of the believer along with its implications.

THE EPISTLE OF ROMANS

All great Bible teachers throughout history have understood the real treasure that the book of Romans is for the Christian. J. N. Darby expressed, "The Epistle to the Romans especially establishes the grand foundations of Divine Truth."⁷ Martin Luther explained concerning the importance of Romans in the Christian's life as well as the truth it contains:

Forasmuch as this Epistle to the Romans is a light and way unto the whole Scriptures, I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without any book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily run of the soul. The more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is, and the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great a store of spiritual things lieth hid therein.⁸

Harry Ironside commented, "The Epistle to the Romans is undoubtedly the most scientific statement of the divine plan for the redemption of mankind that God has been pleased to give us."⁹ Romans is undoubtedly an important book in Scripture for believers not only to read, but also to spend time in study and meditation upon the great truths it contains.

One would find it important to recognize that Romans was written on the foundation of the Old Testament, specifically Habakkuk 2:4. Galatians and Hebrews

⁷ William R. Newell, *Lessons on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Toronto, Canada: J. I. C. Wilcox, 1925), v.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 7.

likewise quote Habakkuk 2:4 and both books deal specifically with different aspects of the text: “The just shall live by his faith.” Romans focuses on “the just” while Galatians on “shall live” and Hebrews on “faith.”¹⁰ American Bible teacher and pastor William R. Newell wrote, “Habakkuk prophesied of it . . . but ah, how little he dreamed of the fullness and wonder of it!”¹¹ That three New Testament books are expositions of one Old Testament verse shouts of its importance as a wonderful truth brought to revelation by the Word of God. The truth of Habakkuk 2:4 has changed the eternal destinies of countless men and women and will continue to do so for eternity. In fact, Romans 1:17 (Paul’s quotation of Habakkuk 2:4) led Martin Luther to come to understand that man is justified by faith in the finished work of Christ, not by works of the Law. He built the rest of his life on this verse, standing up against the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church for the freedom that believers receive in Christ by faith.¹²

Boreham of Australia wrote with profound simplicity, “The words do not flash or glitter. Like the ocean, they do not give any indication upon the surface of the profundity and mysteries that lie concealed beneath.”¹³ One verse tucked within the book of a Minor Prophet has laid the foundation for three great New Testament letters and it also encompasses in so little words how the Christian life begins and is to be lived. As Bishop Lightfoot observed, “The whole law was given to Moses in six hundred and thirteen precepts. David in the fifteenth Psalm, brings them all within the compass of eleven.

¹⁰ McClain, *Gospel of God's Grace*, 16.

¹¹ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1938), 24.

¹² Barnhouse, *Romans Vol. I: Man's Ruin*, 197-198.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 198.

Isaiah reduces them to six; Micah to three; Isaiah, in a later passage, to two. But Habakkuk condenses them all into one; The just shall live by faith!”¹⁴

Romans has three general divisions including doctrinal, dispensational, and practical.¹⁵ Special attention will be focused on the first six chapters of the first section. While all of the divisions are further divided into more specific subdivisions, the general divisions of the epistle are as follows:

Chaps. 1-8 are DOCTRINAL, and give us THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL. Chaps. 9-11 are DISPENSATIONAL, and give us THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HARMONIZED WITH HIS DISPENSATIONAL WAYS. Chaps. 12-16 are PRACTICAL, and set forth THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD PRODUCING PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE BELIEVER.¹⁶

By now, the reader should have a general idea of the theme of Romans, which is specifically stated by Paul in 1:16-17. Not only is the theme necessary for understanding the purpose of the epistle, but it also provides the basic foundation for understanding how Romans answers the great dilemma of man. In verse 16 Paul mentions “the gospel” for the fifth time in the introduction of his letter, as it is the gospel that is the central theme of the entire book. More specifically, as Paul reveals in verse 17, the gospel reveals the righteousness of God. The theme can thus be stated as follows: the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the righteousness of God, and this gospel is how salvation is provided for sinners through faith. Newell deals very specifically with Romans 1:16-17 in an overview writing:

¹⁴ Ibid., 198-199.

¹⁵ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 10-11.

Here we have the *text* of the whole Epistle of Romans: First, the words “the gospel”—so dear to Paul, as will appear. Next, the universal saving power of the gospel is asserted. Then, the secret of the gospel’s power—the revelation of God’s righteousness on the principle of faith. Finally, the accord of all this with the Old Testament Scriptures: “The righteous shall live by faith.”¹⁷

Thomas Constable provides an excellent summary of the book as a whole in writing that Romans “is a message of how a righteous God [declares] people righteous righteously.”¹⁸ In other words, Romans explains how God, in righteousness, could forgive sinners and impute righteousness without setting aside His own righteousness.

Romans also provides an “ordered and complete” explanation to believers of what was accomplished when they were saved.¹⁹ Romans 6 emphasizes the believer’s new life in Christ because of his identity with Him. The foundation Paul lays in the first five chapters is entirely necessary for understanding the deeper truths of the Christian life presented in the latter portion of the book.

The present study of Romans is approached from the perspective that the truths presented by Paul could never have been conceived by the minds of men. One should also recognize that only a foot has been dipped into an ocean that contains so many marvelous revelations of God. Romans even moves beyond how righteousness can be imputed to believing sinners to how righteousness can be practically lived out in the life of the believer through the Holy Spirit. The present study by no means comprises the entirety of Romans, but focuses specifically on the doctrines of justification and

¹⁷ Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 18.

¹⁸ Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Romans: 2013 Edition,” *Sonic Light*, Online: <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/romans.pdf>, Accessed March 19, 2013, 21.

¹⁹ Newell, *Lessons on Romans*, 5.

sanctification as presented by Paul in the first six chapters of the epistle, seeking to clearly communicate how “God can save, yet righteous be.”²⁰

THE GREAT DILEMMA REVEALED

When Barnhouse wrote his commentaries on Romans in the 1950s, he mentioned with striking relevance for today that preaching on God's love while excluding preaching on God's hate against sin had become “one of the tragedies of modern religious life.”²¹ If Barnhouse had considered this a tragedy more than half a century ago, then it has surely become an even greater tragedy in American Christendom today. The problem continues to grow as more and more preachers preach from their pulpits only on what they believe is the love of God, failing to reveal that God is a God of hate toward sin just as much as He is a God of love. Yes, God is a God of love, but if guilty sinners never come to understand that their sin deserves the wrath of God they will never see their need for such a great love that came at so great a cost! Habakkuk 1:13 declares, “*You [God] are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.*” Likewise, Hebrews 1:9 says, “*You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness . . .*” Thus, Paul does not begin the body of his letter expressing that God is a God of love so great that it overpowers his justice, but revealing that man is so lost and helpless that he has no power to deliver himself from God's just and holy wrath against sin. Such is the great dilemma of man, and unless he comes to see and acknowledge it, he will never be able to comprehend the great gift of salvation that has been provided as a remedy for such a great problem.

²⁰ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 17.

²¹ Barnhouse, *Romans Vol. I: Man's Ruin*, 218.

Following Paul's introduction, in Romans 1:18-3:20 man stands on trial before the righteous God, in a court-like scene where the just Judge sits on the throne of heaven evaluating the deeds of mankind to reveal whether or not they have attained His standard of righteousness. Here the great dilemma of man is presented in a four-fold description of pagans, those who are morally upright, Jews, and ultimately the entire human race so that a revelation of man's guilt is laid bare before all.²² Newell points out with clarity, "The present lesson is the necessary beginning of the presentation of the gospel of God's *grace*. Unless men are lost and helpless in sin they do not need the *grace*, the *unmerited* favor, of God. All they need, if they are not lost, is a little divine 'help,' and they will 'save themselves.'"²³ Yet, as Paul will disclose, when man faces the facts, he is entirely incapable of delivering himself from his depraved condition. The facts presented concerning the four groups of condemned sinners are as true today as they were when Paul wrote them and when sin first entered the human race. To see the truth of Romans 1:18-3:20 as *old-fashioned* or refuse to acknowledge man's state in sin will result in judgment if not dealt with before the door of grace and forgiveness finally and unexpectedly closes.

From the outset, man is thrust back into the realization that he has not lived up to the righteous standard of God. Verse 17 transitions into verse 18 in which Paul proclaims, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." God's wrath against sin is the natural implication of His righteous nature; thus to undermine His wrath is to

²² Michael J. Smith, "BIBL425, Romans," "Romans 1:18-3:20: SIN & CONDEMNATION: God's wrath on all men," 1.

²³ Newell, *Lessons on Romans*, 15.

undermine that He is God. Two Greek terms, *thumos* and *orga*, are translated in English as *wrath*. *Thumos* refers to sudden rage and is not used by Paul in the epistle to the Romans. Whereas *orga*, which is the term Paul uses in Romans, “signifies an indignation that has risen gradually and become more settled. Its original meaning was connected with plants and fruits in their swelling with juice until they finally burst.”²⁴ Thayer explains the wrath of God from the New Testament perspective as “*that in God which stands opposed to man’s disobedience, obduracy (esp. in resisting the gospel) and sin, and manifests itself in punishing the same.*”²⁵ God’s wrath against sin has been gradually building since Adam and Eve first sinned. When the day of wrath finally comes to fruition, the just wrath of God will spill out over all of mankind whose sin has not been forgiven by the death of Christ.

Romans 1:18-32 focuses specifically on the condemnation of “the pagan world.”²⁶ Pagans are those who have no regard for morality and the laws of God, who have blatantly rejected the truth and revelation of God. In verse 18 Paul writes that they “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” That they suppress the truth implies there is a certain revelation of truth that God has given to man. The literal translation for *suppress* is “hold down” and was also used by Paul in II Thessalonians 2:6-7 of the restraint or withholding of man’s lawlessness by the Holy Spirit.²⁷ As a result of unrighteousness, people literally hold down and restrain God’s truth. Paul continues in verses 19-20 to

²⁴ Barnhouse, *Romans Vol. I: Man’s Ruin*, 219.

²⁵ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1977), 452.

²⁶ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 28.

²⁷ Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 25.

specifically state two ways in which His truth has been manifested. God has provided revelation of Himself in natural revelation through His creation, namely that He possesses “eternal power” and that He is the “Godhead.”²⁸ In other words, God has revealed that He is both powerful and exists as a divine being, yet man in his sin has suppressed God’s revelation of Himself.²⁹

Along with man’s suppression of God’s revealed truth about Himself, although man has been given such knowledge about God, he has failed to give God the due honor and glory He deserves (1:21-23). In verses 23-26, Paul exposes three instances where man exchanged the truth of God for something else, with the result that God “gave them over” to something in return.³⁰ Sinful man is described as exchanging the glory of God for images of mortal beings and animals, with the result that God “gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves” (1:24). They are described as exchanging God’s truth for a lie and giving glory to the creation rather than the One who created it. The result is that God gave man over to sinful lusts that were not part of His design for mankind.

Women are described as exchanging natural relations for unnatural relations, as well as men, with the result that God gave them over to a depraved mind. That man’s mind is depraved literally means that it is “unapproved.”³¹ Man’s mind is so utterly depraved that it is unapproved before the standard of God. The online *NET* Greek

²⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 57.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³¹ James Strong, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher’s), 8.

concordance renders this word as “not standing the test.”³² Man’s mind, his thoughts, his being, have not met the righteous standard of God. That man’s mind is looked down upon from the throne of heaven with disapproval means man is in a great state of emergency and helplessness. The question ought to be raised again in the minds of readers with a sense of urgency as to how sinful man can be approved before a righteous God. For all three examples of how man has held down the truth of God, denying it in exchange for something fleshly, mortal, human, and sinful are also striking revelations of how God’s wrath is “revealed from heaven” against sin in the present until the day when His full wrath will be revealed (1:18).

If one were to step back and view Romans 1:18-32 as a courtroom scene, as noted previously, the masses of people have been put on trial and found guilty because of their utter denial of truth. In the courtroom the philosophers, those who live according to law and those who are viewed as morally upright, would be seen nodding in approval at the guilty verdict placed upon the heathen. However, before long they are called to the stand and present before the Judge their acts of *human good*, thinking that they have enough righteousness of their own to be approved before God. To their surprise, the Word of God reveals that they too, just like the heathen, have no righteousness of their own that can satisfy the standard of a righteous God. Thus, Paul reveals in Romans 2:1-16 that even the morally upright (from human standards) are in just as great a dilemma as those who plainly reject the truth of God. Far too often people think that if they live a life that is generally *good*, God will find them acceptable. Yet, the standard of man’s righteousness is so far below God’s standard of righteousness that Barnhouse writes, “If we read the

³² “Adokimos,” *NET Bible Online*, <http://classic.net.bible.org/strong.php?id=96>, Accessed January 17, 2013.

whole of the Bible as background for judgment, it is inescapable that the greatest insult a human being can offer God Almighty is to present any ethical attainment as a basis for salvation . . . Human righteousness is unrighteousness with God.”³³

Paul explains in the passage that the moralists pass judgment on the pagan world, without recognizing that they “practice the same things” (2:1). McClain points out that moral judgment is in fact biblical, for the Lord has revealed what is morally right or wrong and it is proper to discern such things. Yet the moralists are condemned because they are practicing the same sins that they are recognizing as wrong in the heathens.³⁴ Verse two reveals two grounds on which the moralists are condemned before God: truth and their own actions. Every man has been given some knowledge of the truth and all are guilty because no one is even capable of living up to his own standards. Verses 11-16 reveal that as the Jews, who have the Law, are judged by the Law when they sin, Gentiles become a law to themselves when they do what the Law requires. For the conscience of every Gentile, despite not having been given the Law, is aware of its requirements as testified by their own condemnation or defense by their conscience. If a Gentile’s conscience is understood as a law by which he lives by, then he is also deserving of judgment because he cannot live always having perfect assurance in his conscience that his deeds are right.³⁵

Having revealed the guilt of both pagans and moralists, Paul continues on in Romans 2:17-3:8 to point out another group of people. Like moralists, these people would look upon the other groups condemning them, yet being convinced in their own

³³ Barnhouse, *Romans Vol. I: God's Wrath*, 9. Isaiah 64:4.

³⁴ McClain, *Gospel of God's Grace*, 71.

³⁵ Smith, “BIBL425, Romans,” “SIN & CONDEMNATION,” 4-5.

minds that they should be exempt from judgment—the Jews. Having the Law, the Jews have reason in man's eyes to see themselves as superior, but as the Scripture reveals they are incapable of meeting its requirements. As Paul wrote previously in verse 13, people are righteous by doing the Law, not simply by hearing or having possession of it. By raising a series of questions in verses 17-24, Paul exposes that the Jews are not righteous simply by their possession of the Law; they have indeed broken it. Paul makes a second point in verses 25-29 regarding circumcision, which from the perspective of the Jews provided an assurance of their perceived right-standing before God. Paul breaks down this perception by explaining that circumcision can only be of benefit for salvation if the whole Law is kept. Not only so, but he explains that one can only be right before God if his heart is right before God.

With pagans, moralists, and Jews all having come to the stand before God and shown to be guilty, Paul continues in chapter three to make sure that if anyone still thinks he has reason to claim his righteousness before God, the Scriptures reveal that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Quoting from the Old Testament (Psa. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isa. 59:7-8; and Psa. 36:1),³⁶ Paul lays the charges against man before the stand, leaving every man in the courtroom of history exposed of sin and shown to be guilty of not meeting the righteous standard of God. The only way for a man to still claim innocence after reading Romans 3:10-18 is to deny the revealed truth of God and such a claim will do him no good in escaping the just punishment for his sin. Paul writes in verse 19, “every mouth may be stopped” because of the revelation of sin. Man's mouth is closed before God. He can make no more excuse. He stands in the place of judgment and

³⁶ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 43.

has no other word to offer to claim a righteousness of his own. Not only so, but “all the world may become guilty before God” (1:19). Though the Gentiles were not given the Law, the Jews were given it and they utterly failed to keep it. They were given the prime opportunity to prove righteousness before God, but they could not do it. If the people that were given such a special place among men in relation to God could not meet His standard, then there is no reason to think anyone else can.³⁷ Sinful man cannot attain righteousness on his own, for he is incapable of keeping the righteous Law of God. When man is placed next to God's measure of righteousness, it only exposes his sin and reveals that all are desperately lost (Rom. 3:20).

THE GREAT PROVISION

What then can man do to be saved? Is he hopelessly lost forever, or is there a way that has been provided by which God can supply man with the righteousness he needs? Thanks be to God! For He has made a provision for man! After such a stark exposure of man's depraved nature, Paul does not hesitate to reveal the great hope man has in light of his great dilemma. Can it be that God has provided righteousness apart from the Law? Yes, He has and it is available to all men on the basis of faith! In Romans 3:21 Paul proclaims that the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the Law and this righteousness is available through faith in Jesus Christ. The current passage should bring back Paul's theme in Romans 1:16-17 to the mind of the reader. The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, not only because He is shown to be just in dealing with sin, but also because His righteousness has now been made available to sinners! How God is just in dealing with sin and how His righteousness is made available to sinners is

³⁷ Ibid., 45-46.

explained with clarity and precision by Paul through Romans 3:26. Here Paul presents a complete explanation of the doctrine of justification, providing examples in Romans 4 and explaining results in Romans 5. All of Romans 1-5 is a necessary foundation to have an accurate understanding of the truths of the Christian life presented by Paul in Romans 6 and the following chapters. As the condemnation of man has been set forth, one is now capable of adequately grasping the need for Romans 3:21-26 and the reasons for Romans 4 and 5. In Romans 3:21-26 the answer to man's great dilemma is revealed. Just five verses answer the question that Socrates raised and explain the solution for how a righteous God can save sinners and impute His righteousness to them without setting aside His righteousness in doing so. Cranfield adds that Romans 3:21-26 is "the centre and heart of the whole of Rom 1.16b-15.13."³⁸ Morris also writes that the passage "is possibly the single most important paragraph ever written."³⁹ For Romans 3:21-26 provides the revelation to man of how God can justify sinners without contradicting His righteous nature.

The beautiful truths revealed in the book of Romans are the cause for much rejoicing in the life of the ransomed sinner. For God has not only answered the questions of Job and Socrates by providing a solution to the great dilemma, but as Romans 6 will reveal, He has provided new life for the justified and is daily at work to bring the condition of the believer into conformity with his righteous position in Christ! No man could ever conceive of such a marvelous truth. That God should care so much for man

³⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: T&T Clark, Ltd., 1985), 68.

³⁹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 173.

(the man that stood before Him in the courtroom unable to open his mouth with a guilty sentence because of his sin) to provide His own righteousness through the greatest sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ is the greatest knowledge that a person could ever come to comprehend. With an understanding of the need for a Savior, one is prepared to read Paul's exposition of the doctrine of justification.

Justification Defined

Justification is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian life. Charles Ryrie provides an excellent description of justification in *Basic Theology*:

To justify means to declare righteous. Both the Hebrew (*sadaq*) and the Greek (*dikaioo*) words mean to announce or pronounce a favorable verdict, to declare righteous. The concept does not mean to make righteous, but to announce righteousness. It is a courtroom concept, so that to justify is to give a verdict of righteous.⁴⁰

As a "courtroom concept," one must understand that justification is a complete and final act of God.⁴¹ As soon as a believing sinner is declared righteous, it is entirely true of him and cannot be repealed. One would find it contrary to nature for a judge to gradually declare a person absolved of his guilt. At the moment the judge declares the verdict, that verdict becomes true of the person and remains true. Likewise, the moment God declares a person righteous, the declaration becomes completely true of that individual in that moment and remains true.

For the sinner that stands guilty before the judgment seat of God in Romans 1:18-3:20, Romans 3:21-26 shows that Christ has taken the penalty of man upon Himself, so that the sinner does not have to bear the consequence of his sin. There is no greater truth

⁴⁰ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 343.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

that has been revealed than the truth that God has provided salvation for man! All of history demonstrated the need for a Savior, and in Christ the penalty for sin has been paid, satisfying the wrath of God and making the righteousness of God available to sinful man. Romans 3:21-26 explains how the gospel has made a way for man to be made righteous without God compromising His own righteous nature. Sin has been fully and completely dealt with and the righteousness of God has been made available to all on the basis of faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners. One of the clearest definitions of justification has been defined as “a legal act of God in which God declares, announces, or pronounces a verdict that the believing sinner has been absolved, forgiven of all sin to [his] account, and has been credited with the righteousness of Christ.”⁴² The following overview of justification explains from Romans 3:21-26 how and by what means the wonderful righteousness of God has been provided for sinners, apart from any work on their behalf!

The Basis for Justification

In Romans 3:21-26 one finds the basis for justification, and apart from these verses the foundation of justification cannot rightly be understood. A sinner could never be justified if Christ had not died in the place of sinners and bore the wrath of God upon Himself. Just as Jesus Christ is central to the gospel, likewise He is central and the basis for justification. Chafer comments, “God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) without a cause (Rom. 3:24), and on a ground so worthy, so laudable, and so unblemished that He

⁴² Smith, “BIBL425, Romans,” “Justification and Righteous(ness),” 1.

Himself remains just when He justifies.”⁴³ Christ’s death, the foundation that Chafer describes as “worthy . . . laudable and . . . unblemished,” is the only acceptable basis for justification because in His death the punishment for sin was fully dealt with.⁴⁴ At the cross of Jesus Christ the sinner finds hope, for there justification was made possible.

God’s wrath against man’s sin was completely satisfied “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24). Douglas J. Moo explains redemption in writing, “The Greek word underlying redemption (*apolystrosis*) was applied to the money that a slave would pay in order to secure his or her freedom. The root idea is a ‘price paid for release.’”⁴⁵ Jesus paid the price, or penalty, of sin in His death on the cross, fully satisfying the debt that was owed to God on behalf of sinners. He became the “propitiation by his blood” when He was lifted up as the sacrifice for man’s sin on the cross (3:25). What is meant by propitiation is that “our Lord was the satisfactory sacrifice for sin and therefore the place where propitiation was made.”⁴⁶ In the Old Testament, the blood of the animal sacrifice sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant served as the temporary propitiation for God’s wrath. Paul explains that the blood of Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for man’s sin, is what completely satisfied the wrath of God.⁴⁷ Thus, God has justly dealt with the penalty of sin in Christ’s sacrificial death, opening the opportunity for sinners to be acquitted of their guilt and declared righteous.

⁴³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 276.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 83.

⁴⁶ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 340.

⁴⁷ Smith, “BIBL425, Romans,” “Propitiation,” 1-2.

In the words of Charles Ryrie, "Therefore, the holy God can remain just and justify the one who believes in the Lord Jesus."⁴⁸

Justification by Faith

Flowing directly from the basis of justification, the death of Jesus Christ, one attains the righteousness of God through *faith* in the person and work of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). On multiple occasions throughout Romans Paul connects the declaration of the sinner as righteous with the term faith. The connection of justification with faith demonstrates that faith is the way in which a person is declared righteous.⁴⁹ In Romans 3:28 Paul declares that "man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." He abolishes the belief that righteousness is attainable through the Law, demonstrating that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:30).

Faith Versus Law

Smith describes faith as a "transfer of trust" from the sinner to Christ.⁵⁰ In placing faith in Jesus, one is trusting that His death and resurrection accomplishes salvation and not man's own efforts to be righteous. Paul places a significant emphasis on the contrast between faith and law in Romans 3:21-4:25, noting that even the Law and the prophets testified to "the righteousness of God apart from the law" (3:21). The fact that the righteousness of God must come through faith in the work of God Himself was not a new theology established with the coming of the new covenant, but one that had been in

⁴⁸ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 345.

⁴⁹ Morris, *Romans*, 146.

⁵⁰ Michael J. Smith, Class notes of Christina Fuselli in BIBL425, "Romans," Liberty University, Spring 2012.

the mind of God from the beginning. Ironside provides a brief, yet concise, depiction of God's plan for justification through faith by a work of Himself in the Old Testament:

The coats of skin wherein our first parents were clothed; the sacrificial victims accepted in behalf of the offerers; the wonderful symbolism of the Tabernacle; all tell the story of a righteousness provided by God for the unrighteous sinner who turns to Him in faith. The prophets, too, take up the same story. They predict the coming of the Just One who was to die to bring unjust men to God . . . The so-called Minor Prophets take up the same strain, and all point forward to the Coming One through whom salvation will be secured for all who repent.⁵¹

Ironside's explanation brings clarity to the truth that in all of history, faith alone was and is the only means by which God declares a person righteous. The wonderful act of God in justifying the sinner happens solely on the basis that Christ bore the just wrath of God on Himself at the time of the crucifixion so that through faith sinners might be justified.

The Example of Abraham

Standing as the prime example of faith as the means of justification, Romans 4 is entirely devoted to Abraham's example of justification through faith alone. Paul raises three main points in the chapter, demonstrating that neither good works, circumcision, nor adherence to the Law resulted in Abraham's justification.⁵² Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 which declares that Abraham "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." On the basis of faith alone Abraham was counted righteous and the same is true for any individual who is to be declared righteous by God.

Romans 4:3-8 specifically deals with the fact that Abraham was not counted righteous by works because the wages of one who works "are not counted as grace but as

⁵¹ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 48.

⁵² Smith, "BIBL425, Romans," "An Outline of Romans: Romans 4-5," 4.

debt” (4:4), meaning that the payment for the one who works is “that which is owed” or “legally due.”⁵³ Abraham did not receive his righteousness because he worked to obtain it as a legally owed payment. He simply believed in God and that was the means by which God declared him righteous. Thomas Schreiner explains, “‘Working’ is the result of one’s own capability, but ‘believing’ relies on another. The object of Abraham’s faith was ‘God’ (v. 3), and he relied ‘on the one who justifies the ungodly.’”⁵⁴ Abraham had no reason to boast in his righteousness because it was based solely on God. The same is true for all who receive righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.

In Romans 4:9-12, Paul deals with the matter concerning circumcision noting that Abraham’s faith was credited to him prior to his circumcision, with the result that he would “become the ‘father’ of both Jewish and Gentile believers.”⁵⁵ The central argument is that since Abraham was not circumcised prior to God’s counting him righteous, his justification was based solely on his faith in God. Moo explains regarding circumcision, “It cannot effect one’s entrance into the people of God; nor does it even ‘mark’ a person as belonging to God apart from a prior justifying act.”⁵⁶ The important implication of Moo’s statement is that Abraham’s circumcision was a symbol of the justification that had already occurred years in advance.

⁵³ “Opheilema,” *NET Bible*. Online: <http://classic.net.bible.org/strong.php?id=3783>. Accessed February 25, 2012.

⁵⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 215.

⁵⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 256.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

Paul's emphasis on justification through faith, not law, is central to Romans 4:13-17.⁵⁷ He points out that the promise to Abraham was "actualized" through faith, not the Law (4:13).⁵⁸ The problem with law is that it brings wrath, so if justification were based on the Law, no one would ever attain it. As Moo writes, "If the law is involved, the promise becomes worthless; it will never be fulfilled."⁵⁹ However, since justification comes by faith, the promise is guaranteed (4:16).

In conclusion, Abraham's belief in God is an example of the faith one must have to be justified. Paul writes at the end of Romans 4 that Genesis 15:6 was not written simply for Abraham, but also now for those who have faith in God, "who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead," that they will be credited righteousness in the same way that Abraham did: justified by faith in the person of God (4:23-24). As McClain clarifies, "God has but one way of saving men in all ages. It is by faith, apart from works. Revelation may change, but down through the ages, salvation is through faith in God!"⁶⁰ God has revealed His wonderful grace in providing righteousness for sinful man. This righteousness is based on the substitutionary death of Jesus and is accessible to man through faith alone.

THE RESULT OF JUSTIFICATION: A CALL TO RIGHTEOUS LIVING

God has provided righteousness for man. He no longer has to live in condemnation because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that has been made on his behalf.

⁵⁷ Smith, "BIBL425, Romans," "An Outline of Romans: Romans 4-5," 3.

⁵⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 228.

⁵⁹ Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 94.

⁶⁰ McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace*, 120.

Those who were once condemned in sin are now those that are justified through faith by the grace of God. A problem can seemingly arise for those who do not accurately understand the gospel after beholding the great doctrine of justification. What is to follow? If a man has been declared righteous before God, how should he live in response to his justification? Too often the justified fall prey to the lie that having been saved and having received the righteousness of Christ, they have freedom to go back and live in the ways of sin before they were justified. Yet Romans does not end at chapter 5! For the reader to believe that justification is God's end goal of salvation is a great mistake. The content of Romans 6 follows directly and necessarily after Romans 1-5, for justification leads to a call to righteous living.

Righteous living must be understood within the framework of the whole book of Romans. Holy living is in no way a resurrected law placed over the grace of God, but the result in the life of the justified believer! God did not give up His beloved Son merely to save sinners from eternal punishment, but that they might also walk in new life. As Romans 6 will reveal more of the marvelous truth of God, those who have been justified have been identified in the very death and resurrection of Jesus, with the result that they have been set free from the power of sin and are called to walk in new life. Barnhouse points out with exceptional clarity that the doctrines of justification and sanctification cannot be separated, though justification is by no means dependent on sanctification. As has been observed, justification is a final and complete act of God in declaring a sinner righteous apart from any work of man. Sanctification is the natural result that follows justification and is accomplished progressively throughout a believer's life. Barnhouse explains regarding the relationship of justification to sanctification:

God moved to save us because He wished us to be holy men and women, revealing His power within us to overcome sin and death . . . Although justification is not sanctification, justification is intended to produce sanctification. Holiness is to be the touchstone of the Christian life. Christ came in order to save His people *from* their sins (Matt. 1:21); they were not to be saved in the midst of their sins and then lie down in them again. Though men seek to pervert the gospel, the Christian must not be drawn aside to any position other than that which demands holiness and leads to holiness.⁶¹

Thus Romans 6 cannot be disconnected from the previous chapters of the epistle and Romans 1-5 would be incomplete without the rest of the book. Within Romans 1:18-5:11, Paul addressed the universal problem of man's sinful nature and the justification that God has made available through the death of Christ. In Romans 5:12-8:39, the focus is shifted from justification to sanctification. Paul's emphasis on Christ's death *for* man in chapters 1-5 transitions to the believer's death *with* Him in chapters 6-8.⁶² God has provided a righteousness for man without jeopardizing His own righteousness, and as Romans 6 will begin to reveal, this righteousness is not only provided in a positional sense, but is now possible in the daily life of the believer! One should keep in mind that although emphasis will be placed on Romans 6, the rest of the epistle is just as important and that Romans 7-8 continue to deal with the doctrine of sanctification with attention to the contrast between living in the flesh versus living in the Spirit.

One ought to be careful not to approach Romans 6 from merely an academic standpoint, for the truth it contains cannot possibly be understood through knowledge of the mind alone. Newell comments on the importance of the passage: "The tremendous

⁶¹ D. G. Barhhouse, *Romans Volume III: God's Freedom* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), 10-11.

⁶² Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1961), 2-3.

truths of this lesson must be learned by our *hearts*, and that from the Spirit of God Himself, if they are to have their due effect upon us. There is for Christians, no more important lesson in the Bible than the one now before us.”⁶³ With Newell’s statement in mind, one must approach Romans 6 with humility and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit for understanding. The following overview of the chapter is set forth with the goal of providing an understandable explanation of the believer’s identity in Christ with special attention focused on the important aspect of *death* in the passage.

An Exposition of Romans 6

Paul builds the case against continuing to live in sin after justification on the basis of Christ’s death and the believer’s identity with Him in His death. Romans 6 deals largely with what scholars call the identification truths, explaining positional facts about how the Christian is united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Romans 6:2 states the fact that believers have died to sin and verses 3-10 explain how that death occurred through one’s identity in Christ. In short, death with Christ provides deliverance from the *power* of sin. Deliverance from the *presence* of sin will not occur until the believer is glorified with Christ.⁶⁴ However, Paul discloses in Romans 6 that believers are freed from the power of sin because of Christ’s defeat of the power of sin. The believer must understand his identity in the death of Christ in order to move on in Christ, beyond the power of sin (Heb. 6:1). Furthermore, the passage reveals that the basis for righteous living rests in one’s identity in Christ’s resurrection. Ultimately, resurrection with Christ provides the clearest revelation as to why believers are to walk in righteousness.

⁶³ Newell, *Lectures on Romans*, 82.

⁶⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 305.

While Romans 6:3-10 establishes foundational truths concerning identification, verses 11-14 command the believer to act upon the knowledge these truths. A believer must know what occurred in justification in order to understand the call to righteous living. When he does come to understand these truths, he is commanded to respond by counting the facts true of himself, regardless of what he feels or sees in his experience. Believers must reckon their death with Christ to be true and also learn to daily die to self and the desires of the flesh (Rom. 6:11).

Romans 6:16-20 presents another truth concerning believers through an illustration of slavery. The passage reveals that after a Christian counts the identification truths to be true of himself, he must make a decision to whether he will live as a slave to sin, which is no different than the life of an unbeliever, or live in the freedom from sin's power as a slave of righteousness. The truth presented by Paul in this section reveals that the positional facts of identification can and ought to impact the daily experience of the believer.

Finally, in the closing verses of the chapter (6:21-23), Paul contrasts the *benefit* of sin with the remarkable benefit of slavery to God. He seals the explanation to believers that continuing in sin after justification produces no present nor eternal value, but walking in righteousness produces sanctification and leads to eternal life. Upon completion of the chapter, one sees how Paul reveals the call to righteous living on the foundation of the Christian's righteous position in Christ.⁶⁵

An important factor to note within Romans 6 is the two aspects regarding death present in the passage, including both a negative and positive aspect. From a negative

⁶⁵ Smith, "BIBL425, Romans," "Romans 6-8: Sanctification: God's Righteousness Lived Out in Man, Part A," 4-7, "Romans 6-8: Sanctification: God's Righteousness Lived Out in Man, Part B," 1-3.

standpoint, death is the due punishment for sin, which is a physical reality for believers and unbelievers alike, but a spiritual reality for those who have not received the righteousness of Christ. One might question how death can be positive in any sense. Simply put, the death of Jesus made righteousness for sinners possible and as the federal head of believers, one's identity in the death of Christ leads to the possibility of new life in His resurrection as well.

Questions that Outline Romans 6

Romans 6 is structured around two questions raised by Paul to address false conclusions that could potentially result from the explanation of justification by grace through faith alone. Given the truth that righteousness is received through faith alone, Paul was well aware that the gospel would be attacked by those claiming that if salvation is by grace entirely apart from works, then man has liberty to sin after being justified. However, the passage reveals that such thinking is not only erroneous, but also a complete distortion of the truth of the gospel.⁶⁶

The first question in Romans 6:1 (“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”) is raised in light of what was addressed by Paul in the previous chapters regarding justification through faith alone. The phrase “continue in sin” carries significant weight in the Greek language that is not obvious to the reader in English. *Continue* (ἐπιμένωμεν) literally means, “to continue in an activity or state.”⁶⁷ *Sin* is preceded by a singular definite article almost every time it is used in chapter 6, implying

⁶⁶ Barnhouse, *Romans Volume III: God's Freedom*, 9-19.

⁶⁷ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 375.

not the actual sins a believer commits, but the sin nature.⁶⁸ The justified believer will still struggle with committing sins, but the question asked in Romans 6:1 implies staying or abiding in a lifestyle of sin after justification.

The second question in Romans 6:15 (“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?”) addresses “sinning in a state of liberty.”⁶⁹ Barnhouse provides a clear distinction between Romans 6:1 and 6:15. He explains, “The two questions might be translated: ‘Shall we sin in order to obtain grace?’ and, ‘Shall we sin because we are in grace?’”⁷⁰ The second question is necessary in addition to the first because Paul was well aware that both were likely arguments against salvation through faith alone, completely independent of works. Some of the English translations for Paul’s response to the questions include “Certainly not!” “God forbid,” “Of course not!” “May it never be!” and “Absolutely not!”⁷¹ The English translations convey that drawing such conclusions regarding sin are not only fallacious, but even preposterous. Believers should not even entertain the thought in their minds. The reason for such an answer constitutes the central theme of Romans 6, in that believers have “died to sin” (6:2).⁷² *How* they have died to sin is what Paul expounds upon in the chapter as well as the *result* of having died to sin.

⁶⁸ Joe Focht, “Romans 6.” Sermon, Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA, 2002, MP3 file, <http://www.ccphilly.org/resources/audio-messages/>, accessed April 20, 2011.

⁶⁹ Barnhouse, *Romans Volume III: God’s Freedom*, 10-11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Translations of Romans 6:15 from the NKJV, KJV, NLT, NASB, and HCSB, respectively.

⁷² Schreiner, *Romans*, 304.

The Believer's Identity in the Death of Christ

Paul's answer to the question in Romans 6:1 begins by introducing a critical aspect in the passage—death. He asks a rhetorical question in 6:2, “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” In the question Paul makes an important assertion regarding “we who have died.” Who does *we* apply to and how have they died? Before tackling such a mind-boggling question (for if Paul is including himself in the *we*, he is claiming he is dead while writing a letter to people who are very much alive and well, also claiming that they have died), one must recognize the necessity of understanding the death of Jesus. Within the 23 verses of Romans 6, Paul uses terms including *died*, *death*, and *dead* a total of 18 times. Of prime importance is the substitutionary death of Christ. Newell asserts, “‘Christ died for our sins’—that is the *first* point in Paul's gospel. (See I Cor. xv, 3.) So saints have no vital connection with Christ, save that which God establishes in His *death*.”⁷³ As explained in justification, a sinner can receive the righteousness of Christ because the wrath of God was fully satisfied in His death. Understanding the death of Jesus as the “*first* point” in the gospel, one is capable of moving on to understanding further implications of death presented in Romans 6.⁷⁴ Death is fundamentally necessary to the gospel and the believer's relationship with the Lord. As the passage unfolds, Paul also shows that death stands as the fundamental necessity for freedom from the power of sin in the Christian life.

⁷³ Newell, *Lectures on Romans*, 89.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

In order to understand *how* Paul claimed that he as well as his audience had died, one must understand the concept of federal headship presented in Romans 5.⁷⁵ For what Paul presents in the whole of the book of Romans is important for understanding his theology in the present passage. In addition, the truths Paul reveals concerning himself and the Roman believers are *facts* that are true of *everyone* who has been justified. In Romans 5:12-21, the passage directly preceding Romans 6, Paul explained how Adam is a federal head for all people in that what he did had direct ramifications on all that followed him. Adam sinned and death entered the world through just this one man. As the federal head for all mankind, the whole human race is under the power of sin and death.⁷⁶

Understanding the concept of federal headship through Adam, one is able to understand the concept of Jesus as the federal head for all believers. What He accomplished in His death, burial, and resurrection has direct ramifications on every believer. However, Christ as a federal head is far greater than Adam, for the results of His headship over all believers has a much greater result than the results of Adam's sin (5:15). While Adam's sin resulted condemnation, the grace available through Jesus Christ results in justification and life (5:18-19). The important implication to understand is that as Adam represented all of mankind, Christ represented believers in what He accomplished in His death and resurrection.⁷⁷ In Adam all people are identified with him as sinners, but in Christ believers are identified with Him as righteous through

⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁶ The phrases *life in Adam* and a person being *in Adam* are references to the sin nature that was inherited from Adam.

⁷⁷ Smith, "BIBL 425, Romans," "An Outline of Romans: Romans 4-5," 8.

identification in His death and resurrection. The importance of one's position in Christ has incredible impact on the conditional life of the Christian. Ironside writes, "The very fact that our link with Adam as federal head was broken by our association with Christ in His death tells us that we have the right to consider ourselves as having died, in that death of His, to the authority of sin as a master."⁷⁸ Thus Paul is able to transition from chapter 5 into chapter 6, explaining the identity truths that are based in the concept of federal headship.⁷⁹

How has the believer died to sin and been crucified with Christ? The answer is simply that the believer was identified with Jesus Christ when He died. All who are in Christ were crucified with Him. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul provides an example of the believer's identity with Christ through baptism. Newell explains regarding baptism as presented in Romans 6:

. . . Christ having been "made sin on our behalf," had *died unto* sin; had been *buried*, and had been *raised* from the dead through the glory of the Father; and now lived unto God in a new, resurrection life.

Therefore they could see in their baptism the picture of that federal death and burial with Christ which Paul sets forth so positively in the second verse: "Such ones as we, who died."⁸⁰

Newell clearly portrays Paul's point in raising the two questions in Romans 6 for the Christians in Rome: their physical water baptism symbolized their spiritual baptism into Christ's death and resurrection that occurred at salvation. The same is true for every believer today.

Paul uses the same Greek word, ἐβαπτίσθημεν (aorist tense, meaning a one-time event, of βαπτίζω), in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that he uses in Romans 6:3 to depict the

⁷⁸ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 75.

⁸⁰ Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 204.

identification of all believers in the one body of Christ.⁸¹ Baptism is not what saves, but a symbol of the saving work that has occurred for the one who has received salvation, being identified with Christ. Acts 10:44-48 and 16:29-33 both portray water baptism as occurring after one has already received salvation. Thus, water baptism is a physical, outward demonstration of the spiritual baptism into Christ that occurs at the time a person believes in Christ as his Savior.

Paul goes in depth in Romans 6:1-10 to reveal to the Roman Christians what their baptism in Christ truly signifies. John Witmer explains, “The spiritual reality Paul spoke of is that by faith believers are ‘baptized (placed) into Christ’ and thereby are united and identified with Him.”⁸² Thus, the Christian was identified with Christ, his federal head, in the crucifixion of Christ that occurred in the past, with implications impacting him in the present. Through the picture of baptism, one is better able to grasp what Paul pointed out in verse 2: that the believer has “died to sin.” Romans 6:10 uses the same terminology concerning Christ that Paul used in verse 2 concerning the one identified with Christ (6:10 —“he died to sin,” 6:2 —“we who died to sin”). Verse 3 reveals how the same phrase that is used of Jesus Christ can be used of the believer: the Christian was “baptized *into his [Christ’s] death*” (italics added for emphasis).

⁸¹ John A. Witmer, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (SP Publications, Inc., 1983), 533-534.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 461.

The Believer's Identity in the Resurrection of Christ

Three days after Jesus was crucified and buried, the power of God was displayed when He defeated sin and death by rising from the dead.⁸³ The death and resurrection of Christ cannot be separated. Thus it follows that identification truths extend beyond a believer's identity in the death of Christ into the believer's identification in the resurrection of Christ. C. I. Scofield explains, "In the reckoning of God, the believer's union with Christ began with his death, and continues in his resurrection."⁸⁴ Romans 6:4-5 testifies, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection." Tucked within the passage of Romans 6 is the great proclamation to all believers: because Christ was raised and "lives to God" (6:10), so also are all believers to "walk in newness of life" (6:4). Jesus' statement in John 10:10 ("I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly") becomes a living reality for believers when they come to understand and embrace the fact that they have received new life through identity in Christ's resurrection. The principle of new life in Christ returns to the questions Paul raised in verses 1 and 15, verifying even more clearly that grace is not a freedom to live in sin, but a freedom to live a truly abundant life apart from sin. Ironside describes this truth profoundly in writing that as a result of resurrection to new life, "All thought of

⁸³ Romans 6:9; Luke 24:1-35, 45-46; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

⁸⁴ C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course Volume IV: Epistles and Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1960), 752.

living in sin is rejected, all antinomianism refuted . . . new life is to answer to the confession made in . . . baptism.”⁸⁵

Being united in Christ's death, believers are just as much united in His resurrection (6:5). The Greek term for *united* “means ‘growing together’, growing together in such an intimate way that it means an essential union. That is the meaning of the term ‘union by growth’, a joined growth becoming one, ‘united together’. It expresses therefore a very definite and real union.”⁸⁶ Such a union is like that of branches that are grafted into a tree. The grafted branches become united with the root of the tree and thus “grow together” with it.⁸⁷ Jesus uses imagery of Himself as “the true vine” and those who are in Him as branches in John 15. The picture presents the clearest visual imagery of the believer who has been united with Christ, who shares in His life.

Being united in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers have been provided access into a whole new realm of life that was unattainable in the flesh. The new realm is one in which sanctification can be practically worked out in the new life of the Christian. The old nature must be kept in the grave; it cannot be improved upon nor sanctified. The new life is the life in which positional righteousness can result in practical righteousness. Though future bodily resurrection is also promised for those in Christ (1 Cor. 15:50-53), within the context of Romans 6:1-14, Paul explains a resurrection in verse 5 that affects the very life of the believer on earth. The new life that the believer can partake in (Rom. 6:4) is the immediate result of resurrection in Christ Jesus.

⁸⁵ Ironside, *Lectures on Romans*, 77.

⁸⁶ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 56.

⁸⁷ Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 209.

Paul expresses the result of resurrection in his own life in Galatians 2:20 saying, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul's personal declaration of identity with Christ ought to stand as the example for all believers. For those in Christ have died with Him, have been raised, and now partake of new life in Him. Thus it only follows that one lives his life in light of such a marvelous truth! Having been freely justified by faith, the Christian life is also to be lived on the basis of faith with recognition that the righteousness of Christ provided in a positional sense naturally results in a call to holy living. Not only so, but Paul's attitude was one that looked upward and forward. He left his old nature behind in his death with Christ, seeking to know more fully the power of Christ's resurrection at work in him. He proclaimed with confidence in Philippians 3:8-15, 20-21:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; . . . For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Paul understood that Christ's work in him would not be complete until the day that he was glorified with Christ, but his earthly life was not lived wallowing in the sin of his

past. He left the sins of his past behind and embraced the resurrection life in Christ, for he knew of his identity with Christ and that it resulted in a call to righteous living!

A believer's identity in the death and resurrection of Christ also provides the fundamental basis for understanding how the power of sin is broken in his life. Romans 6:9 proclaims, "Death no longer has dominion over Him," that is over Christ. Christ has victory over sin and death because of His resurrection. All who are in Christ share in His victory because of their identity in Him. Newell writes regarding Romans 6:7, "And when the believer died to sin with Christ on the cross he was delivered altogether out of sin's realm and jurisdiction."⁸⁸ The reason is that the old man was crucified with Christ and in this fact the "body of sin might be done away with" (6:6). "Done away with" means "to render inactive or inoperative or ineffective," in other words, unable to complete a purpose.⁸⁹ The old man is all that was inherited from Adam, and this is the man that was held in the realm and slavery of sin, which according to verses 6 and 7 the believer has been set free from.⁹⁰ The believer now has life in an entirely new realm, one that was not accessible in Adam, in which sin has no power and victory in Christ has been provided in fact and is possible in experience!

The Necessity of Reckoning

Knowledge of one's identity in the death and resurrection of Christ necessitates the reckoning of these facts to be true. Paul commands in Romans 6:11 that believers are to "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Miles Stanford

⁸⁸ Newell, *Lectures on Romans*, 92.

⁸⁹ Smith, Class notes of Christina Fuselli in BIBL425, "Romans."

⁹⁰ Newell, *Lectures on Romans*, 91.

explains that *reckon* “means ‘to regard as being, to count as true.’”⁹¹ The Greek word literally means, “to determine [something] by mathematical process” and is written as an imperative, meaning that it is a command.⁹² Newell explains that when Paul uses the term in the context of Romans 4 and Romans 6:11, he presents the picture of God as a judge in a courtroom who is “accounting the believer righteous.”⁹³ Nee puts in plain words that as an accountant can only record the exact amount of money in his possession, so also what is recorded of the believer is simply true of what he is.⁹⁴ The believer has participated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Having come to a knowledge of these truths, he is commanded to reckon by simply regarding or counting them true of himself.

Stanford points out that believers must understand the importance of reckoning based on facts rather than experience. He adds that three steps are essential for reckoning to occur in its fullness:

Our freedom from domination by the sinful Adamic life was completed *positionally* through our identification with the Lord Jesus on Calvary. There we shared His death to sin, and from there we entered into His life to God. From this eternal position in Christ, our *experiential* freedom and growth are carried out as we: (1) Know, and reckon on, the identification truths; (2) Abide, and rest, in our Liberator; (3) Depend on, and walk in, the Spirit. Not just the first step, not even the first and second, but all three comprise the walk of reckoning!⁹⁵

⁹¹ Miles J. Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 184.

⁹² William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 597.

⁹³ Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse*, 131, 223.

⁹⁴ Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, 40.

⁹⁵ Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters*, 188.

Knowing and reckoning the truths revealed in identification lead to “a set heart-attitude” in which the believer is fully aware of having died to sin and being made alive to God.⁹⁶ The first step must lead to the second, in which the believer learns to abide and rest in his source, Jesus Christ. Finally, reckoning can only have its full effect when the believer is walking in the Spirit. Stanford summarizes, “Reckoning becomes effective as we count on the Word, abide in the Lord, and walk in the Spirit.”⁹⁷ For no spiritual growth can occur by the believer’s own efforts, but only by the Lord as one rests completely in Him.

The truths of Romans 6 will have little impact in the life of the believer if he does not take the step of reckoning. For it is one thing for a believer to recognize and understand the identification truths, but another to apply them to his life and then rest in Christ and walk in the Spirit. Then the positional truths become manifest in experience, and transform the believer’s condition to bring about the wonderful work of sanctification. The purpose of reckoning is that a believer would see and acknowledge the death of his old Adamic self that occurred in the past when Christ died on his behalf, applying this to his life with reckoning, or accounting true, that he now partakes of new life in Christ.⁹⁸ For in the new life one can abide in Christ and walk in the Spirit, being transformed into the likeness of Christ and growing in righteousness in experience.

Stanford writes with profound clarity:

There can be no effective reckoning on our life in Christ until we are firmly established in the truth of our having died to the old . . . We cannot rest in our risen Lord until we know we have been positionally released from Adam through death. Neither can we rest in the *process* of being

⁹⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

experientially released from the domination of the Adamic life until we know and count on the fact that we are loosed positionally.

True reckoning has its ultimate emphasis on the life side of the Cross; we count on our having died to sin in order to count on our being alive to God. Since we are new creations in Christ, death is forever past; we were brought out of it in Him at His resurrection. As for the old man within, we continually reckon that source to have been crucified, so that it may be held daily in the place of death. *We reckon; the Cross crucifies . . .* Once we see that our death to sin is in the past tense, completed, we are free to count ourselves *alive* to God in Christ Jesus, and to *live*—in the present tense!⁹⁹

If only more believers would see the truths of Romans 6 and understand the importance of reckoning! What might the church look like if believers could grasp these marvelous truths that God has so wonderfully provided? The richness of His Word reveals such depths of the Christian life that reach far beyond justification. The Christian life is a process and the Spirit is ever at work to bring believers into conformity to the image of the Savior Jesus Christ. Believers must leave their old selves at the cross and continually abide in Jesus, walking in the new resurrection life they have received.

Paul's command in Romans 6:11 is for believers to reckon their position in Christ as true. He follows with verses 12-14 with commands that "Those in Christ are to refuse and cast off the general bondage of sin . . . The method of this is to be (negatively) by the withdrawal of our members from sin's demands, and (positively) by the presentation of both ourselves and our members to God."¹⁰⁰ Two negative commands include not allowing sin to reign in one's body with the result that the desires of sin are obeyed (6:12). The second negative command is that believers "Do not present [their] members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin" (6:13). Following the two negative commands

⁹⁹ Ibid., 205.

¹⁰⁰ Newell, *Lectures on Romans*, 96.

are two positive commands: "Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God" (6:13).

The basis for the commands of Romans 6:12-13 is the fact that believers have been identified in the death and resurrection of Christ. Reckoning these facts to be true allows them to grasp that they indeed have died with Christ and now partake of new life in Him. As one reckons, the facts of identification begin to show their fruit in experience as the believer learns to obey Romans 6:12-13. Newell asserts that one's "experience . . . is simply the entering by faith into what has already happened at the cross . . . God makes the facts, and tells us to take the attitude that befits these facts; and when we obey, God works out experimental victory through us."¹⁰¹ The promise follows from the commands of Romans 6:12-13 that sin will have no mastery over believers because they are no longer under law, but under grace (6:14).¹⁰² Here one sees the transfer of the facts of Romans 6 into the experience of his daily life.

Identity with Christ Results in Freedom from Slavery to Sin

In the latter half of Romans 6, Paul provides an illustration of slavery to finalize why both questions raised in the chapter are not only a distortion of the gospel, but completely out of line with what has been provided for believers in justification. For the believer to surrender to the yoke of sin after salvation, he is returning to slavery and death when freedom has been provided at so great a cost!

Romans 6:16-20 presents an important reality to believers: they have been set free from the power of sin, but it is still possible for them to go back into submission under

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰² Ibid., 96.

sin. In Adam, an unbeliever has no choice but to be enslaved to sin because he is still bound by its power. However, in Christ believers no longer have to be enslaved to sin because of the freedom they have received in Christ. Through a question, Paul brings up an important fact in verse 16: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness?” The question implies “self-evident truth”; for one is well aware that it would be foolish for a freed slave to go back into slavery under his old master.¹⁰³ In the same way, a believer living in obedience to his old master, sin, after having been set free from its power defeats the purpose of receiving freedom in Christ.

In Romans 6:17-18 Paul speaks in the past tense about the Roman believers, giving thanks to God because having once been slaves of sin, they have now become slaves of righteousness. Morris adds, “Whatever the sin, it alienates from God, and he rejoices that as regards the Roman Christians this is all in the past. They have ‘obeyed from the heart’, where the aorist tense points to the decisive act of obedience when they turned to God.”¹⁰⁴ The Roman believers had made a personal decision to apply what they had learned and chose to live as slaves of righteousness in conformity with their position in Christ. Morris provides a beneficial description of Paul’s statement in verse 18 writing, “The freed in Christ have become *slaves to righteousness*. They are not aimless, purposeless. They have been freed from sin in order that they may give themselves over

¹⁰³ Witmer, “Romans,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 464.

¹⁰⁴ Morris, *Romans*, 262.

wholly to worthwhile causes, boldly expressed here as being enslaved to the right.”¹⁰⁵

The distaste for sin ought to be multiplied when one sees that he has been freed from sin with a distinct purpose to live for righteousness. Paul set the foundation for this truth in the first half of Romans 6, firmly establishing the fact that having died with Christ, believers have received new life in Christ that they are also called to live in.

Paul adds a note in verse 19 that he is writing in “human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh.” His *human term*, meaning, “to speak ‘as people do in daily life,’” refers to enslavement, for one might initially see slavery in a negative light, especially in Rome where slavery was commonly practiced. However, his illustration could be easily understood by the Romans and effectively communicates “spiritual truths.”¹⁰⁶ Cranfield also explains, “Paul’s figure seems no less necessary today; for it is doubtful whether there is any other which can so clearly express the total belongingness, the total obligation, the total commitment and the total accountability, which characterize the life under grace.”¹⁰⁷ However, one should not let the term *slavery* add any kind of negative light to becoming a slave of righteousness, for there is possibly no greater privilege a man could receive!

Paul continues to recall that at one point in time the Roman Christians presented themselves “as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more lawlessness*” (6:19). In the same way, but on a contrary note, just at they were once slaves of things they are now ashamed of, Paul calls the believers to present their members as slaves of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 264.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 326.

righteousness, which results in their sanctification. Thus, every time a believer makes a conscience decision out of obedience to God by living in righteousness, the fruit of sanctification continues to be worked out in his life. Cranfield notes that *hagiasmos*, translated as *holiness* in the New King James Version, is used a total of ten times in the New Testament and “denotes God’s work in the believer, his ethical renewal . . . the word, as used by Paul, indicates a process rather than a state, and is better represented by ‘sanctification’ than by ‘holiness’ or ‘consecration.’”¹⁰⁸ Paul uses the term again in verse 22 and also three times in 1 Thessalonians, in which he states that God’s will for believers is their sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3). When believers choose to present themselves as slaves to righteousness, the will of God is being accomplished in their lives to conform them to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. For God did not save sinners that they might continue in sin, but that the righteousness He has provided for them be practically lived out in their lives.

Paul notes in verse 20 that when believers were formerly enslaved to sin, before justification when by nature they were slaves of sin, they were “free in regard to righteousness.” If believers can now be slaves of righteousness, why would they want to go back to living like they did before they were justified as slaves of sin, in a lifestyle that led to death? Understanding the truth explained in Romans 6:16-20 reveals yet another reason why grace is no reason to choose to sin.

The Shame of Sin Versus the Benefit of Sanctification

In the final three verses of Romans 6, Paul contrasts the *benefit* of sin with the wonderful gift provided through Jesus Christ. Using a rhetorical question yet again, he

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 327.

asks, “So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed?” The expected answer is an obvious *none*, for just as Paul says, those things result in death. The only *benefit* of sin is shame and the only outcome is death. Romans 6:23 declares, “the wages of sin *is* death.” Wages (*opsonion*) literally means “‘ration–(money)’ paid to a soldier.”¹⁰⁹ Death is the payment that is owed to the individual who sins. Cranfield helps bring clarity to the meaning of *opsonion* in explaining:

Sin is still personified, and is here represented either as a general who pays wages to his soldiers (some who understand [*hopla*] in v. 13 in the sense of ‘weapons’ see here the recalling of military imagery already present there) or—and this suits the prominence of [*doulos*] in the preceding verses—as a slave-owner who pays his slaves an allowance. The word [*opsonion*] . . . denotes a wage paid in money, and is most frequently used of soldiers’ pay, but was also used in connexion with slaves.¹¹⁰

Whether the wages are viewed in light of a soldier or a slave, the point is clear: as a soldier or a slave would receive the pay that is due him, death is what is owed as the payment for sin.

Paul no doubt has physical death in view (contrasted with eternal life), but much more than physical death is his focus on the spiritual aspect of death. Both physical and spiritual death can be understood in terms of separation. As Barnhouse describes, “As physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body, spiritual death is the separation of the soul and spirit from God.”¹¹¹ Sin results in both physical death and spiritual death. For the Christian, even though he has received life in Christ, the effects of sin still impact his daily experience. Morris explains, “‘Death here is the negation or

¹⁰⁹ William Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 747.

¹¹⁰ Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, 329.

¹¹¹ Barnhouse, *Romans Volume I: Man’s Ruin*, 210.

absence of a life that is truly life. Sin robs life of its meaning, purpose, fulfillment' . . . sin 'promises life and gives death.' . . . Sinners get what they have earned. Death is no arbitrary sentence, but the inevitable consequence of their sin."¹¹² Jesus proclaimed in John 10:10 that he came to provide *abundant* life. Unbelievers cannot share in the abundant life of Christ because of their spiritual death in sin.

For the believer, the fruit of sin produces nothing of eternal gain or value.¹¹³ As Moo explains, "As slaves of sin, unbelievers produce attitudes and patterns of life that lead to condemnation and are the source of shame for Christians."¹¹⁴ Though the believer will experience eternal life after the death of his physical body, only choices of obedience reap fruits of righteousness and reward for this life and the life to come. When a believer sins, he suffers loss not only eternally, but also in his present life as has been understood previously, in that sin separates a believer from the fellowship he has with the Lord and pulls him back into the lifestyle that he was delivered from, producing nothing of eternal gain or value. Thus believers are called to live as slaves of righteousness bearing eternal fruit of righteousness for the glory of God. The fruit of righteous living is sanctification, a practical outworking of righteousness in the life of the Christian.

Freedom from sin has been provided for believers. The power of sin has been broken by Jesus Christ and all who have been justified, being identified in Him, no longer need to be subject to the yoke of slavery to sin. How wonderful that the believer can choose to be enslaved to righteousness! Though a human example cannot do justice to the

¹¹² Morris, *Romans*, 267.

¹¹³ Smith, Class notes of Christina Fuselli in BIBL425, "Romans."

¹¹⁴ Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 117.

mark of freedom on the believer from sin into a life of righteousness, Paul has provided a clear picture of the new life a believer has received in Jesus Christ. Therefore, believers can live in the knowledge of their righteous position in Christ, reckoning the death of their old man in Jesus Christ and aware of the new life they have received. The benefit in their lives now leads to sanctification and life rather than death!

CONCLUSION: RIGHTEOUSNESS PROVIDED, RECEIVED, AND RECKONED

In coming to a close, the Scriptures have provided a most complete and wonderful answer for all that has been observed concerning the great dilemma of man, a seemingly unsolvable problem according to Socrates. The courtroom that once held nothing but a great throng of sinners, now holds multitudes of those who have been declared righteous by a just Judge who has provided righteousness for man through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Oh how great the provision that was made on behalf of sinners! Even more so God has gone beyond simply saving, for he has justified and provided a means by which the power of sin over the believer has been defeated. Those that were once enslaved to the chains of sin and death have now been called to a life of holiness, a life of righteousness that is daily being conformed into the image of the Righteous One Himself. Let none conclude that the free gift of salvation is freedom to go back into slavery to the dark ways of sin, but freedom to live in righteousness for the glory and honor of the One who paid such a great price to deliver both Jews and Gentiles alike from so great a state of depravity unto a marvelous and holy life in Christ.

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