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# **NEW CREATION**

**THE END OF ALL THINGS  
ACCORDING TO FLESH**

**By**

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# CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Foreword .....	iii
Prologue to Part I .....	iv
Part I Paul’s Ministry — New Creation— .....	.1
The Significance of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 .....	1
The Passage – 2 Corinthians 5:13-6:2 .....	.3
Paul’s Ministry Questioned .....	4
The Work of Christ: How Far-reaching .....	6
Dead to Sin, Alive to God .....	8
Two “Natures?” .....	10
Dead to The Law, Legalism .....	11
The New Man .....	13
Status of The Things of the Flesh .....	15
Flesh – According to Flesh .....	16
Knowing Christ “After the Flesh” .....	21
Flesh – The Time of Human Frailty? .....	23
Paul’s Messianic Expectations .....	24
Estimating Messiah According to Flesh .....	26
The Promises and The Messiah .....	27
“In Abraham” -- Circumcision and The Law .....	28
New Creation .....	32
Abraham Transcended .....	35
Reconciled to God by Messiah .....	36
Reconciliation of The World .....	39
Reconciling Me: Reconciling The World .....	41
An Ambassador for Christ .....	43
Be Reconciled to God .....	44
Righteous in Him .....	45
He Made Him ... To be Sin ... We Become The Righteousness of God in Him .....	46
Epilogue to Part I .....	48

# CONTENTS

(Continued)

Prologue to Part II .....	51
Part II: New Testament Overview – The End of Israel	
According to Flesh .....	54
Proclamation by John The Baptist .....	54
The New Birth .....	56
Confronting The System .....	58
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem !! .....	61
The Olivet Discourse .....	62
The Joel Prophecy .....	62
A Prophet Like Unto Moses .....	65
Stephen – The Final Confrontation .....	68
Further Scripture Support .....	70
Not All From Israel Are Israel .....	71
But God Has Not Rejected His People .....	73
And So All Israel Shall be Saved .....	74
Wrath ... To The Uttermost .....	75
“Bless Them ... Curse Him” .....	76
“The Least of These My Brethren” .....	77
Promises, Promises, Promises .....	78
The Present World Situation .....	80
Appendix I Occurrences of “kata sarka” .....	81
Appendix II Some Thoughts in Regard to Baptism .....	85

## FOREWORD

Several years ago I wrote a booklet, “*Be Reconciled to God*,” which was published by The Open Bible Trust in England. Later on I wrote an article, “*The End of Israel According to Flesh*,” which was published by This I Believe, Inc. as TIB #26. It explores some of the far-reaching implications of the first one. Scripture Research, Inc. has requested that I merge these two publications into one booklet, as they would form a coherent whole, and which they would publish.

-- Daniel Andersen

## **Prologue to Part I**

True evangelism proclaims the “good news” of what God has accomplished in the Person and Work of His Son, the benefits of which are offered freely to the hearer. True evangelism does not urge people to *do* something, whether repent, pray, sorrow, or perform acts of contrition. It presents people with something to *believe*, a message to “mix with faith,” the Savior to embrace.

We can do no better than go to that master evangelist, the apostle Paul, for insights and understanding as to what is to be proclaimed so that persons can become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, he is the one who began the ministry of Christ abroad in the world. Paul is the one who “shunned not to declare all the counsel of God” so thoroughly that he could state he was “pure from the blood of all,” Acts 20:26,27. In a unique passage, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21, that steward of God’s truths gives a compact summary of his ministry and testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks of the dramatic changes that took place in his own views regarding his fellow human beings and the Messiah of Israel and the purpose of God in relation to humanity. This passage can serve as our guide and pattern of what to proclaim in seeking to present Christ to anyone anywhere. It can also enable those who have reached out to Christ by faith to come to a greater appreciation of those rich treasures that have been put to their account in the Person of God’s Beloved Son.

Certain premises will be stated that the reader is urged to accept, at least tentatively. If these have never been considered before, they will likely produce a definite and exciting change in understanding what Paul was writing about in the passage under consideration and, by extension, in the understanding of much of the content of the New Testament Scriptures.

## **Part I: Paul's Ministry – New Creation**

To the apostle Paul, more than to any other writer of Scripture, was given the “stewardship of the secrets of God,” especially the task of interpreting and setting forth the deepest meaning and far-reaching implications of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we fail to grasp the truths given to this steward of God, we may fail to understand God’s provision for humanity and His relationship to humanity that are based upon Christ’s work.

### **The Significance of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21**

Paul makes strong personal defense and justification of his ministry in his letters to the Corinthians, especially in the second one. In the passage referred to, it appears that Paul gives an encapsulation of his ministry, of the truths he was commissioned to minister. It may be thought of as Paul’s ministry “in a nutshell.”

In the larger context he details the quality and character of that ministry. He gives vivid descriptions of his feelings, his experiences, and what he was called upon to endure. Because so many in that day (and it seems just as true today!) attached much significance to the things of the flesh, the “externals” of life, Paul calls upon his readers to bear with the folly of his boasting along that line: “Seeing that many glory (boast, brag) after the flesh, I will glory also.” (2 Corinthians 11:18. The entire 11th chapter should be read in this connection.) We recognize the irony in such boasting, for Paul’s boasting was not in himself, but in his Lord: “But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (10:17). Indeed, he describes his ministry as a great treasure in a vessel of clay in order that all might recognize that the power in that ministry was of God, not of the frail human being to whom it was committed (4:7).

Before examining the passage in detail, I urge the reader to accept

(at least for now!) the following premises:

- 1) Though Paul here uses the 1st person plural, he is actually intensely personal, even autobiographical.
- 2) In v 16 he is not referring to a personal knowledge of Jesus (“Christ”) but is referring to his earlier “Messianic expectation” as a zealous Israelite true to the traditions of his people. So I shall use the word “Messiah” here instead of “Christ,” in order to help convey this impression.
- 3) In v 17 Paul is not describing the “change” experienced by one who comes to Christ, important as this may be. He speaks of the new basis for being brought to a right relationship with God — “in Messiah . . . New Creation!” What have “passed away” are certain very specific things, the things connected with the old Israelitish tradition and Messianic expectation.

We examine the 1st of these premises here, deferring the others until later. A literal translation of the passage uses the first person plural (we, us, our). But we should understand Paul to mean the singular (I, me, my). I quote from an extensive footnote in Conybeare’s work, *The Epistles of St. Paul*, at 1 Thessalonians 1:2:

It is important to observe in this place, once for all, that St. Paul uses “we” according to the idiom of many ancient writers, where a modern writer would use “I.” Great confusion is caused in many passages by not translating, according to his true meaning, in the first person *singular*, for thus it often happens, that what he spoke of himself individually appears to us as if it were meant for a general truth: instances will occur repeatedly of this in the Epistles to the Corinthians, *especially the Second* (emphasis mine).

Conybeare’s footnote goes on to justify this claim by showing, as

an example, that even though 1 Thessalonians has the salutation “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus,” Paul must speak for *himself Personally* in 3:1,2, writing: “we thought it good to be left in “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus,” Paul must speak for *himself* Athens alone, and sent Timothy our brother.” Silvanus (also named Silas) could not have been included in this remark as he did not rejoin Paul until Timothy himself returned. (See 1 Thessalonians 3:6; Acts 18:5.)

Further support is in A.T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, Epistles of Paul, p 230. At v 13, concerning the plural pronoun “we,” Robertson states:

It is literary plural, for Paul is referring *only to himself* (emphasis mine).

I have stressed this point as it gives remarkable meaning and intensity to 2 Corinthians 5:13-21. Conybeare, Moffatt, and Goodspeed translate this passage, indeed, the entire book of 2 Corinthians, in this way. It gives a “sparkle” that we would otherwise miss. Of course, in certain passages the plural “we” or “us” reaches out to include the Corinthians in a general statement and the pronoun should remain plural. Examples are 5:21 and 7:1.

### **The passage — 2 Corinthians 5:13-6:2**

Before going on it would be appropriate to have the entire passage before us. The following rendering is the writer’s own, but giving due credit to the scholars mentioned above. It is generously paraphrased in seeking to convey the subtleties and nuances of the text.

13. “I am beside myself,” am I? Well, that’s between myself and God. I am “sane,” am I? Well, that’s in your own interests.

14. In any case, I am controlled by Christ's love, convinced that One died for all, consequently all died;
  15. and (convinced that) he died in behalf of all in order that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died and was raised in their behalf.
  16. So, having come to a realization of this, I no longer regard anyone according to flesh (that is, by what is external). Admittedly I once had a fleshly estimation of Messiah, but I can't estimate him in this way any longer.
  17. In fact, if anyone comes to be in Messiah...(that one partakes of a) NEW CREATION!! The old ideas have passed away, indeed, they've become new, and different!
  18. And all this is the doing of God, the One who reconciled me to himself by Messiah and gave to me the service (ministry) of this reconciliation:
  19. how that God was reconciling the world unto himself in Messiah, not reckoning to them their offenses, and he has put into me the word of this reconciliation.
  20. Consequently I am an ambassador for Christ - it is as though God makes his appeal through me! I entreat (everywhere) as one representing Christ: "BE RECONCILED TO GOD!"
  21. He made him who knew not sin to be sin in our behalf in order that we might come into a right standing with God in him.
- 6:1. Moreover, as one working together (with God), I also appeal to you, "Don't receive this grace of God in vain."
2. For he says, "I heard you in a favorable time, and helped you in the day of salvation." Well, *here is the favorable time, here is the day of salvation!*

## **Paul's Ministry Questioned**

Paul's ministry and apostleship were constantly being discredited and challenged in a variety of ways. His most critical opponents apparently were a group of "legalizers." It has been said that they "dogged Paul's footsteps," pressing the claims of circum-

cision and the keeping of certain tenets of the Mosaic Law upon those to whom Paul had testified concerning Christ and the grace of God. They sought to discredit Paul by arguing that he could not be a genuine apostle. He had never met Christ, so could not have received an apostleship. He could only have learned from the original apostles and so was subservient to them and obligated to them. The things he ministered were distortions and twistings of what he had learned from these earliest apostles. Paul deals with such charges in various places in the epistles to the Corinthians and very emphatically in the epistle to the Galatians.

Apparently accusations were also made concerning Paul's behavior. It seems he was accused of being fickle, of being "two-faced," as suggested by the phrase "yea, yea, and nay, nay." He uses this accusation to emphasize that his proclamation of Christ stressed the positive, the "yea," with no hint of "yea and nay." Indeed, whatever may be the promises of God, in Christ is the "Yea" and the "Amen." And the glory of God is in it! (See 1:15-20.)

Another claim is that he acted irrationally at times and with undue sobriety at other times. Paul uses these claims to indicate the driving force in his conduct. Because the work of Christ in death and resurrection is involved, this leads to the brief summary, in the passage under consideration, of his whole ministry. So in 5:13 he responds to those who criticize his behavior, perhaps making actual quotations from their charges, as indicated in the translation. If he acts insane (ecstatic?) that is solely between himself and God. If he acts soberly, it is for the sake of the Corinthians. In all this he is constrained by the love of Christ, v 14. I take this to speak of Christ's love for Paul, though it is entirely possible that it speaks of Paul's love for Christ. No matter how various ones may react to Paul's behavior, let all know, and let those who belittle him consider, that the motivation for all his actions is Christ's love.

## The Work of Christ: How Far-reaching?

This, then, gives Paul occasion to speak of the extent and implications of that love. It led Christ to give Himself in death: "...having judged thus, that One died for all, then all died." The "all" here must speak of all humanity, every human being. To make it any segment or fraction of the human race would contradict the force of v 16, where Paul says he can no longer regard anyone according to external, or fleshly, distinctions. The two phrases are intimately interrelated -- the One dying for all leads to the all dying. The dying of all is the result of the One dying. The verbs are identical in every respect, except that the first is the 3rd person singular and the last the 3rd person plural. To alter the implication from one to the other is, in my estimation, misleading, and indicates failure to grasp the great scope of the work of Christ. The *King James Version* reads: "...one *died* for all, then *were* all *dead*." (There is no substantial manuscript support for the "if" in the KJV.) Translating this way makes the passage mean Christ's death showed all to have been previously dead in some manner, for example in what Darby's footnote calls "a state of nature." Perhaps these translations assumed that the death of all is what is spoken of in Romans 5:12: "...death passed upon all men." But this cannot be the case. Here the death of all is clearly the *consequence* of the One dying for all. The "all died" hinges upon and is the result of the fact that "One died." Thus his death was, in some sense, the death of all. All died because the One died. All died in Him. This can mean no less than that the history of the human race ended in the death of Christ. The collective and individual records of all have ceased. God has brought all, all humanity, into the state of death in the death of His Son. This is the end of the Adamic race in relation to God. Thus God is not dealing with humans as sinners alive in this world, inflicting punishment or

taking vengeance. And this great work was not done in anger or harshness, not done capriciously, not done from losing patience and acting in desperation. It was done as an act of love and grace.

Now as surely as Christ died, so He was raised. And as all died in His death, any expectation of anything beyond must reside in His resurrection. Paul goes on to state in v 15: “And He died in behalf of all in order that the ones who live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who died in their behalf and was raised again.” The phrase “those who live” or “the ones who live” speaks to me of those who by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are identified with Him, not only in His death, which is the case for all humanity, but also in His resurrection. If all humanity died **as a consequence of the One dying**, which we take to mean all died **in Him**, it would follow that “the ones who live” must live **as a consequence of the One living again**, or, they live **in Him**. This is supported by the phrase: “...who *for their sakes* died and was raised,” or, “who died and was raised *in their behalf*.” Thus they are “alive unto God in Christ Jesus,” having passed from death to life. It now becomes these to live, not in self-seeking and self-centeredness, but as those belonging to Christ, devoting themselves to His honor and glory.

## **Dead to Sin, Alive to God**

So vv 14,15 may summarize in short, succinct phrases truths detailed in Romans 6,7, perhaps even the large passage, Romans 5-8. The death of Christ has ended the history of humankind “in the flesh,” in Adam. All that humans are or could hope to be, all their vaunted accomplishments or miserable failures, all are brought into the dust of death. On an individual basis, my own personal history as a child of Adam ended in the death of Christ. My “old man was

crucified with Him.” It is here, in Romans 6:1-11 that we are introduced to the grand truth of personal identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Whenever Paul speaks of this identification with Christ in His death, he uses simple personal pronouns such as “I,” “me,” “we,” “our,” “ye,” “your.” Note this in Romans 6:6: “*our* old man is crucified with him,” Galatians 2:20: “*I* am crucified with Christ,” and Colossians 2:20: “if *ye* be dead with Christ.” See also Romans 6:2,3,4; Colossians 2:12,13; 3:1,3. It is the person, the whole person, that is so identified with Christ, the identification being so complete that His death becomes the death of the person. As to when in time this took place, it is obvious that it took place when Christ died. Our exercising of faith in this operation or working of God, our reckoning or accounting it to be the case, is, of course, our own action in our own lifetime. But the *King James Version* appears not to have grasped the scope and implications of this identification with Christ, as it consistently renders the associated verbs inadequately. Some notable examples follow, along with a corrected wording:

Romans 6:2

- KJV — ...we that are dead to sin...
- prefer — ...we who died to sin...

Romans 6:6

- KJV — ...our old man is crucified with him...
- prefer — ...our old man was crucified with him...

Galatians 2:20

- KJV — I am crucified with Christ...
- prefer — have been crucified with Christ...

Colossians 2:20

- KJV — ...if ye be dead with Christ...
- prefer — ...if ye died with Christ...

Colossians 3:1

- KJV — If ye then be risen with Christ...
- prefer — If therefore ye were raised with Christ...

Colossians 3:3

KJV — ...ye are dead...

prefer — ...ye died...

Translating in the preferred manner puts the emphasis directly on the work of Christ Himself. It is His work, not ours. The glory and credit are His, not ours. It is done, finished, complete. It is not just Christ dying **for my sins**, but **for me**. When He died, I died. When He was raised from the dead, I was raised. Faith appropriates and rests in His work, thus I “reckon” myself to be dead indeed unto sin, but living unto God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). Notice that here, *in relation to sin*, the believer remains in the state of death, so to speak: “...reckon...yourselves *to be dead* indeed unto sin.” The implication is that sin can have no power or influence over a dead person.

In the passages cited above, it is always “died,” implying the believer has passed from the state of death and is seen on resurrection ground. Further, it is not a “crucifying myself daily” or a continual “putting myself to death.” Such exhortations can lead to subtle forms of works and self-righteousness, and do not take God at His Word.

## Two “Natures?”

Nor do these passages describe something that has been called the person’s “sinful nature” or “evil nature” that is supposedly crucified with Christ. It is not sin that died, or a “sinful nature” that died. *It is not my “nature,” it is me!* It is the person, the individual, the self, the “ego” (Greek for “I”), all that can be wrapped up in the personal pronoun “I,” that died because of being merged (baptized, Romans 6:3,4) into Christ in His death. I am not to reckon a part of myself, a sinful nature, as dead. I am to reckon myself, my whole being, person, individuality as dead (with respect to sin). Sin, the whole root (as opposed to “a sin,” or “sins,” the fruit), the very

basic principle of self-will, self-striving, self-centeredness and self-consciousness as opposed to God-centeredness and God-consciousness, can have no influence over a dead person. Thus, the believer in Christ is “freed” from sin: “...he that died is freed from sin,” Romans 6:7. The Greek word translated “freed” is more literally “justified.” Rotherham renders it “righteously acquitted from sin.” In this context it conveys all the ideas of being released, cleared, and righteously discharged (thus God did not compromise His own intrinsic righteousness in the transaction) from the power, influence, dominion, and taint of sin.

This application of the death of Christ in relation to sin is for all and is available to all. For sin came into the entire human race and it is there, and people sin, whether or not a system of law, such as the Mosaic Law, is imposed. Such a law makes certain actions or deeds so offensive that they are recorded. But when there is no law sin is not put to account, that is, no accounting is kept of one’s sinful acts. Nevertheless, sin as a basic root or principle is there in the world of humanity. (These ideas are dealt with in Romans 5:12-14.) The death of Christ has dealt with it, with the very basic reality of sin, to free us, to clear us from it.

## **Dead to the Law, Legalism**

The major passage dealing with the application of the work of Christ to those under law is Romans 7:1-6. We present it here, liberally paraphrased in seeking to convey the meaning of the Greek text:

1. Or are you ignorant, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know what “law” means), that the law governs the person only as long as he lives?
2. For example, the married woman is bound by law to the husband while he is alive. But if the husband should die, she is released from that “law of the husband.”

3. So then, if she becomes another man's while her husband is still alive, she will be considered an adulteress. But if her husband should die she is set free from that law and is not considered an adulteress if she becomes another man's.
4. Similarly, my brothers, you were made dead to the Law by the (crucified) body of Christ, so that *you too* could become Another's, even His, the One Who was raised from among the dead, in order that we might be fruitful to God.
5. For when we were in the flesh, the promptings of sin, stirred up by means of the Law, were active in our bodily members, resulting in our being fruitful to Death,
6. But now we have been released from the Law, having died in that relationship which once bound us. Consequently we should be rendering bondservice in a new way, of spirit, and not in an obsolete way, of subservience to a written code.

Here Paul seems to have especially in mind the Israelites who, in relation to God, were under the legal system of the Mosaic Law. Paul shows how death ends a legal obligation by severing a legal relationship. With the severing of a relationship, one is free to establish a new relationship, one that would not have been possible if death had not intervened. Thus, believing Israelites could reckon themselves dead, not only to sin, as all can, but also to the claims of the Law. A legal system can have no control or authority over a dead person! A dead person cannot be ordered about by rules and regulations! So Israelites could reckon themselves dead to the Law in the death of Christ in order that they might see themselves as joined to Him, belonging to Him, Who was raised from the dead. Though this passage appears to deal most specifically with Israelites (there were many in Rome!) in relation to the Law, I believe it is most appropriate to make a generalization of the truth and declare that the death of Christ frees anyone anywhere from any legal system in relation to God, whether self-imposed, which

seems to be a universal practice, or divinely-imposed, as with Israel of old.

Legalism in any form is burdensome and constricting. It drives sincere persons to despair, uncertainty, and fruitlessness in relation to God. The freedom in Christ gives power, assurance, joy. It removes the burden and strength and consciousness of sin. It causes the spirit to soar. It has the power to enable a quality of life that honors and pleases our God. Paul aptly calls this quality of life “bringing forth fruit to God” or “being fruitful to God,” and “serving in newness of spirit.” This is in contrast with “bringing forth fruit unto death” or “being fruitful to death,” and “serving in the oldness of the letter.” The latter phrases describe the bondage of legalism, a relationship to God under law whereby an acceptable quality of life is striven for by obedience to rules and regulations, by works, by *doing*. This way of legalism, which operates in the realm of the flesh, the realm of human striving and effort, is the way of death. The way of the truth in Christ, coming into the influence and current of God’s thoughts, or spirit, is the way of life. Paul deals further and in great detail with these matters in Romans 7:7-8:17.

## **The New Man**

The foregoing considerations are, I believe, a proper expansion of the truths contained in 2 Corinthians 5:14,15. “They who live” of v 15 are those who, by faith and reckoning, are merged into Christ in His death and in His resurrection. They are in Christ. Thus they are seen as raised with Christ. Certainly God the Father sees the believer to be in His Son, as Paul emphasized in 1 Corinthians 1:30: “...of him (God) are ye **in Christ Jesus.**” Before God, the believer is no longer seen as a member of the human race in Adam, but is seen as being in His Son, as being identified with Christ Jesus. Further, as we read in Romans 6:10, God’s Son died unto

sin once for all and now, in resurrection, is alive unto God. These experiences are reckoned to or “put to the account of” the believer. The believer has died and been raised with Christ. Thus Paul exhorts believers to view themselves in the same standing as they are viewed by God: “In the same way look upon yourselves as also being dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11).

The thoughts of these passages strongly force upon us the idea of far-reaching changes in the relationship of humanity to God and the place of believers before God. As mentioned earlier, the history of the human race in Adam has ended in the death of Christ. And the individual history of the believer in Christ has not only ended as far as being a participant in the Adamic race is concerned, but a new history has begun in the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ. A new history in the glorious resurrection experience of Christ Himself! A new identity: no longer being seen in and identified with the old humanity with its foibles and weaknesses and corruption, but seen in and identified with a new humanity! There lives in relation to God a New Man, One forever beyond the effects and reach of sin and the dominion of death (Romans 6:9,10). God has severed all connection with the old order of humanity, with manhood in Adam, with manhood as derived from Adam. He has established a new order of humanity, a new ground of acceptance, a new relationship in His Own Son. The believer can exclaim: “I am no longer in myself (or in Adam) before God: I am in Another! **I am in that Man** -- that Man Who was raised from the dead!” A challenging question once posed to me is most fitting here. It is implicit in Paul’s writings to the Romans and Corinthians. It confronted me with the issue of being able to enunciate distinctly and without ambiguity my position and identity and my own deepest commitment in relation to God the Father: “**God has changed His Man! Have you?**” (That is, “God has changed His Man from Adam to Christ, from the first Adam to

the Last Adam, from the old man to the New Man! Have you consciously and deliberately made this same change as to your own position and identity in relation to God?")

## **Status of the Things of the Flesh: The Externals of Life**

The *King James Version* translates the first part of v 16 of the text we are studying as follows: "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh." The Greek for "Wherefore henceforth" could be rendered literally: "So that from the now." Some have interpreted this time reference as a "dispensational boundary line," with "henceforth" or "now" indicating the time Paul wrote this epistle. Thus, it is claimed that God initiated a new program or dispensation during the time the history recorded in the Book of Acts was unfolding, perhaps at about the time of Paul's sojourn in Ephesus, Acts 19. So the truths referred to in the succeeding verses, including new creation and the ministry of reconciliation, were introduced and became effective at that time. And, as these are truths of tremendous scope, this supposed change of dispensation during the time of the Book of Acts must also be of tremendous scope and impact.

I certainly agree that the truths of new creation and reconciliation are most important and far-reaching, but I doubt that the "now" of v 16 has to do with God introducing a new dispensation at the moment of Paul's writing this letter. The historical time reference for new creation and reconciliation is the death and resurrection of Christ. No doubt God's actions and relationships with regard to humanity moved to that level when those events transpired. But we must distinguish between God's accomplishment of His pur-

pose in Christ and the bringing of the realization and understanding of it into human consciousness and thought. It is the latter that Paul deals with here. He is stating how **his own** awareness and grasp of the truths summarized in vv 14, 15 affected **his own** thinking and outlook. So we might paraphrase the first phrase of v 16:

Having come to a realization of this...

Moffatt renders it:

Once convinced of this, then...

### **Flesh — “Sarx” According to Flesh — “kata sarka”**

Before going further we must give some consideration to the word “flesh” and the phrase “according to flesh.” The flexibility and wide range of meaning of the Greek word “sarx” (“flesh”) are very impressive. Here is a sampling (all from the KJV):

Luke 24:39: ...a spirit hath not *flesh* and bones, as ye see Me have.

This is as simple and literal a use of “sarx” as one could find.

I Peter 1:24: For all *flesh* is as grass.

Here the meaning is plainly all humanity.

Romans 7:5: For when we were in the *flesh*.

This phrase is to be associated with “But now we are delivered

from the law” in v 6 and describes the state of Israelites under the Mosaic Law. Deliverance from the bondage under law is in Christ. They certainly had not left the realm of the literal flesh!

Hebrews 5:7: Who in the days of his *flesh*.

Here “sarx” appears to describe general human frailty, weakness, and limitation, the condition in humanity that Christ experienced before His resurrection

Romans 11:14: ...I may provoke to emulation them which are my *flesh*.

Paul refers to his fellow Israelites, his kinsmen.

Galatians 4:23, 29: ...he that was born after the *flesh*.

This refers to Ishmael, conceived and born in the normal, natural process by which human beings are conceived and born. This is in contrast with Isaac, conceived and born by divine provision and enablement.

Galatians 5:19: Now the works of the *flesh* are manifest.

The emphasis here is upon immoral and evil expressions of human behavior.

Philippians 3:4: If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the *flesh*, I more.

There are no immoral or evil connotations in view here. There is rather a listing of things that cater to pride and accomplishment. The context shows that the confidence or trust in the flesh is in such things as circumcision on the eighth day, being an Israelite, Being of the tribe of Benjamin, and being blameless as to require-

ments and prescriptions of the Mosaic Law.

Very few occurrences of “sarx” use it in the simple literal meaning. Most have figurative connotations of some kind. Often it speaks simply of humanity, but with the implications of weakness, infirmity, and mortality. It often conveys the idea of human standards, conventions, attainments, values, and status, stressing outward features rather than inner character. These become sources of pride and distinction, leading to discord and divisiveness.

Crucial to the understanding of these verses and crucial to the proposals made in this article is the meaning of the Greek phrase “kata sarka.” It occurs twice in 2 Corinthians 5:16 and is translated “after the flesh” in the KJV. It can also be translated “according to flesh.” These are very literal translations. It is interesting to notice how many translators seek to translate the idea or meaning rather than literally translate the words:

...to regard anyone *from the world's standpoint*.  
— Twentieth Century New Testament

...I estimate no one *by what is external*.  
— Moffatt

...think of anyone *in a merely human fashion*.  
— Knox

...no one *from a human point of view*.  
— Revised Standard Version

...no longer *be based on their outward lives*.  
— Phillips

...*worldly standards* have ceased to count...  
— New English Bible

Shortly I shall refer to scholars who point out that the phrase we

are studying refers to “the local and hereditary,” to distinctions of race and class. I believe that when Paul suggests that he no longer knows or estimates others “according to flesh,” he had in mind their genealogy and relationship to the Law of Moses. Were they Israelites? Were they properly circumcised? Did they strive to keep the Law to whatever extent possible: occasional pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem, scrupulous dietary restrictions, proper observance of the Sabbaths, keeping separate from other peoples and their customs no matter where they were dwelling? Paul very clearly connects the life “under the Law” with the realm of the flesh. Romans 7:4-6 and Philippians 3:3-8, already quoted from, are good examples. Another is Galatians 3:2, 3 where the phrase “by the works of the law” is parallel to the phrase “by the flesh.”

I urge the reader to study every single occurrence of the phrase “kata sarka” in the New Testament. In this way one can become familiar with how it is used and the meaning it conveys to each context. These occurrences, along with pertinent comments, are listed in the Appendix.

I believe we have every right to extend Paul’s remarks here to include “external” features and aspects of life. Beyond genealogy and birth we can include such things as upbringing, training and education, social status, political persuasion, “financial bracket.” These are the aspects of life that are made so much of, that are highly prized and esteemed, that are sought for and fought for. They may be characterized as the “externals” in the sense that they lend themselves to being paraded, put on display, made a show of. They contrast with inner traits and qualities such as being kind, gentle, reputable, and unselfish. It is a tragedy that so much is made of the things of the flesh, the externals, as they are most often the result of the accident of birth and are, in a definite sense, superficial. We realize that the externals do not describe the real person. The inner qualities, whether good or bad, describe what one really is, and are independent of the externals. What one is by

birth and “station” in life should have no effect upon one’s intrinsic character, what one really is. Unfortunately, the mad scramble and competition for the symbols and “trappings” used to display fleshly status cause personal character to degenerate into pride, selfishness, contentious and competitive striving, jealousy, and enmity. I suggest that Paul uses “flesh” in 2 Corinthians 5:16 with the same connotations as in Philippians 3:3-8.

The first “know” (KJV, v 16) is not the common “knowing” associated with the process of learning. It is rather a conscious *regard*. Paul is stating that the impact of the truth of Christ’s great work on his own thinking and outlook is such that he can no longer consciously regard *anyone* in accordance with the things of the flesh. Again quoting Moffatt:

Once convinced of this, then, I estimate no one by what is external.

Paul is stating that the things so highly valued, the things of the flesh, are no longer a part of his outlook, are no longer a part of his conscious regard of his fellow human beings in his daily encounters and consideration of them. He can only think of his fellow human beings as those for whom Christ died and who, regardless of the many distinctions constantly imposed upon human attitudes and relationships in the realm of the flesh, have all been brought into the common bond of the state of death due to the work of Christ. All are the same in the state of death. There is no difference between rich and poor, high and low (financially, socially, educationally), Israelite and Gentile, “*red and yellow, black and white,*” Caucasian and Oriental, descendant of a *Mayflower Pilgrim* and offspring of an African slave. It is a view sorely needed in a world so full of strife, bitterness, and contention among individuals, groups, and nations on the basis of race or ancestry or national identity. I daresay there is no greater force for a compassionate, unifying outlook upon all peoples than the real-

ization that, in giving Himself up in death, the Lord Jesus Christ embraced all humanity to Himself and all are reckoned to have died in Him. Certainly God's people should be in the vanguard of repudiating racism in any form, of developing attitudes and measures that reach out in love and concern for all peoples, reflecting the love of Christ in the giving of Himself.

The force of these words in v 16 indicates that all humanity is in view in the context. To limit these thoughts to Israelites or to certain within the people of Israel would be to maintain in force the greatest distinction in the realm of the flesh that is seen throughout the entire Biblical record. Paul's words would be made meaningless and effectively rendered impotent.

### **Knowing Christ "After the Flesh"**

Continuing v 16: "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." This is confessedly a difficult passage and it lends itself to a variety of interpretations.

Some take "flesh" here to be literal and use this verse to suggest that at some time after His resurrection (indeed, after the events of Luke 24:39 where we read: "Handle me and see, for a spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see me having!") Christ removed Himself from His human body of flesh. Thus He was once known as a Man in the flesh, but is no longer associated with a body, with flesh. This leads to the separation of the Christ from the human Jesus.

Let us be reminded that the word "Christ" is a word "carried over" (transliterated, not translated) from Greek to English. That is, the Greek word is simply spelled with English letters. "Messiah" is a word similarly transliterated from Hebrew to English. Both would be *translated* as "anointed" or "The Anointed One." Thus,

“Messiah” and “Christ” are equivalent.

According to the view described above, Christ now exists as a spirit-being apart from human substance. What became of the flesh, the man Jesus, must remain a mystery. It seems that any separation of Jesus and Messiah (Christ) and flesh is dealt with most seriously by John in 1 John 4:1-6. The New English Bible renders vv 2, 3 of that passage as follows:

This is how we may recognize the Spirit of God: every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God and every spirit which does not thus acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is what is meant by “Antichrist;” you have been told that he was to come, and here he is, in the world already!

The context makes it plain that the full acknowledgment or “confession” of Jesus (v 3) is that He is Messiah (Christ) and in the flesh. V 2 can be translated either “has come” or “is come in the flesh.” The perfect tense is used in the Greek. Its significance lies in presenting action as having reached its termination *and existing in its finished results* - [see Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1948) p. 201.] The implication appears to be that Jesus Christ not only came in the flesh but continues to exist substantially in the flesh. There can be no separation between Christ, Jesus, and human substance. To make a separation is, to John, the spirit of antichrist.

A further counter argument is that if Paul were referring to Christ as no longer having a body of literal flesh, he would not have used the phrase “according to flesh” (“kata sarka”). This phrase is never used to refer to literal flesh, but to the external features of life, as indicated earlier. If Paul meant to state that Christ is no longer to be known in literal flesh, he would have used the phrase “in the

flesh” as in Galatians 2:20: “the life which I now live *in the flesh*” (“en sarki”).

In one of his last epistles Paul states that the expectation of believers is to have their humiliated substance (“body,” certainly implying flesh) transformed to be like the glorious substance (“body,” again implying flesh, though certainly not the present corruptible flesh) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:21). Indeed, the very title “Lord Jesus Christ,” so familiar in the epistles and so dear to the believer, implies that the man Jesus is indeed Messiah, or Christ, and, in His resurrection glory, has become Lord of all.

### **Flesh — the Time of Human Frailty?**

A more common interpretation considers the phrase “Christ after the flesh” to refer to the life of Jesus Christ before His death and resurrection. Though in resurrection He is still human, still has substance (body) of flesh and bone, the term “flesh” cannot appropriately be used to characterize Him in such a glorious state. It carries the connotation of mortality, limitation, weakness. It appropriately describes Him before His death. Hebrews 5:7 supports this idea, speaking of the “days of his flesh” as a look back to His life in manhood before resurrection. In resurrection, though His substance is literal flesh, He has entered upon a new order of manhood no longer subject to death, as we saw in Romans 6:9. He has been raised “in glory” and “in power,” phrases describing resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:43. To use the term “flesh” as implying frail humanity to describe or characterize this new life would not be suitable. Thus, it is suggested, Paul speaks of knowing Christ (not “knowing” in the sense of “being acquainted with,” but knowing *about* Christ) **before** His death and resurrection as “knowing Him according to flesh.” He was a human being experiencing the mortality, limitation, and weakness

besetting all humanity. But in resurrection He is no longer to be known in this character. Rather, He is to be known as characterized by a new glorious life, triumphant over death.

There is much to commend this view of v 16, but there are at least two arguments against it. First, if Paul were referring to knowing about or learning about or even being acquainted with Christ before His death, the name “Jesus” would more likely have been used, consistent with other passages in this respect. Also, this view fails to take into account that the “henceforth” in both instances has to do with *Paul’s* own awareness of the truths summed up in vv 14,15 as we considered earlier. He is describing the impact that the truth concerning the work of Christ has had *upon his own thoughts and outlook*. Things simply can no longer be the same! They have changed! They are different! Notice the force of this idea in Moffatt’s translation of v 16:

Once convinced of this, then, I estimate no one by what is external; even though I once estimated Christ by what is external, I no longer estimate him thus.

## **Paul’s Messianic Expectations**

Paul is describing not only a change in his attitude and outlook in relation to his fellow human beings as far as the things of the flesh are concerned, but states that this change of view also includes his ideas of Messiah, his Messianic expectations! It was in Conybeare’s little volume, *The Epistles of St. Paul*, that I was first made aware of considering v 16 in this manner. A footnote at 2 Cor. 5:16 reads, in part:

...the preceding phrase does not refer to *personal knowledge*, but to a *carnal estimate*. St. Paul’s *view of Christ was carnal* when he looked (like other Jews) for a Messiah who should be an earthly conqueror.

Here is Conybeare's rendering of v 16 (the reader should be aware that "carnal," "fleshly," and "according to flesh" are synonyms):

I therefore, from henceforth, view no man carnally; yea, though once my view of Christ was carnal, yet now it is no longer carnal.

Paul was one of the most thoroughly educated Jews of his day. It has been suggested that he would have become one of the most outstanding and influential leaders in the secular history of Israel had not his life been changed by his personal encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus. He was brought up a Pharisee, taught by Gamaliel (a most skilled and respected teacher) and came from an influential family (evidenced by his "free" Roman citizenship). He was conversant with the Hebrew language and was knowledgeable in the culture, traditions, history, and Scriptures of his people. He could probably quote "chapter and verse" on any issue, controversy, prophetic topic, etc. with the greatest readiness and familiarity, including the concept or idea of Messiah. He shared with Israelites generally the expectation of Messiah, God's Anointed One, Who, in God's appointed time, would be instrumental in the outworking of God's purposes. But it was, Paul confesses, an expectation based upon a "carnal" or "fleshly" estimate of Messiah. That is, it was based upon the things of the flesh, the externals, what persons are by birth, genealogy, training and education, as discussed earlier in this study. The moral dimension is not involved here; it is simply what human beings are in the external facts and features.

So Paul's earlier view of Messiah led him to think that the status or place of Messiah Himself would depend upon the externals and that receiving the favors or blessings of Messiah would depend upon what one is or can be in relation to the externals. Thus, status in the realm of flesh permeated his view of Messiah, the work of Messiah, and the relationships to be established with Messiah as the result of His work.

## Estimating Messiah According to Flesh

Can we be specific? Can we know just what Paul meant by saying he once had an estimation of Messiah according to the flesh? I believe it is possible. Conybeare's footnote gives the hint that Paul's view of Christ was like that of other Jews. I think we can expand on this idea to say that Paul's expectations of Messiah were those of a well educated Pharisee, one knowledgeable in the history and traditions and religion of the people Israel.

This view of v 16 is supported by scholars who have examined the passage in great detail. One commentary makes the following interpretation of Paul's thoughts:

...i.e., though there was a time in my life when I, like my Judaizing opponents now, laid great stress on the local and hereditary, and, so to speak, fleshly "notes" of the Messiah who was to come, *yet now we know Him so no more*, i.e., I know better now, for I have learnt since my conversion that the national Messiah of the Jews is Himself the Incarnate Word, to whom every race of men is alike related...

(The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol.3, p 70)

We must emphasize that the phrase "after the flesh" ("kata sarka") occurs twice in v 16 (KJV), the first time in relation to "no man" (or "no one"), the second time in relation to Christ, or Messiah. Concerning the first, A.T. Robertson, cited earlier, states:

According to the flesh, the fleshy way of looking at men. He, of course, knows men "in the flesh,"...but Paul is not speaking of that. Worldly standards and distinctions of race, class, cut no figure now with Paul (Gal.3:28) as he looks at men from the standpoint of the Cross of Christ.

Concerning the second occurrence, Robertson goes on to state:

Paul admits that he had once looked at Christ *kata sarka*, but now no longer does it. Obviously he uses *kata sarka* in precisely the same sense that he did...about men. He had before his conversion known Christ *kata sarka*, according to the standards of the men of his time, the Sanhedrin and other Jewish leaders. He had led the persecution against Jesus till Jesus challenged and stopped him (Acts 9:4). This event turned Paul clean round and he no longer knows Christ in the old way *kata sarka*. Paul may or may not have seen Jesus in the flesh before his death, but says absolutely nothing on that point here.

## The Promises and the Messiah

We quote here a sampling of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, using the KJV:

...In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed...(Genesis 12:3).

...Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him (18:18).

...in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...(22:18).

It is possible to translate the verb “be blessed” in these passages using the middle voice and thus read that the nations would “bless themselves.” Here are examples, using 12:3 (emphases mine):

...by you all the families of the earth shall *bleſs themſelves*.  
(Revised Standard Version)

All the communities of the earth shall *find bleſſing* in you.  
(The New American Bible)

...the nations will *bleſs themſelves* because of you.  
(The Living Bible, footnote)

We ask, “How are the phrases *in you, in thy seed*, etc. to be understood?” I am indebted to some of the commentaries for possible answers, specifically the *International Critical Commentary* on the epistle to the Galatians. Apparently the Israelite “doctors of the Law” interpreted the promises to Abraham in the manner just described. Further, they understood the phrase “in thee” and “in thy seed” to mean the same thing, referring to the line of descendants from Abraham (through Isaac and Jacob, as these promises were repeated to them). The important point is that the line of descendants, or seed of Abraham, was not looked upon as an **instrument** by which God would in some active manner bless the nations of the earth. Rather, the seed of Abraham was the **place of blessing**, the **location where** the blessings would be experienced. Nations of the earth would “bless themselves” by becoming descendants, or seed, of Abraham, for the descendants of Abraham were viewed as being “in Abraham” and thus “heirs of promise.”

### “In Abraham” — Circumcision and the Law

Now how could nations, those *not descended* from Abraham, become “seed of Abraham?” The answer would be given firmly and clearly: *by being circumcised and keeping the Mosaic Law!*

The covenant of circumcision, summarized in Genesis 17:9-14, speaking of circumcising those “bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed,” was easily interpreted to include any who wished to become identified with Abraham, to be included in the line of promise. Exodus 12:48, speaking of partaking of the Passover, states that a stranger, if circumcised, “shall be as one that is born in the land.” In addition, the Mosaic Law contained many tenets and ordinances that peculiarly identified the people of Israel as distinct, as separated to God from the surrounding nations. So these two actions, becoming circumcised and keeping the Law, became the doorway into the

line of promise, into the seed of Abraham, into the place where the promised blessings would be experienced. It was no wonder, then, that the Pharisees insisted, concerning all those to whom Paul had brought the testimony of Christ abroad in the Roman Empire, “that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses,” Acts 15:5. It is no wonder that the “legalizers,” those who insisted upon circumcision and keeping the Law, tried to destroy the labors of Paul and to discredit his apostleship. They could quote chapter and verse on this matter and they made the strongest case possible.

Now let us relate these thoughts to Paul’s statement that he once had “an estimation of Messiah according to flesh.” It is common knowledge that there was a general Messianic expectation in Israel. The Psalms and the prophets contain beautiful and vivid passages describing blessings to be brought to that people and to all the peoples and to the creation itself in “the times of the Messiah.” In fact, the blessings promised to Abraham as discussed above were linked with this Messianic expectation. These blessings could be considered the “Messianic blessings of the Messianic Era,” or the “times of Messiah.” The point is, though, that the promised blessings, brought by Messiah, would be brought *to those in the place of blessing*. And the place of blessing, the place where any of earth’s people would “bless themselves,” would be “in Abraham,” or in the “seed of Abraham,” as these were the “heirs of promise.” Messiah was not considered by Israelites to be apart from the divine order of things in Israel or one who would bring any changes to this order. Rather, Messiah was considered as an extension of that system in Israel, that is, of the Mosaic Law. So Messianic blessings would be brought only to those who were properly circumcised and kept the Mosaic Law. These were the gateway to the place of blessing, the seed of Abraham. So to be in Abraham was to be safe, to be ready, to be guaranteed the blessings of the Messianic era. One can imagine the leaders of

Israel using such passages as Isaiah 52:1 to bolster this entire view of what could be expected in the “times of Messiah:”

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. (KJV)

This passage clearly supports the idea that in the time of blessing for Israel, any who have any contact with that people through its “holy city” would properly observe the covenant of circumcision and would be ceremonially clean, indicating subservience to the ordinances of the Mosaic Law. Isaiah 56:6,7 further reinforces the idea that those of other nations would “bless themselves” by becoming merged into the line of promise, the seed of Abraham:

Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, everyone that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant. Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. (KJV)

The sabbaths, of course, constituted a “sign between me (God) and you (the children of Israel),” Exodus 31:13. Observing these and bringing sacrifices to the temple would indicate coming under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses. And the “taking hold of my covenant” would surely mean observance of the covenant of circumcision as set forth in Genesis 17:9-14, where this rite is referred to no less than five times as a covenant to be kept.

This, then, constitutes an “estimation of Messiah according to the flesh.” Messiah would make the proper distinctions, would know those who had taken the proper measures to become seed of Abra-

ham and thus inherit the promises. The association of circumcision and keeping the Law with the realm of the flesh is very strong and comes through so clearly in several New Testament passages. In Romans 7:5 (refer to the quotation of vv 1-6 given earlier) notice how the phrase, “For when we were *in the flesh*,” is clearly associated with “the promptings of sin *by means of the Law*.” When Paul wrote to the Philippians he made the suggestion that if any could have confidence or trust in the things of the flesh, he could have more than anyone! In backing up this claim, the first item he lists is that he was circumcised the 8th day (3:4,5. The entire passage, 3:3-9 is relevant to this issue). See also 2 Corinthians 11:18-22. The entire letter to the Galatians deals with this association, especially 3:1-5; 4:19-31; 6:12-15.

We read in Acts 15:5 of “certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed.” These were the ones who insisted that all who responded to the testimony concerning Christ must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. These apparently accepted Jesus as the Messiah. But they obviously had “an estimation of Messiah according to the flesh” just as Paul himself confesses having had. They are perfect examples of Israelites described above: Messiah comes to bring blessing to those in Abraham, to the seed of Abraham, to the heirs of promise. Perhaps the only respect in which they differed from Paul before Paul met Christ is that they accepted Jesus as Messiah while Paul hadn’t yet. But Messiah is not, to them, sufficient in Himself to bring about a favorable relationship with God. The idea of a personal commitment to Messiah alone for Who He is and What He is in relationship to God is foreign to their thinking. The basic commitment is still to being safely identified with the seed of Abraham by means of circumcision and keeping the Law.

## New Creation

To many Israelites, including Paul himself before he met Christ, Messiah was simply an appendage to, or extension of, the Old Testament religion of the Israelites. Messiah would bring in the time of blessing to the faithful ones; He would bring that system to its highest possible level. But He would not make drastic or dramatic changes. By contrast, Paul's summary in 2 Corinthians 5, yea, the emphasis of his whole ministry, describes the actual effect of the presence and work of Messiah more like a "quantum leap" than simply an extension or continuation of what had gone before. Having come to realize the true scope and meaning of the work of Messiah, he can no longer retain a view of his fellow humans or of Messiah Himself in the realm of the flesh with its limitations, requirements, and distinctions. So he goes on in v 17 to state that, as the case actually is, if anyone is in Messiah, that one is involved in something so radically new that Paul calls it a **NEW CREATION**. It is for "anyone," not just for those who are properly qualified in the realm of the flesh. *And the place to be is in Messiah, not in Abraham.* This is a revolutionary idea! This makes Messiah Himself the object of faith and personal commitment! This makes Messiah Himself the place of blessing! Paul goes on to say that the old ideas have passed away, things have changed, things simply can no longer be the same. The old expectations and estimations which he shared with all Israelites concerning the place of Messiah in the plan and purpose of God were centered in the realm of the flesh. All this has changed. All is new, not just in the sense of being recent, or "fresh," but in the sense of being different. He uses strong terms to indicate that a revolutionary, not evolutionary, change has taken place.

Verse 17 in the KJV reads:

...if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are

passed away; behold all things are become new.

This wording supports the view that v 17 describes the change that takes place in an individual's life when Christ is embraced as one's personal Savior. That person becomes a new creature. There is a change in that person's life and outlook, a great change for the better. Everything becomes new! New life! New outlook! New hope! A transformation has taken place.

I have no doubt that many who come to Christ experience such a change. And certainly new qualities and factors come into one's life when Christ comes in. But we do wrong to insist that everyone have an emotional experience of some kind when accepting Christ. Personal reactions are as varied as people themselves are varied. Age, background, education, culture, etc., can all affect a person's feelings when making a commitment to Christ Jesus. There should be no prescribed or stereotyped pattern in these respects.

Note in the KJV that the italicized words represent words missing in the Greek text, thus attempting to set forth the meaning. A strictly word-for-word rendering would be: "So that if anyone in Christ new creation (or "a new creation")." I like to think that if Paul were addressing a group he'd make a pause after the phrase, "if anyone (comes to be) in Messiah," then throw his arms up into the air and exclaim: "NEW CREATION!" or, "A NEW CREATION!" It is a note of triumph, of joy, of exultation.

The view of v 17 suggested above that describes Paul's own change of outlook in regard to Israel's Messiah is supported by the noted scholars referred to earlier. The Expositor's Greek Testament gives the translation, "...*the* old things have passed away; behold, *they* are become new" (emphasis mine). It goes on to state:

...not only the ancient customs of Jewish ritual observance, but

the old ways of conceiving of the Messiah who was to come; more generally, the old thoughts of God and of sin and salvation have received fresh coloring—they are “become new”...

A. T. Robertson renders the last part of v 17 as follows:

The old things are passed away. Behold, they are become new.

As to the identity of these specific things, he states:

The ancient way of looking at Christ among other things.

Comments in Expositor’s go on to indicate that such passages as Hebrews 8:13; Isaiah 43:18,19; 65:17; Revelation 21:4,5 offer verbal parallels to Paul’s statements here. Quoting:

...but the parallel is rather in words than in sense. The thought... carries us a step beyond the prophets of the Old Covenant. St. Paul’s words show how completely he regarded “the Death of Christ as a new epoch in the history of the human race. Had he foreseen distinctly that a new era would be dated from that time; that a new society, philosophy, literature, moral code, would grow up from it over continents of which he knew not the existence; he could not have more strongly expressed his sense of the greatness of the event than in what is here said.” (Stanley).

To appreciate the change Paul is describing in vv 16, 17, it is fascinating, at this point, to read Ezra 8, 9, 10 and Nehemiah 8, 11, 12, 13. Notice there the great concern with finding and identifying Levites for the service of God. Notice how detestable to loyal Israelites were mixed marriages, as indicated by the sending away of foreign women with their children! Notice the concern for proper genealogy, the identity of priests and Levites, the purification of the priests and Levites, the “cleansing from strangers.” We could imagine Paul expressing such concerns when he estimated his fellow humans and Messiah “according to flesh.”

But can we imagine Paul exhibiting or insisting upon any such concerns after the dramatic change of his personal views as expressed in the context we are studying?

## Abraham Transcended

As stated earlier, this passage is a brief encapsulation of the substance of Paul's ministry. He goes into greater detail in other places. For instance, the question arises as to status of the promises to Abraham and the significance of being identified with the seed of Abraham. In the letter to the Galatians Paul deals with this issue head on. He states that, in the purpose of God, the singular seed of Abraham comes right down to the person of Messiah, or Christ. **He** is the seed of Abraham. **He** is the seed of promise (3:16, 19). Christ, then, is the object of faith. And this faith in Christ so merges one into Christ ("baptized into Christ") that that one has "put on Christ," or figuratively "clothed oneself with Christ." This, then must mean that the one who exercises such faith in Christ is identified with Christ, is "seen in Christ." So Paul can tell them that they become sons of God in Christ—because *He is the Son of God!* This far transcends being a son of Abraham or being reckoned a descendant of Abraham. And, lest any scattered Israelites living abroad in the Roman Empire are still concerned, Paul clearly states that if they belong to Messiah, then they **are seed of Abraham and heirs according to promise** because Messiah is both of these. In Christ, in Messiah, they lose nothing! These ideas are presented explicitly in Galatians 3:25-29. My own rendering follows:

But the faith having come, we are no longer under a tutor, for you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus by means of this faith. For as many of you as have been baptized into (or "merged into") Christ have put on Christ. There are no distinctions here between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between male and female, for YOU ARE ALL ONE in Christ Jesus. Moreover, if you belong to Messiah, it follows that you are

Abraham's seed, heirs in accordance with promise (or "on the principle of promise," as opposed to the principle of legalism).

We should point out that v 27 does not restrict the "all" of v 26, as though the application might be only to certain select ones. It is rather the *explanation* (the "for," or "because") of how v 26 could be realized! In vv 25, 26 Paul appears to refer to "the faith" as a revealed body of truth, while v 27 describes the individual's active embracing of that truth, and, as a result, becoming baptized into, or merged into, or placed into union with Christ, resulting in being identified with Him.

Further, these ideas appear to be implicit in Paul's "encapsulation" in 2 Corinthians 5, especially in the statement regarding New Creation. Paul has set forth a transcendent, awe-inspiring principle: the believer becomes in the sight of God what His Own Son is! And this is not by circumcision and keeping the Law, it is simply by faith in Messiah Himself! What a great change this is: Messiah emerges as the sole object of faith, as the One in Whom the relationship with God of any person of any branch of the human race is established!

### **Reconciled to God by Messiah**

In 2 Corinthians 5:18 Paul appears to follow up his strong statements about the dramatic changes wrought by Messiah with a kind of reminder and warning to the Corinthians, to his detractors, and to all. This whole abrupt change, this transformation of the scene and of his own view, is of divine origin, not just the product of his own personal reasonings and imaginings. It is not from himself. It is from (literally "out of") God. It is a divine work. God is referred to in a very specific way: "*the God who reconciled me to Himself* through Messiah and gave to me the ministry (or service) of this reconciliation..."

Here the words “reconciled” and “reconciliation” first occur in this context. They are words which convey a great depth of meaning and we do well to examine them briefly. The Greek words have the basic thought of so altering the state or situation of some thing or person in relationship to another that the one is “adjusted to” or brought into a more suitable or harmonious relationship to the other. In the affairs of human beings there is often reconciliation *to one another* of adverse parties. But in the things of God it is always reconciliation *to God*. We never read of anyone reconciling God to himself or of God being reconciled to or reconciling Himself to someone else. And it is God who reconciles to Himself or provides the basis for reconciliation . It is not through the merit, activity, or strenuous effort, no matter how laudable, of the one reconciled.

Further, we must distinguish between *reformation*, which is a change for the better in an individual’s morals or conduct (often dubbed “turning over a new leaf”), and *reconciliation*, which is a gracious work of God in bringing others into a favorable relationship to Himself. Let us never confuse them and let us never downgrade God’s great work of reconciliation to the level of any effort to “dress ourselves up” or “do ourselves over” or in some way seek to make ourselves presentable to God.

The meaning of “reconciled” and “reconciliation” in vv18-20 is to be found in the immediate context. Paul first speaks of himself being reconciled to God by means of Christ. Thus, the work of Christ must be the basis for it. This directs our thoughts back to vv 14, 15 which give a summary of the extent and effect of the work of Christ.

Recall that v 14 speaks of Christ’s work for humanity: “One died in behalf of all, consequently all died.” Thus, the entire world of human beings is, by the work of Christ, brought into the state of death before God, ending its history in Adam, its head. The idea of

Adam as head of humanity is plain from Romans 5:14-21, dealing with his “moral headship” (the effects of his transgression) and 1 Corinthians 15:35-50, dealing with his “morphological headship” (passing on his form and structure). It is in this sense that he is a type of “The One to Come,” Christ. Adam’s moral and physical likeness and the effects of his act of transgression are handed down to those, the old creation of humanity, who are derived from him and of which he is head. Similarly, the moral and physical likeness of the Son of God and the effects of His work of righteousness are handed down to those, the new creation of humanity, who are derived from Him and of whom He is the glorious Head.

Again, recall that v 15 makes further application of the work of Messiah. “Those who live” must refer to those seen as alive in Christ. These are His Own who, by faith, have so laid hold of Him that they have been merged into Him and are thus seen as risen with Him in His own resurrection experience. Colossians 2:12 expresses it:

...buried with him in that merger (baptism) in which you were also raised with him through your faith related to the working (energizing) of God who raised him from the dead.

So God’s reconciling of Paul to Himself by Christ must refer to Paul’s favorable relationship to God *in the Risen One*. God drastically altered Paul’s state and situation in relationship to Himself. Paul was no longer an Israelite in the flesh, a human being in Adam. His old man (all he was in Adam) had been put to death with Christ and put away in burial. He was now identified with a new order of humanity in that One Whom God raised from the dead. Those partaking of or identified with that new humanity have the anticipation of being eventually fully conformed to the image of the Son of God; of being morally and physically what He is in His glorious, risen humanity.

The “ministry (service) of this reconciliation” is a summary statement of Paul’s proclaiming and spreading the truths concerning the meaning, extent, and effects of the work of Christ. That it was a service God called Paul to and not simply something Paul took upon himself is stressed here and in many passages throughout his epistles. It is the burden of the entire context, the basic subject of the entire epistle of 2 Corinthians, and comes up for emphasis over and over again. For examples, the reader is urged to consider such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:9,10; Galatians 1:6-2:10; 1 Timothy 1:12,13.

## **Reconciliation of the World**

Paul goes on in 2 Corinthians 5:19 to emphasize how the work of Messiah went far beyond the provincial and narrow expectations so prevalent among Israelites. He stresses the divine aspect of the death of Christ, for it is there, *in Christ*, that God was doing the work of reconciling the world to Himself. The death of Christ was not simply the tragic end of the life of an unfortunate individual. It was rather the greatest event in history, the biggest step undertaken by God toward the ultimate realization of his purpose.

The Greek text does not have the definite article, “the” with the word for world (*kosmos*) though we include it in our translation. This suggests that Paul is not calling attention to the world itself but rather to the work of reconciliation which God wrought on its behalf in Christ. It is a “world-reconciling” work. So my rendering differs from those who translate v 19: “God was reconciling *a world* unto Himself,” which leaves the identity of the “world” indefinite. I take the “world” here to be the “all humanity” of v 14, thus the world of humanity. That the Greek word *kosmos* can be used of humanity as a whole is supported by such a passage as Romans 5:12, speaking of sin coming into the world.

The meaning of reconciling in this context, I believe, is now clear. It is not bringing all humanity to eternal life in Christ. It is not a universal redemption nor a universal salvation. It is a universal reconciliation for the world of humanity. It is God acting in the death of Christ to bring all humanity into the state of death before Him. In the death of Christ God acted to drastically alter the state and situation of humanity in His sight and has brought it into a favorable relationship to Himself.

If thoughts along this line are new to the reader, it may seem strange that bringing humanity into the state of death in the death of Christ is a work of “reconciling the world unto Himself” by God. But consider the following:

1. The death of Christ is not an act of punishment upon humanity. It is rather the means whereby God can deal graciously with it.
2. In ending the history of humanity in Adam, God no longer views persons as alive in the flesh. He is not dealing with them as sinners in this world. So He is not recording trespasses and offenses, no matter how degraded or evil anyone’s behavior may be. He is not “reckoning” offenses to anyone. After all, when one’s individual history is judged as ended and one is reckoned as dead, what would be the use of observing and keeping track of that one’s misdeeds? Dead people do not commit offenses!
3. We must keep in mind that in Christ’s experience death was the prelude to the glorious realities of resurrection. Death took place, resurrection was just beyond! And it seems that Paul, in the context, is emphasizing that the experience Christ went through in death is intimately linked with the human race, with humanity. Thus, to be reckoned in the state of death because of the death of Christ is a step toward being reckoned alive because of the resurrection of Christ. Or let us say it is but *one step removed* from being reckoned alive because of the resurrection of Christ! In a sense, it puts every member of the human race potentially in Christ, in complete identification with Him. The opportunity is present for anyone to appropriate to oneself the full provision of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. There are no “prerequisites,” no reforms, no acts of contrition or remorse, no good deeds, no prolonged prayers or agonizing, no acts of righteousness required. The floodgates of

God's mercy have been opened and His mercy extended to everyone. The invitation is available to all: "Come, for everything has been accomplished!" All that remains is to appropriate God's provision for oneself, that is, to lay hold of Christ by faith.

## **Reconciling Me: Reconciling the World**

This, then, is the difference between God's "reconciling the *world* unto Himself" and God's "reconciling *me* unto Himself by Christ." Both are divine undertakings. Both are such drastic alterings of a party's state or situation that the party now, in some sense, "accords" or "harmonizes" with God and is brought into a favorable relationship with Him. The work of Christ in giving Himself up as an offering and sacrifice to God is the same for the world of humanity and for the believer in Christ. The gracious undertaking and provision by God in sparing not His Own Son but giving Him up to die is the same for the world of humanity and for the believer in Christ. It is the same work, the same provision, the same basis of reconciliation. But for the world of humanity it is a reckoning solely on the part of God. It is His judgment of the world in the death of Christ. It is not something the world has a conscious awareness of or a significant understanding of. These come about through the ministry of that reconciliation.

Humanity reckoned in the state of death in the work of Christ is never referred to as being "in Christ" or "baptized (merged) into Christ," terms reserved only for those who have responded by faith to God's provision. Christ is no longer in the state of death, and to be "in Him" is to be identified with Him, not only in death and burial, but in the new life of His resurrection, to be risen with Him. It is the act of personally placing faith in Christ, laying hold of God's provision, that brings one from death to life in the reckoning of God. This difference, the effect of faith, is emphasized throughout the epistles of Paul and the Scriptures of the New Testament. Faith has always been the instrumentality by which a

person comes to God and enters into His program and purpose: “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” In the context of the ministry of reconciliation faith is the response to God’s Truth concerning the Person and Work of Christ. It lays hold of God’s provision for humanity in His Son. So, although all humanity is brought into the state of death as a result of the work of Christ and is potentially “in Him,” only the believer is viewed as actually merged into Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. This difference is stressed in Romans 6:3: “...are you ignorant that we, as many as were merged (baptized) into Christ Jesus were merged into his death?” and Galatians 3:27: “For as many of you as were merged (baptized) into Christ have put on Christ.”

We do well to emphasize for ourselves individually just what faith in Christ brings to us and means for us: the “putting on” of Christ so that we see ourselves identified with Him in His death and resurrection and the active reckoning of ourselves alive unto God in Him. Also, we do well to be sure we enter into and embrace the truth of what God, in love, has undertaken in relation to the world of humanity, and thus view our fellow human beings with like compassion and love. It is so tempting to preach morals to the immoral, to exhort the unvirtuous to virtue, to require the degraded to reform themselves, to, in some sense, be “policemen to the world.” Our lives should certainly, as we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” be a pattern and example of virtue and uprightness and godliness. But our total stance and bearing should indicate that we have responded to the graciousness of our God whereby He approached us (and all) with a love and favor our efforts and striving could never earn. He has not dealt with us by means of a legal system, a codified set of rules and regulations, by keeping track of our sins and shortcomings, by holding threats over us, by “cracking a whip.” He is not “The Great Policeman in the Sky.” He has dealt with us in His Son. We deal with Him and meet Him in His Son. There He will deal with anyone. There He has already

undertaken in behalf of all!

In v 19 Paul goes on to speak of God putting *into him* the word of this reconciliation, echoing somewhat his earlier phrase: “and gave to me the service of this reconciliation.” Perhaps here he emphasizes that God brought him to the deep grasp of the very substance and meaning, the “logos” (word) of what was given him to minister. Paul was a *repository*, and this truth was, in a sense, *deposited in him*, becoming part of his very being.

### **An Ambassador for Christ**

Paul was unique. Paul was a marked man. God “separated him,” “set him apart” for service, from the time of his birth, perhaps even before his birth. See Galatians 1:15. This truth cannot be generalized. It cannot be said of everyone. It was true of Jeremiah. See Jeremiah 1:5. To make these statements general, as though everyone could say the same of themselves, as I have heard preachers claim, would be to destroy their very purpose: to indicate the uniqueness and thus the authenticity of the service of Jeremiah and of Paul. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul claims to be an ambassador for Christ. To no one else did God entrust the grand truths of the great reach and marvelous effects of the work of Christ and the ministry of the accomplished reconciliation. It would be utterly presumptuous for anyone else at any time to apply these words to himself or herself. Paul could speak and act on behalf of Christ. The words and actions of an ambassador (the Greek word may be translated ambassador, envoy, representative) are the genuine and official expressions of the one that ambassador represents. This sentence shows the falseness of the idea that Paul concocted notions of his own, or that Christ and Paul worked at cross purposes. True, we do not find the truths Paul ministered in the gospels, not in the teachings of Jesus. Nor do we find them in the writings of the other apostles. The new wine of the full revelation

of God's purpose in Christ must come after His triumphant resurrection and be placed in the new vessel chosen to be its repository. Paul stresses over and over again that he is Christ's bondsman, that he is Christ's commissioned one (apostle). He came behind no one in the credentials for apostleship and service. Later in this epistle he writes:

...for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds, 12:11,12, KJV.

He had earlier challenged the Corinthians with a series of questions:

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

1 Corinthians 9:1 KJV

In carrying out the course of such a ministry, Paul is God's spokesman. So when Paul gave testimony to the scope and impact of the work of Christ, when he ministered the truth of reconciliation and exhorted the hearer to respond to the report with faith, it was God speaking and entreating through him.

## **Be Reconciled to God**

The phrase, "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (KJV), makes it appear that Paul is addressing an exhortation directly to the Corinthians. As much as they needed to adjust themselves to harmonize with the will of God, this isn't the thought here. Rather, he is giving expression to his position as Christ's ambassador, as God's spokesman in the ministry of the truth, as one by whom God appeals to those who came within the hearing of the message. Wherever and whenever Paul set forth to

any audience the meaning and significance of the work of Christ, he could include but one appeal: **“BE RECONCILED TO GOD.”** Not that he used these specific words; that is not the point. **The appeal is inherent in the message of reconciliation.** This phrase simply sums up and expresses his stance, and God’s, in relation to the hearers. The work has been accomplished, the way has been prepared, God has wrought. He has drastically altered the relationship of all humanity to Himself in the death of His Son. The message appeals to the hearer to respond with faith, to appropriate what God has provided. Faith puts into effect the reconciliation God has worked out and thus to respond in faith is to actively enter into that favorable relationship to God. God, for His part, has reconciled all to Himself. The hearer, for his or her part, responds in faith and thus is consciously and knowingly reconciled to God.

### **Righteous in Him**

2 Corinthians 5:21 appears to extend and present the basis for the exhortation at the end of v 20. And it can be thought of as an encapsulation of the grand truth of justification by faith that Paul develops so extensively in chapters 3 and 4 of the letter to the Romans. The change from the singular to the plural pronouns is proper here because of the general nature of the truth presented. Conybeare, Goodspeed, and Moffatt all do this! I like to think of v 21 as revealing God’s side, God’s view, God’s actions and reckoning, in the work of reconciliation in the death of Christ.

The spotless, unblemished, perfect One, that Man Who was everything a human being should be in relation to God, was so dealt with by God in the giving up of Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God that the entire principle and all the effects of sin could be excised and annulled, once and for all — He died with respect to sin *once for all!* (Romans 6:10). The truths summarized here are echoed throughout the writings of the New Testament.

Our Lord Jesus was “proved in every respect like ourselves, but apart from sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Sin could get no foothold, could find no lodging in Him. What seems so easily to beset us, influence us, motivate us, and threaten to overpower us, could make no inroads in the life and character of this One. It was not that He did not know what sin was, that He did not know its nature and origin and insidious workings. Nor that the subtleties and enticements of sin had no more effect upon Him than upon a stone. For He was tried. He was put to the test “in all points like as we.” But He was victorious. He came through unscathed, morally triumphant. Not only did He never swerve from the path of duty in doing the will and the work of the One Who sent Him, but He did always those things that pleased His Father. In no way did He fall short of fully glorifying God.

**He made Him...to be Sin  
In Order that We Might Become  
The Righteousness of God in Him**

We tread lightly here — this is holy ground! Who can plumb the depths, who can totally grasp the meaning of that phrase which declares that God “made him sin in our behalf?” Though the Greek word for “made” can be used of an artisan fabricating a material object, it is used here in a context of fundamentally moral, not physical, dimensions.

It has been suggested that “sin” here means “sin-offering” — that Christ “was made a sin-offering by God.” Isaiah 53:10 might be quoted to support this view: “...when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...” (KJV). The Expositor’s Greek Testament denies this possibility as the word “sin” occurs twice in the same phrase and cannot take on two distinct meanings. Further, “sin” here stands in contrast with “righteousness” and so must mean “sin” in the abstract sense, not a specific object.

I agree with Expositor's view on the phrase in question. It seems to describe what God could do because of the completeness and genuineness of the manhood of our Lord Jesus. So thoroughly and intimately did He become identified with humanity that, in giving Himself up in death, Christ embraced all to Himself. And so, in the judicial proceedings of God, Christ could be seen in and identified with all the moral failures and shortcomings of the human race, even, perhaps, with the responsibility for sin coming into the world.

Are these thoughts too drastic? Hardly! Think of how drastic is the phrase we are considering! These are attempts to get hold of the depths of meaning in the words stating that Christ was "made sin."

Notice the strong, gripping contrasts in v 21! God made this One sin, this One Who was perfectly righteous—on our behalf—that we who know sin so intimately might be brought into a right standing with God in that Righteous One! He was *made* sin, while we *become* (not, "are made") the "righteousness of God." I take this to mean that we have been so *righted* by God that we are totally accepted by Him, lacking nothing. We have been brought into a *right standing* or *right relationship* with Him. It has been remarked in this connection:

Such we are in the sight of God the Father, as is the very Son of God Himself (Hooker, *Serm.*, ii. ,6).

And so our standing before God is "in Him," "in Christ," one of Paul's favorite phrases. Surely we should strive to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present course of things, but not as an endeavor to present our own righteousness to God in order to earn His approval. It is rather our seeking to bring our manner of life, our conduct, into harmony with the perfection of our standing in His Son. It is there we rest.

Paul immediately exhorts the Corinthians not to receive this gracious work of God in vain. If they drift back into a legalistic approach to God, giving place to the things of the flesh, expecting their relationship to God to be based upon circumcision and keeping the Law, then the truth in Christ as ministered by Paul would be for nought. So Paul appeals to them as one working together with God. He closes this significant passage with a quotation from Isaiah 49:8, and indicates that the time of God's favorable dealing, the time of His blessing, has indeed arrived.

## **Epilogue to Part I**

In the passage we have considered, indeed, in his entire ministry, Paul stressed the meaning of the resurrection life of Christ in relation to the place and standing of the believer. The believer in Christ is seen as "risen with Him." The believer is "alive in Christ." The exhortation of Romans 6:11 is to reckon ourselves, account ourselves, "to be dead unto sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus." We are to view ourselves as "on resurrection resurrection ground." Yet it is on this major point that so many have failed to "possess their possessions." There is a constant dwelling upon the death of Christ, with sins, with Christ "dying for my sins." The phrase "My sins which were many are all washed away" seems as far as some advance in the truth. Does this preoccupation with sin and the cross help to remove the consciousness of sins, and to fasten our thoughts and affections on our risen and glorified Lord? Further, this emphasis indicates a failure to grasp the difference between the place of Israel of old, under the Law of Moses, and that of nations not having such a law. Israelites, individually and collectively, accumulated a burden of sins and transgressions. The law made provision for this, constantly stressing the measures to be undertaken, whether for the rulers, the common people, or for the nation as a whole in the never-ending stream of sacrifices at the altar. For under law, sin is

put to account. And the law set forth an identifiable and knowable standard of conduct. Failure to adhere to it stimulated or energized the anger of God. But where there is no such law, there is not transgression, and sin is not imputed, or put to one's account. Paul sets these principles forth in the following passages:

Now the Law stimulates (divine) anger, while where there is no law neither is there transgression. (Romans 4:15)

Sin was indeed in the world before the Law, but sin is never counted in the absence of law. (Romans 5:13, *Moffatt.*)

Of course, the provisions under the Law for sin and transgression were but types or shadows. The genuine work was accomplished when God sent forth His Son, who came under law, to redeem those under law. Thus, for Israel it could properly be said, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Here is perhaps the most notable example of the scriptures describing Christ's work in relation to that people (from Isaiah 53, *Revised Standard Version*):

4. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.
5. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.
6. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
8. ...who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

I'm sure Isaiah 53 brings many precious thoughts to our minds. I earned my first Bible by reciting it from memory in Sunday School! But consider who is in view in the personal pronouns, who is meant by "my people," and the use of the word "trans-

gression.” Also, consider the implications of the passages from Romans that were quoted above.

The sin and trespass offerings were appropriate to the people under the Law of Moses, making provision for breaking that Law in ignorance. Read carefully Leviticus 4,5 for the details. The work of Christ certainly had a “sin-offering” aspect. It redeemed Israelites from all accumulated guilt for sins (perhaps even including presumptuous sins) “under the first covenant” and freed them from the very “consciousness of sins.” See Hebrews 9:14, 15 in this regard. There is no mention in the Bible of sin and trespass offerings outside the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law. “Sin” in Genesis 4:7 is not a “sin-offering.” It portrays sin as a beast that “crouches,” ready to seize Cain. He was admonished: “...you can overcome it.” But he failed miserably and we wonder if he even tried.

We do read of the burnt offering outside the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses. That may have been Abel’s offering. Abraham was to offer Isaac as a burnt offering but instead offered a ram caught in a thicket. Noah and Job presented burnt offerings. Of course, all the offerings had human sin and shortcoming in view, but the burnt offering was unique in that it was totally consumed on the altar and went up as “a sweet savor.” This seems to picture devotion and worship, a “going up” to God. It is this aspect of the work of Christ that should grip us, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 5:2:

...and lead lives of love, just as Christ loved you and gave himself up for you to be *a fragrant offering and sacrifice* to God. (Moffatt)

What Christ did for Israel under law was but one aspect of His work. It redeemed them from the accumulated record of sins and transgressions since receiving the Law, since Moses. But sin, the root and basic principle, did not begin with the Law. It was already

in the world before the Law and would have to be dealt with in due time. In the accomplished work of Christ God greatly altered both the relationship with Himself of Israel of old and also of the world of humanity. He has dealt, on behalf of all, with the ultimate issues of sin and death and righteousness and life. When Paul deals with these truths, setting forth the work of Christ in relation to humanity, he must go all the way back to Adam, far beyond Moses, far beyond Abraham (Romans 5:12-21). For Israel under law, Christ died for what they *did*, their actions, their sins. For humanity, including Israel, Christ died for what we *are*, beings trapped in the bondage of sin (the root, not the fruit) and under the dominion of death.

The truth that should bring me joy and put a song in my heart is that He died for *me*, not for something I've done or failed to do. He died in my behalf that I might be joined to Him in His death and raised with Him in His new life. He did not remain in the state of death, and I should not remain at the foot of the cross. In His resurrection life He is God's new humanity: a human being in a glorious state of which it can be said, "He dies no more, death has no more dominion over Him, He lives unto God!" And the purpose of God in forming this new order of humanity will not be fully realized until He has brought many sons to glory, until He has brought all His own, past, present, and future, into that destiny of being conformed to the image of His Son. Then our "being saved in virtue of His life" will be finally and fully accomplished.

This is where reconciliation brings us and these are the truths which occupy our hearts and minds and in which we delight.

## **Prologue to Part II**

The ideas suggested by the phrase, “The End of Israel According to Flesh,” are not familiar to Bible students and Bible readers in general. They are not readily found in the literature produced by Bible teachers and commentators. Yet I believe this is a major Bible theme, one that is woven into the “warp and woof” of the New Testament writings. Though the thoughts developed here are set forth with a degree of conviction, they are not set forth in a spirit of dogmatism. I believe Scripture interpretation should be presented with a degree of tentativeness, never with a sense of finality and absoluteness. It is far too complex an endeavor for any presumptive claims. So the thoughts presented here are to be considered a set of proposals to be considered and to be investigated. None of us come to the Bible without our personal “paradigms” or patterns of thought with regard to its major themes, including that of the place of the people of Israel in God’s purpose. We weave our paradigms into the very fabric of the Scriptures so intimately that we feel they are the very inspired record itself! And so we must never tamper with them. One of the most “tamper-proof” thoughts as to its relationship paradigms concerns the people of Israel to God and its future in the outworking of God’s purpose are held with great tenacity and rigidity. I appeal to the reader to consider the ideas being proposed in a spirit of inquiry and search.

To me, The End of Israel According to Flesh is really an extension of what has been set forth in Part I: The End of All Things According to Flesh. Of course, what we have in mind here is in relation to God and the purpose of God. The things of the flesh go on and occupy much of time, attention, and effort in daily life. So much of the interactions and relationships between peoples of the earth have to do with what is according to flesh: to race, ethnic

identity, traditions, feats of skill or strength, etc. So much of pride, persecution, suffering, and competition between people and among peoples is based upon the flesh, the externals, the outward things of life. Israel “according to flesh” struggles for its place and status among the peoples of earth along with the others. We can expect that such turmoil and strife between peoples will continue as long as external features are so highly valued.

Paul makes it very plain that to have a place or standing in relation to God, one must be “in Christ.” If *anyone* comes to be in Christ, that one partakes of New Creation. It is not a matter of whether one is an Israelite or not. It is no longer a matter of attaining a place in Abraham, of being seed of Abraham. A place there could be attained in the realm of the flesh. But nothing of the realm of the flesh can give one a place in Christ. This can only be by faith. Before God there is no place or standing for an Israelite in the realm of the flesh, in the realm where the covenant of circumcision and the Mosaic Law were the means of approach. If this is the case for individual Israelites, it is the case for the entire nation. Nothing in the realm of the flesh can any longer constitute Israelites as the people of God. The only way, the only approach, the only means for a righteous standing in relation to God is to be in Christ. To me this is the clear message of Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5. To me this is the basis for making such a statement as “the end of Israel according to flesh.”

## **Part II: New Testament Overview**

### **The End of Israel According to Flesh**

Isn't this going too far? Isn't it claiming too much? Doesn't it contradict so much in Scripture, so many passages, so many prophecies, so many promises? I'm sure many will react with such questions. If the proposed thoughts in relation to Israel are Scriptural, a strong case will have to be made from the Scriptures themselves. I believe this is possible and will proceed to make such a case. It is my personal conviction that the thought of "the end of Israel according to flesh" is a major theme of the New Testament scriptures and is woven into the very fabric of truths that are developed in them. (The New International Version, NIV, will be used in scripture quotations that follow unless otherwise noted.)

### **Proclamation by John the Baptist**

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father;" I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." — Matthew 3:7-12

In Luke's account these words are addressed "to the crowds com-

ing out to be baptized by him.” They are stern words of warning. They speak of a time of judgment coming, of assessment, of discarding the worthless and retaining what is of value. I cannot find here the thought of warning people that they will face God in judgment to determine their eternal destiny, of warning people that the issues of heaven and hell are soon to be decided. I see in these words the warning that the religious system of that day, the religious hierarchy and all that subsumes under it, faces total discard. The greed and corruption that so characterized the “establishment” centered in Jerusalem would be the object of God’s anger. That system would be discarded and something new, something properly expressing the character and sovereignty of God, would replace it. Every individual who was either a part of that system or who was a victim of it would be given the opportunity to have a place in the new order that was to be introduced in the Messiah. But if any rejected the counsel of God as proclaimed by John the Baptist, then by Christ Himself, or by any of those later commissioned to herald the news on behalf of God, they would also be rejected, would be excluded from the new order to be established.

In the assessment coming, it would not do for any to claim having Abraham as forefather. Such a place in the realm of flesh would give none a unique position or privilege or status. None could claim God owed them something because of such fleshly rank, that they were specially privileged because of promises they could point to in Old Testament scriptures. If God lacked children for Abraham in order to fulfill what He had promised, He could produce them from the stones lying about. There could be no stronger words to indicate that God is not obligated to the flesh, to the things of the flesh, to accomplish His ends. No one can “back Him into a corner” and make a demand upon Him by quoting chapter and verse from the Scriptures. He is free to attain His goal in the manner and methods He chooses. These thoughts carry a valuable lesson for us today as well.

In the Bible, a tree is often a figure for a system of government or hierarchy of some sort. To “take root downward, and bear fruit upward” (see Isaiah 37:31) is a description of being established and blessed. To “lop the bough” (see Isaiah 10:33) is a description of overthrow, of bringing high and mighty ones down to nothing. Ezekiel 17:22-24 and Ezekiel 31 use the figure of the tree in such ways. John the Baptist announces that the time to cut down and discard is coming. Of course, cutting a tree with an ax is a vivid figure. So is the throwing of a worthless tree into a fire. The gathering of wheat into the barn and burning of the chaff are also appropriate figures for preserving what is of value and discarding what is worthless. It is wrong to interpret such figures as literal objects. The ax, tree, wheat, barn are figures. So also is the fire. Let us keep in mind the situation of that day when a corrupt religious system put burdens upon people that were grievous to bear, kept them in superstition and ignorance, put them in such bondage that they could be described as “poor,” “broken-hearted,” “captives,” and “blind” (see Luke 4:18). To apply the Baptist’s words to a situation in “the life to come,” to make them describe God’s determination of individuals’ “eternal destiny,” is, I believe, to miss the point completely.

### **The New Birth.**

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit (or, *but spirit*, ft.) gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again” (or, *born from above*, ft.).

John 3:6,7

This is part of the more extended conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. It is from this passage that the doctrine of “the New Birth” is drawn, leading to all the claims and controversies about whether or not one is “born again.” It would be presumptuous of me to claim full understanding of our Lord’s words here, but it may be that a

simple, forceful message has become laden with theological encumbrances and complications. Perhaps the point being made to Nicodemus is the same as the one made earlier by John the Baptist: “Don’t take refuge in the thought that you are descended from Abraham; you need an origin, a birth, from a higher source than what is reckoned in the realm of the flesh. In that realm (kingdom) that expresses the reign and sovereignty of God, the status attained by the flesh counts for nothing; one must avail oneself of the provision and enablement that flow out from God Himself.”

So to me this is another passage that indicates that the things of the flesh, whether genealogy or the rites and ordinances of circumcision and the Law of Moses, have no place and standing in the new order coming in with the Messiah. To be an Israelite according to flesh, to be a child of Abraham, to have meticulously adhered to all the fleshly requirements are of no avail. Nicodemus, and anyone else, must have a standing before God which has a source or “birth,” in figure, that transcends anything of the flesh, that transcends what can be produced by human ability and attainment. This source, or “birth,” (we should observe that the Greek word used here is variously translated “born,” “conceived,” “beget,” “begotten”) is “by the Spirit” (or spirit). This suggests a provision and enablement by God, as opposed to human efforts and merits.

This interpretation is consistent with other passages where “flesh” and “spirit” are contrasted. Who can be certain of the meaning of “water” in the 5th verse? We point out that there is no article with “water” or “spirit” in the Greek here. The *Companion Bible* suggests this is a figure of speech with the force “spiritual water.” Some suggest it is a figure for *purification*. This phrase in v 5 appears to be equivalent to the phrase “of the Spirit” (spirit?) in vv 6,8 where the definite article is used with the word for “spirit.”

## Confronting the System

The record of Christ's ministry is also a record of the antagonism and disputations between Himself and the religious hierarchy centered in Jerusalem. The persons who made up this system are variously designated Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, priests, elders, and lawyers. Christ constantly exposes the corruption of this system, the machinations of its members in maintaining their wealth and position, the greed and lust for authority and riches that so characterized and motivated those who belonged to it. His own character and motivations stand out in stark contrast. They sought the praise and glory from men; He sought the praise and glory that came from God alone. They honored one another; He constantly honored His God and Father. So much of the book of John can be seen as an account of the contrast between the character of Christ and the character of those who made up that religious system. In Matthew 21-23 these strifes and antagonisms seem to accelerate, coming to a climax in Christ's pronouncing judgment upon that religious hierarchy. We summarize here some of this material, without extensive commentary or quotation:

Matthew 21:12-16: An act of judgment regarding the temple, upsetting, for a time, the merchandising that transformed the "house of prayer" into "a den of thieves." (Obvious reference to Jeremiah 7 in which the temple is no safeguard to a corrupt hierarchy, but is subject to destruction.) Religious authorities object to Christ healing the blind and lame and were indignant at the praise from the people.

21:18-20: withering of the fig tree. This must be more than a lesson about asking in prayer. It very well could be a figure of the discard of that whole system.

21:23-32: Christ's authority challenged by the religious authorities, His strong words about publicans and harlots entering

the kingdom of God while the religious leaders are rejected.

21:33-46: parable of the vineyard, one of the strongest and most pointed of all Christ's parables. The role of persons in the parable who represent God's prophets and servants, the Son of God Himself, and those religious authorities is unmistakable. Mark and Luke use the poignant term "wellbeloved" (Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13, using the same word as in the familiar phrase, "This is my beloved son," Matthew 3:17) of the "one son" the owner of the vineyard sends, anticipating reception with honor and respect. But the tenants, or "husbandmen," given charge of the vineyard, slew him. There was no missing the point: "...when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them:" (v 45). They were the builders who rejected the building stone that, in the working of God, became the capstone or chief cornerstone. They were totally opposed to and outside the plan and purpose of God and were to be eliminated from it, "ground to powder" by that stone. This is clear in v 43: "...the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." The old order is discarded, a new order takes its place before God. I like to think of this "nation" as that described in 1 Peter 2:9, which I render as follows:

But you are a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people for (God's) possession, that you might show forth the virtues of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light.

These, believers in Christ dispersed about the Roman Empire, constitute the new order, the new "hierarchy," the new "people of God." Peter's use of Exodus 19:6 here must be of special significance. Notice that he also accompanies his description of this unique order with the same figure of the stone rejected by the builders as having become the capstone or chief cornerstone (see 1 Peter 2:4-8). And expressing in their lives the very "virtues" or qualities found in Christ Himself would surely be "bringing forth

the fruits thereof” in Matthew’s account. This strongly suggests that in the new order coming in with the Messiah, the very personal qualities and character we find displayed in the Person of Christ are to be the standard of life and conduct. This thought seems parallel to Paul’s exhortation in Romans 13:14:

But clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ...  
(Conybeare)

Now back to Matthew:

22:1-14: another parable where the role of persons in the parable representing God, Christ, and the religious authorities is clear. Those “bidden to the feast” and any who would enter under false pretenses are excluded. The wedding celebration is attended by guests from unusual and unexpected sources. V 7 appears to be a clear warning of the destruction to come later in the 1st Century.

22:15-22: the Pharisees try to trap Christ with the issue of public taxation.

22:23-33: The Sadducees try to trap Christ with the issue of resurrection.

22:34-46: the Pharisees try again, using the issue of priority among the commandments. But Christ traps them with the question of Messiah being both David’s Lord (Master) and David’s son. They no longer dare question Him.

23:1-39: Christ’s intense denunciation and judgment of the religious authorities for their abuses, machinations, hypocrisies, rationalizations, false teaching, greed. The words are strong and piercing. The corruption at the heart and core of these leaders and their system is exposed. Their righteous outward appearance is a total sham. Christ takes their pious disclaimer concerning the murderous character of “our fathers” to show that they are of the same character, true sons of such wicked forebears (vv 30-32). They are descendants in kind of those that rejected the counsel of God as voiced by His prophets. They will also kill and crucify

those commissioned ones who proclaim the truth of God among them. Their criminal guilt, including the implicit guilt of rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, is so great that upon them would “come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth” from Abel on (v 35). The “generation” upon which all these things falls (v 36) may refer directly to that group of religious authorities who have just been called a “generation of vipers” (v 33). Matthew appears to use the phrase “wicked and adulterous generation” several times specifically in reference to the religious leaders. See 12:39, 41, 42, 45;16:4 for examples.

## **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!!**

“Get out of here! Don’t you know that Herod is out to kill you?” Go tell that rascal that I’ll go when I’m good and ready. I have several days’ work to do and I’ll leave when finished. In the meantime, I don’t fear Herod. It’s in Jerusalem where you and your kind have jurisdiction that I have cause to fear! Is it possible for a prophet to perish outside Jerusalem? — Luke 13:31-33, liberally paraphrased.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” — Matthew 23:37-39

Christ’s words reach a definite climax here as He pronounces sentence upon Jerusalem. It is clear from the context that He has the religious system and its officials in view, not every individual inhabitant. It is that religious hierarchy in that city at that time where the rejection of the counsel of God comes to a climax. Its assessment and discard by God also comes to a climax, as warned by John the Baptist. The phrase, “...your house is left to you desolate,” depicts rejection and abandonment by God. Some

interpret “your house” as speaking of the temple, that it is rejected by God as “the temple of God” and becomes, instead “*your* house.” Others claim it is simply a general picture of abandonment and desolation and not directed at the temple in particular. But it is a strong picture. A “house” should know happy scenes of merriment and joy and activity. Nothing is so forlorn and gloomy or so representative of rejection and desolation as a run-down, abandoned house.

## **The Olivet Discourse**

Matthew 24, 25, constituting what is called “The Olivet Discourse,” unlike the preceding material, is not directed at the religious system. But its contents indicate the end of all that centered in the temple, as it begins with Christ’s prediction of its utter destruction. It was a magnificent structure, originally built by Zerubbabel, but it underwent a great “upgrading” starting about B.C. 19-20 by Herod the Great that continued for at least 46 years (John 2:20). Christ’s actions in the temple and his prediction in Matthew 24 strongly imply that God had abandoned it as “the House of God” and had no further use for it. The fact that Christ had authority to forgive sin indicates that the temple, the place for Israelites to bring their sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin, was simply redundant.

It is my personal conviction that the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the wars with Rome that climaxed in A.D. 70 with the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Detailed information in this regard is in *This I Believe*, No. 35, (available on request).

## **The Joel Prophecy**

Acts 2:15-21: beginning of Peter’s address on the Day of Pente-

cost. The role of the quotation from the prophet Joel has been a continuous source of fascination and controversy. Peter does not say “that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke through the prophet” as in several places, such as Matthew 1:22; 2:15. He says simply “...*this is what* was spoken by the prophet Joel.” A similar statement is Matthew 3:3: “...*this is he* who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah.” We readily see in Isaiah a direct reference to John the Baptist but are very reluctant to see in Joel a direct reference to what occurred in Acts 2. So we interpret Peter as meaning “...this is that (kind of thing) which was spoken by the prophet Joel,” or “...this is (a little bit of) that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” and postpone the definitive “fulfillment” of Joel’s prophecy to some unknown future date. But I propose that we take Peter’s words at their simple face value.

In the prophets, a “day of the Lord” is a time of reckoning or judgment by Yahweh, the God of Israel. It may be a reckoning or judgment upon enemies of Israel, thus bringing blessing to His people. It may be a reckoning or judgment against Israel itself for disobedience and idolatry. There are several such “days of the Lord” in OT history. Such a time of reckoning or judgment is often accompanied by the overthrow of a system of government, the casting down of high and haughty and mighty ones. Such a casting down may be described in the highly figurative language of cosmic cataclysms. Consider:

And when I put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light, Ezekiel 32:7, KJV.

A similar passage is Isaiah 13:10. These scriptures describe violent overthrow and change in the governments of Egypt and Babylon. The references to the darkening of the sun and moon may be vivid figures for the extinguishing of the pomp and glory of reigning monarchs and may have nothing to do with actual sunshine and

moonlight! Notice in Psalm 18 how David uses violent cosmic upheavals to describe his being delivered from the hand of his enemies and from Saul. This may simply be a characteristic of Hebrew poetry and prophecy—the use of highly figurative and vivid descriptions. Is it right to insist that Joel’s prophecy must be accompanied by literal cosmic events: “wonders in heaven, signs in the earth, blood, fire, smoke, darkened sun, reddened moonlight?” Perhaps this shifts our attention from what is happening. A pompous, haughty religious system that presumed to act for God in relation to God’s people was being “put out.” It was rejected by God and abandoned to itself. It could no longer act or speak for God and He would never again undertake for it. The ax is being laid to the root of the tree, the chaff is being consumed. The invitation is there in the words of Joel for any to call upon the Name of the Lord and be saved from the shipwreck and rejection of that system.

We continue, examining passages in the Book of Acts.

Acts 2:23, 36: Peter boldly hurls the charge at his own countrymen, his fellow Israelites: “Jesus of Nazareth...ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

2:40: Peter exhorts his hearers to “Save yourselves from this untoward (crooked in a wicked sense) generation.” That “generation” has been abandoned by God. Deliverance is offered to all, the oppressors and the oppressed.

2:41-47: God’s manifest presence and activity in His new center and household.

3:13-15: Peter repeats the charge, “...ye denied the Holy One and the Just...and killed the Prince of life.”

3:17: Notice that Peter speaks of “*your* rulers,” not “*our* rulers.” He no longer identifies himself with that corrupt system.

## A Prophet Like Unto Moses

3:18-26: a most crucial and greatly misunderstood passage. Peter brings the combined weight of the testimony of *all* the prophets to bear upon the situation of that day. Circle and connect each reference to “prophets” in these verses to grasp Peter’s thrust.

We can see here a parallel to the Lord’s words about the righteous (innocent) blood of those righteous ones since Abel coming “upon this generation” (Matthew 23:35, 36).

v 18: God declared by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer and this He has fulfilled.

v 21: God’s holy prophets of old had spoken of the “setting things right.” Was this going on at that very time?

vv 22, 23: rejecting a prophet (spokesman) of God results in being rejected by God. Peter quotes the Deuteronomy passage concerning a prophet, using its original emphasis. See Deuteronomy 18:15-22. The people of Israel did not wish to hear God speak directly any more (v 16). God accommodated Himself to their frame of mind, promising to raise up a prophet when necessary to communicate with them, putting His words into the mouth of the prophet. The authenticity of such a prophet could be tested by the people, as the succeeding verses (20-22) indicate. A prophet who did not speak for God could and should be rejected. We have here a general principle, not the prediction of a certain prophet at a certain time. It applies to all the prophets of God through the history of the Old Testament. I realize that this passage became the basis for predicting a certain prophet at a certain time, but that is a tradition that grew up in Israel and is not the original meaning of the passage. John the Baptist was questioned as to whether he was “that prophet.” This idea has led many to wonder who Peter meant when he quoted the Deuteronomy passage: himself? Christ? It is neither. The passage gives a general principle applicable to all prophets of God.

The consequences for rejecting a spokesman of God are serious, perhaps deadly. To reject a spokesman giving God's words put into his mouth by God, is to reject God himself! The KJV of Deuteronomy 18:19 says of such a rejecter, "I will require it of him." The thought in the Hebrew is that God would make this one answer for his actions. Just what would result from this "answering" is not stated. Perhaps it could vary with the circumstances of the occasion. The Greek translation (Septuagint Version) makes the consequence appear stronger: "I will exact righteous retribution from him." Some translate, "I will take vengeance on him." Peter does not quote either the Hebrew or the Greek of Deuteronomy directly, but intensifies the penalty for rejection: "...every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed (utterly destroyed, exterminated) from among the people." This is total rejection and abandonment. It does not mean immediate death as a capital punishment, but when abandoned by God, a horrible end could result. It is a bit of conjecture to see in Peter's words that the abandonment by God resulted in the Roman armies' giving siege to and ultimately destroying Jerusalem with the death of countless Israelites in A.D. 70. God's people were given warning and could escape the city in time, but those who rejected God's words through His prophets perished.

v 24: If the rejection of any single prophet at any time led to a righteous retribution, what hope could there be for those who rejected the combined weight of every prophet from Samuel on?! This is precisely what Peter here indicates: "*All the prophets* from Samuel on, *as many as who spoke*, announced these very days!" So anyone, high or low, who rejected the testimony being given, would be eliminated. Credentials indicating status of the flesh would mean nothing. Having Abraham as forefather would be no refuge. There is only one safe place, only one course of action that would keep one within the counsel of God to take part with His people in His program.

vv 25, 26: Peter drives the point home and offers the way of escape. The emphases in the following NIV rendering are from

## Rotherham:

And *you* are heirs (lit, “sons,” heirship implied) of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth shall be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, he sent him *first to you* to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

It is difficult for us to grasp the excitement of the occasion, one of the most crucial points in all Biblical history. The combined weight of rejecting all the prophets was upon that people and that city. The invitation to flee God’s anger and to obtain the blessings of the inheritance of all that God had vouchsafed to that people was offered in and through Abraham’s offspring, the risen Messiah. Note Peter’s thought: God promised to **ble**ss all peoples through (literally “in”) Abraham’s offspring (seed). **That blessing** was first brought to these, as heirs, by that offspring, Christ, raised from the dead. Here is also the anticipation that the blessings of Messiah, Abraham’s offspring, would ultimately extend to all humanity, breaking out of the fleshy restrictions and provincialism of Israel itself. The coming ministry of Paul, the commissioned one (apostle) to the nations (Gentiles), may be here in germ form.

4:1-22: Peter and John, “unlearned and ignorant men,” boldly confront the religious leaders and presume to speak to them as God’s spokesmen. Peter again charges them with the crucifixion of Jesus (v 10) and uses again the figure of the stone rejected by them, the builders, having now been made the chief cornerstone or capstone (v 11). The phrase, “...this is the Lord’s (Yahweh’s) doing,” accompanies the figure of the building stone, Matthew 21:42; Psalm 118:22,23. Peter seems to be implying strongly that God, in raising Christ from the dead (v 10), made Him to be the “head of the corner.” To reject this capstone is to reject God. This in turn implies being rejected, discarded, by God. Peter tells them bluntly that the only rescue possible from this place of discard is in the name of that same One by whom the lame man had been

healed, the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

5:17-42: This chapter relates various manifestations of the presence of God among the people of God. Peter again boldly faces “the establishment” and charges it with killing and crucifying Jesus (v 30). Let us not miss the point here that this is before the supreme religious council, the Sanhedrin. But this group simply has no standing. The apostles are now the leaders in Israel, God’s Israel, and speak for God to the old establishment. Peter testifies of God that He exalted Jesus, whom they had killed, “to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.” God mercifully invites any in the old order to be rescued from it and find a place in the new order. That many do is evident from 6:7 where we read that “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

## **Stephen — The Final Confrontation**

Acts 6:8-15: preliminaries to the last big showdown with the establishment in Jerusalem. Stephen must have had some insight into how God’s program was moving and would develop. We don’t know just what words he spoke but we can gather something from the accusations made that he must have realized the Law of Moses was not to stand as the way to God and that the status of the temple would be dramatically changed. Note accusations in vv 13, 14:

This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.

These accusations were made by “false witnesses” before the supreme council, the Sanhedrin. Stephen must have been teaching something that would give rise to them. Could he have spoken from the book of Jeremiah about the New Covenant? and that it

would be “not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...”? (Jeremiah 31:31-34) This would certainly “change the customs Moses handed down to us,” and any Israelite who denied this denied a major part of his own heritage. Perhaps Stephen indicated that the temple was part of the system of types or shadows that were contained in the ritual observances of sacrifice. He makes a pointed remark about God and temples as a dwelling place for God in his address of chapter 7, indicating that the accusations made by false witnesses were not without basis in “the wisdom and the spirit (Spirit?) by which he (Stephen) spoke” (6:10).

7:1-60: Stephen’s address to the Sanhedrin, the last major confrontation with the old establishment. Stephen reviews the familiar history of Israel, highlighting it with incidents from the lives of outstanding persons of OT history. Some of the details he gives are not found elsewhere in the Bible. When he builds up to the main point, his words are parallel in their thrust to the Lord’s words in Matthew 23:29-36. He stresses the disobedience of the Israelite fathers at the time of Moses, indicating that the forty years’ sojourn in the wilderness was characterized by idolatry (vv 38-43). Before charging these leaders of the people with the same disobedience shown by the fathers, Stephen makes some pointed remarks about the temple (vv 46-50), likely having some parallels with the accusations against him. He uses writings that all these men would admit are divinely inspired and with them removes the temple from the false esteem they had attached to it. Or perhaps it is better to say that he elevates God from the restricted and narrow view they had of Him: that He dwelt in that structure of wood and stone in the city of Jerusalem. I can’t help but feel that his words “...the most High dwelleth not in temples *made with hands*” (v 48) echoes the phrase “rejoiced in the works *of their own hands*” (v 41).

Stephen may be taking the accusations made against him and turning them back upon his adversaries as accusations of making the

temple an idol and all that takes place within it idolatry. For those disobedient to God and who reject His counsel, this is just what it would be!

Then he drives home his main thrust (vv 51-53):

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!  
You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!  
Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.

Here are some of the most pointed words in the entire Bible! These who made so much of the rite of circumcision in the flesh kept their hearts and ears covered and hardened to God's truth. Their hardness of heart and mind could not be worse. They unjustly murdered One who was just and innocent. They made their boast in the Law, but enacted a mock trial with only a legal facade in their machinations to eliminate that Righteous One.

This section closes with Stephen having a vision of the glory of God and Jesus elevated to a position of glory and majesty. His description further inflamed the angered passions of the council members. Their abandonment of and by God could not be expressed in a stronger way. Each one should have repented in dust and ashes and abject humility. But their uncontrollable wrath led them to murder Stephen, true to the base inner character that had been exposed so pointedly by their victim.

### **Further Scripture Support**

The development of New Testament truth gives strong support to the proposal that God has given up on Israel according to flesh. One of the main themes of NT truth is that the blessings of eternal

life and being deemed righteous by God are not by the Mosaic Law, not by legalism in any way, and not from personal works or efforts. These blessings are freely bestowed in the Person of Christ Jesus. The status, standards, and attainments of the flesh cannot enter into this realm.

In the writings of Paul we see emerging a new definition, a new meaning of Israel. It is no longer based upon being identified with Abraham as forefather in the flesh. It is based upon being identified with Christ, the Messiah, by faith. We saw earlier that Paul's remark in 2 Corinthians 5:17 carries this implication, that one partakes of a new creation when one comes to be in Messiah. The old things of Israel, the things of the flesh, have passed away are gone. In 1 Corinthians 10:18 Paul calls attention to a familiar scene:

Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? (KJV)

Israel according to flesh went on with its religious ritual in the temple and would probably continue it to this day if they had the opportunity. Paul uses this to illustrate a point about the care needed in partaking of the Lord's table. His use of the illustration is in a detached impersonal way, as though he and any believers in Christ really no longer have anything to do with these temple rituals. Is not the phrase "Israel according to flesh" here in contrast with "the Israel of God" of Galatians 6:16? Note how the terms "flesh," "circumcision," "uncircumcision," "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," "crucified," and "new creation" are used in Galatians 6:12-16.

## **Not All From Israel Are Israel**

The dichotomies "flesh" and "promise," "flesh" and "spirit," along with the contrasts "law" and "faith," "works" and "grace" are

familiar in the writings of Paul. In Romans 9 he states emphatically that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel,” v 6. He illustrates this point in v 7 by showing that inclusion in what is called “seed of Abraham” excludes all Abraham’s descendants except those through Isaac. Then he states the principle involved in v 8:

*Not the children of the flesh* the same are children of God; But  
*the children of the promise* are reckoned as a seed.

—Rotherham (emphasis his)

The promise in this case is recalled in v 9, the promise that Sarah would have a son. Another illustration is the elimination of Esau from the line of promise while Jacob is chosen. The point Paul is making is that God is not unjust in eliminating some persons from what constitutes His purpose, while choosing others. The application of these illustrations is that Israel has stumbled at the stumblingstone. To be a descendant of Israel according to flesh or to seek righteousness on the basis of a legal system cannot make one a child of God or include one in the people of God. That can come about only by faith in that rejected stone, Christ.

These contrasts are also detailed in Galatians 4:21-31. The dichotomy “flesh and promise” in v 23 is parallel to “flesh and spirit” in v 29. “Flesh” refers to Ishmael, born in the ordinary way to Hagar, the bondwoman. “Promise” and “spirit” refer to Isaac, born by divine provision and enablement to Sarah, the freewoman. Paul’s allegory in this passage is pointed and clear. “Flesh” and “Hagar” represent Sinai (the Law), Jerusalem (that city again!), and bringing forth children of bondage, the bondage of legalism. “Promise” or “spirit” and “Sarah” represent the provision and enablement of God in Christ, a “Jerusalem which is above,” and bringing forth children of freedom, freedom from the bonds and shackles of legalism. As Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so those enmeshed in legalism were persecuting those who had entered into

the liberty wherewith Christ made them free. Paul's exhortation to the Galatians (4:30) rings clear:

But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."

His meaning is clear. Have done with legalism and all that goes with it. There is no inheritance for any who are attached to the Law and those who perpetuate it. In the illustration Ishmael was excluded from the line of promise. (So he must stand or fall before God as anyone else not in that line. This was not a matter of being "saved" or "lost" in some eternal sense.) In the reality, Israel according to flesh has been excluded from God's purpose. But the reality includes provision not possible in the illustration. Ishmael could not get inserted into the line of promise from Abraham. But Israelites could, and can, individually embrace their Messiah, become one of the "children of freedom" in Him, and obtain the inheritance that is in Him, even to becoming joint-heirs or co-heirs with Him!

## **But God Has Not Rejected His People!**

I anticipate an objection to my thesis based on Romans 11:1.

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means!

Paul has already told us that not everyone descended from Israel is part of Israel, that children of the flesh are excluded from the line of promise (9:6-8). Can he now be telling us that children of the flesh are to be accepted, that the allegory developed in Galatians 4 is to be annulled? The title of this work is "The End of Israel *According to Flesh*." The things of the flesh, which we have seen in many contexts means status or position based upon genealogy, circumcision, and keeping tenets of the Law no longer have any

standing in relation to God. *These things* are ended. It is not the end of Israel. But Israel has been redefined and has a new identity. Any status or standing before God for an Israelite is by being in the “Israel of God,” a new creation in Christ. This was and is available to every Israelite. Is this not precisely what Paul is driving at in Romans 11:1 ?

Did God reject his people? By no means! *I am an Israelite myself*, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul’s proof that God did not reject His people is Paul himself! He was now an Israelite in Christ. And that was the invitation to all Israelites—enter into that new identity in Christ. This is what Paul labored for, as he goes on to detail in this chapter:

...I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people (lit., “my flesh”) to envy and save some of them (vv13,14).

### **And so All Israel Shall be Saved**

This passage has been used to support many notions about the future of Israel. Our English word “so” has many meanings and uses. Many take it here in the sense of “subsequently,” after certain antecedent events, or in the sense of drawing a conclusion from the preceding discussion. But the Greek indicates that the meaning is “in this manner,” “in this way.” (As in Matthew 6:9, *After this manner...pray ye.*) Paul has clearly shown that way or manner to be by faith in Christ, as he has demonstrated in his own person.

What is “all Israel?” Every Israelite ever born? Every Israelite in the time of Paul? Every Israelite in some future time? I’d have to say “none of the above!” Paul does not say “every Israelite.” He says “all Israel.” What constitutes “all Israel” must agree with his words in 9:6-8 where he clearly indicates who are “*not* all Israel” (KJV). “All Israel” must be those God defines and identifies as His

people, “the Israel of God.”

There is nothing in Romans 11 to indicate that God will eventually reverse the allegory of Galatians 4 and go back to the things of flesh and law as the basis for owning people as His children or His nation. All that constitutes His Israel will ultimately be delivered, based upon the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel. Paul makes it very clear in this epistle that the love of God for him and his reconciliation in Christ were demonstrated while he was a sinner and an enemy of God. And he claimed to be the chief or worst of sinners! (Romans 5:8,10; 1 Timothy 1:15) He also claimed in 1 Timothy 1:16 that

...I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

These thoughts must be brought to bear upon the question that opens Romans 11 and upon Paul’s presentation in that entire chapter.

## **Wrath...To The Uttermost**

Support for my thesis is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. Quoted here is Conybeare’s version:

For you, brethren, followed in the steps of the churches of God in Judaea, which are in Christ Jesus, inasmuch as you suffered the like persecution from your own countrymen, which they endured from the Jews; who killed both the Lord Jesus, and the prophets, and who have driven me forth (from city to city); a people displeasing to God, and enemies to all mankind, who would hinder me from speaking to the Gentiles for their salvation; continuing always to fill up the measure of their sins; but the wrath (of God) has overtaken them to destroy them (more literally, “to make an end of them,” footnote).

These words echo the words of Christ in Matthew 23 and Stephen in Acts 7. Perhaps Paul uses the term “the Jews” here in the same way as John 20:19: “the doors were shut...for fear of the Jews.” See also John 19:38. In such contexts the phrase “the Jews” speaks of the religious hierarchy. That whole establishment has been eliminated and abandoned. God has made an end of it. It has no status or standing. Perhaps we have here insight into the meaning of the phrase “the wrath of God.” Certainly we have an application of it: **to be totally excluded from the purpose and program of God.** Individuals, of course, could be rescued, as Peter made clear in his addresses and as Paul makes clear in Romans: “For *whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,” 10:13. But the old order is rejected, and such individuals become part of the new order of things in Christ. Their status, standing, and identity are in Christ alone. And that is sufficient.

### “Bless Them...Curse Him...”

What about the promise in Genesis 12:3?

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse...

Haven't promises like this formed a tradition in the Western World, where Christianity has flourished? And hasn't this tradition exerted such influence that it affects our national policy toward the people of Israel? Hasn't God promised to bless those who bless Israel and set Himself against those who set themselves against Israel? And will God go back on anything He has promised?

I'd say that we can make an *application* of this promise, but it has no standing in its literal interpretation in the realm of the flesh. In fact, it cannot be interpreted literally, as Abraham has long been dead! So the “thee” (“you”) must mean Abraham's seed or line of descendants after him. What, then, constitutes Abraham's seed?

Paul makes the answer most clear. In Galatians 3:16,19 he indicates that the seed of promise is narrowed down to Christ Himself. Those identified with Christ are identified with the seed of promise and are thus constituted “seed of Abraham,” Galatians 3:29. So “Abraham” and “seed of Abraham” are redefined in terms of Christ, not in terms of fleshly genealogy. If this has any meaning back in Genesis 12:3 it would be that God’s purpose centers in Christ, not in Abraham, and that people of any nation may “Bless Christ and be blessed.” But to reject Christ would result in ultimate rejection. As to the threat, “I will curse,” consider the impact of Paul’s strong words in 1 Corinthians 16:22: “If anyone does not love The Lord – a curse be on him.”

As far as national policy is concerned, it should be to deal with Israel, and any nation, according to the proper principles of justice and equity, granting no special privilege based upon mere genealogy.

### **“The Least of These My Brethren”**

What about “the least of these my brethren” of Matthew 25:40? Aren’t Christ’s “brethren” His kinfolk, His fellow Israelites? And isn’t this again instructing other nations to feed, clothe, and aid Israelites at all times in all circumstances? I personally doubt that Christ would define those He calls “my brethren” as fellow Israelites according to flesh. I’d be more inclined to think His definition would be in Mark 3:33-35:

“...Who is my mother, or my brethren?” And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.”  
(KJV)

This gives a more satisfactory view of “the least of these my breth-

ren.” The statements of John 20:17; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11,12 should also be brought to bear upon this issue. I believe these passages harmonize nicely with the definition in Mark 3. There is nothing in Matthew 25 that requires us to identify Israelites that are descended from Abraham through Israel as Christ’s “brethren.” When occasion warrants, we should be willing to feed, clothe, assuage thirst, visit, and otherwise aid Israelites, and any other human beings, with compassion and concern.

### **Promises, Promises, Promises**

But aren’t there many, many promises throughout the Old Testament about a future time of blessing for the people Israel, blessings of peace and prosperity, blessings of dwelling safely in their land? And aren’t the gifts and calling of God without repentance or reconsideration on His part? And mustn’t we be careful not to “spiritualize” anything in the Bible, especially in regard to “prophetic material?”

These, and many other questions, must be given careful consideration. In such consideration I believe we can identify certain principles that must be used in seeking answers.

First, we must realize that all the promises of God that we are concerned with here are promises made *to and for His people*. We have already observed that this cannot mean every Israelite, that not every individual descended from Israel (the man) is Israel (the nation or people). The promises are not to those “cut off from among the people.” The point Paul makes in Romans 9 is that those of Israel who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah of God are “cut off from among the people” and no longer are Israel though they may descend from Israel. What constitutes Israel has been redefined. Israel has a new identity. This definition and identity are found in Christ. In fact, in Galatians 3:16 and 3:19, Abraham’s seed, the *seed of promise*, is narrowed down to Christ Himself! *He*

is the heir. In v 29 Paul shows that Abraham's seed is given a new definition as those who belong to Messiah. If *He* is the seed, then those identified with *Him* constitute seed, or descendants. They are heirs according to promise, that is, heirs on the principle of promise as opposed to circumcision and keeping tenets of the Law. Further, they are Sons of God and joint heirs with Christ. When Christ enters upon His inheritance, those who belong to Him will enter along with Him and realize the full measure of what God has promised.

These thoughts indicate another principle: the promises focus upon the Person of Christ. This is certainly a Biblical principle, as Paul indicates in 2 Corinthians 1:20:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are  
"Yes" in Christ.

In this context Paul expresses his deepest motivation in carrying out his ministry and makes a fascinating play on the words "Yes" and "No," perhaps implying the ideas of a "positive" vs. "negative" attitude or bearing. So he seems to be saying that "whatever may be the promises of God, they are positive in Christ." Consider again Peter's invitation to his fellow Israelites at the end of Acts 3 as a possible illustration (Rotherham's rendering, emphasis his):

*Ye* are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God covenanted unto your fathers, saying unto Abraham—And *in thy seed* shall be blessed All the families of the ground, *Unto you first* God—Having raised up his Servant—Hath sent him forth, ready to bless you, When ye are turning away, each one, from your wickednesses.

Peter clearly identifies the seed of Abraham with the risen Christ, God's Servant. The phrase "shall be *blessed*" in the promise quoted from Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 is to be connected with the

phrase “ready to *bless* you.” The blessing of Abraham is there in the Messiah! And available first of all to those Peter addressed.

We should not allow our thinking to be restricted or blocked by the exhortation not to “spiritualize” the promises. What we should do is find out as much as possible as to how the Bible itself treats the promises, see what principles are brought to bear upon the matter, and invest these principles to see what the implications are. I believe Paul has given us some very definite clues (in addition to those we’ve already considered). My rendering of Galatians 3:8 follows:

Moreover, the scripture, foreseeing that God is justifying the nations on the principle of faith, announced glad tidings beforehand to Abraham: “In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

This illustrates again how a promise must be “channeled” through the Person of Christ to see its fulfillment. The phrase “in thee” is equivalent in meaning to “in thy seed,” as a comparison of the promises to Abraham will show. Later in Galatians 3 Paul indicates that this “seed” is Christ Himself (3:16,19). In 3:14 he clearly states that being justified on the basis of faith and not by law (see 3:7-14) is indeed “*the blessing of Abraham* come on the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.” So the blessing of being justified by faith in Christ, made available to those of the nations through the ministry of Paul, is the realization of the promise in Genesis 12:3. I believe we should treat this as a divine illustration of the realization of a promise in Christ. And we should not be afraid to exploit the principle Paul gives us here to the fullest extent possible.

## **The Present World Situation**

The deep conviction that gripped Paul should also grip us. The meaning and reach of the work of Christ has all humanity in view.

It changed Paul's outlook—he could no longer regard his fellow human beings according to normal human standards and status, according to genealogy, tribe, race, nationality, religious background. Do we really think God has more care and concern over a people living in a particular corner of the earth's real estate than over the other billions of human beings? Paul could no longer view God's Messiah, and therefore God Himself, as restricted and provincial. Let us not be guilty of the charge, "Your God is too small!"

## Appendix I

### Occurrences of "kata sarka"

A listing of each passage in which the phrase "kata sarka" is used follows (in italics). A few have the definite article, "the," before "sarka," but most omit it. This doesn't appear to add anything of significance. The KJV is used because of its more literal translation.

John 8:15: "Ye judge *after the flesh*; I judge no man." Here the phrase suggests making judgments or assessments according to normal worldly or human standards.

Act 2:30: "...God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, *according to the flesh*; he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne." Christ was a descendant of David in the normal sense. We should point out that the manuscript evidence for the phrase here is weak. The verse should read, "...God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne" (NIV).

Romans 1:3: "...the gospel of God...Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord...of the seed of David *according to the flesh*." Here the phrase obviously refers to Christ's genealogy. David was his forefather.

Romans 4:1: “What shall we say then that Abraham our father *as pertaining to the flesh*, hath found?” Though the use of “kata sarka” is somewhat ambiguous here, we see that Paul is referring to Abraham as forefather of Israelites in the normal genealogical sense. Many, perhaps most of those who read this epistle, were Israelites.

Romans 8:4,5: “...That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not *after the flesh*, but after the Spirit. For they that are *after the flesh* do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” In this context of chapters 7 and 8 (review again 7:1-6!) the things of the flesh, the “walk...after the flesh,” and “the mind of the flesh” (v 6) do not speak simply of immorality. They describe the legal approach, the attempt by means of the Mosaic Law or any such legal means to produce a manner of life and conduct that would “bring forth fruit unto God” (7:4), that would be pleasing to our God and Father. But the legal approach does not bring about the desired results. The goal or requirement of the Law, that of bringing about a righteous lifestyle, is not realized by legal means, is not accomplished in the realm of flesh, but is accomplished by being carried along in the current or force of God’s provision in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:12, 13: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live *after the flesh*. For if ye live *after the flesh*, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” The comments on the previous passage extend to this one as well. The path to life is not by legalism. Paul has shown that this approach cannot lift the flesh from its natural tendencies and limitations. But God’s provision in Christ will succeed. I take the “make to die the deeds of the body” of v 13 as the application of the exhortation in 6:10, 11:

The death he (Christ) died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (NIV).

That Paul is contrasting the legal approach to a satisfactory lifestyle with the way of God's provision and enablement in Christ is clear by comparing the following verses, 14-17, with Galatians 4:3-11. The parallels are very clear. The "spirit of bondage" is the effect of the legal approach, being under law. The "Spirit of adoption" (or, "spirit of sonship") is the awareness of being brought into the intimacy of a relationship with God where the heart's cry is "abba, ho pater!" –"Father, my Father!"

Romans 9:3: "...my brethren, my kinsmen *according to the flesh.*" Paul and his fellow Israelites were related, were "kinfolk," by normal genealogical considerations.

Romans 9:5: "Whose (Israelites) are the fathers, and of whom *as concerning the flesh* Christ came." Christ came forth from the Israelites in the normal way of considering one's heredity.

1 Corinthians 1:26: "...not many wise men *after the flesh*, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." Our phrase clearly indicates worldly status and attainment as measured by everyday human standards.

1 Corinthians 10:18: "Behold Israel *after the flesh*: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" This is a most crucial passage in this study. To illustrate an important point about union in the breaking of bread, Paul uses "Israel *according to flesh*," which was continuing with all the ceremony and ritual centering in the temple in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 5:16: "kata sarka" occurs twice here and has been dealt with in detail earlier.

2 Corinthians 10:2,3: "...I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked *according to the flesh*. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war *after the flesh.*" (Conybeare, Goodspeed, Moffatt are consistent in making the personal pronouns here the first person singular, "me," "I," instead of "us," "we.") Though Paul lives "*in the flesh*" (as all humans must!), his life, conduct, reasoning, resources, etc. are not dependent upon normal human attainment and talent and ability, but are "mighty through God," every thought being brought "into captivity

..to the obedience of Christ.”

2 Corinthians 11:18: “Seeing that many glory *after the flesh*, I will glory also.” This passage is similar to Philipians 3:3-8. Paul boasts about things of the flesh to make a point. The context indicates these things to include being a Hebrew (prowess in the ancient tongue?), being an Israelite, and being of the seed of Abraham. He goes on to describe enduring of labors, hardships, and persecutions that cause pain and suffering to “the outer man.”

Galatians 4:23: “But he who was of the bondwoman was born *after the flesh*; but he of the freewoman was by promise.” Ishmael was conceived and born in the normal manner while Isaac was conceived and born by divine provision and enablement.

Galatians 4:29: “But as then he that was born *after the flesh* persecuted him that was born after the Spirit...” The previous comment applies here.

Ephesians 6:5: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters *according to the flesh*.” In the world of human affairs, assessed by everyday standards and conventions, some are servants or bondsmen to others. Perhaps an application for today in our society would be to use the terms “employees” and “supervisors.”

Colossians 3:22: “Servants, obey in all things your masters *according to the flesh*.” This is parallel to the previous passage and goes on to indicate that the outward aspects, the externals of life, should not detract from inner devotion and service to our Lord.

We see that the phrase being studied, “kata sarka,” is used almost exclusively by Paul. Not one of these passages uses it with the word “flesh” having a strictly literal meaning, that is, the fleshy, material aspect of our physical human frame. It is quite impressive to note how many times this phrase has to do with genealogy and/or matters having to do with being under law in relation to God. Even in Galatians 4 where the phrase is used of the conception and birth of Ishmael, the obvious application is to those

Paul challenges with the remark, "...ye that desire to be under the law."

## Appendix II

### Some thoughts in Regard to Baptism

The passages, Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12, which speak of "baptism," play a prominent role early in this booklet. Most, but not all, Bible commentators consider this baptism to be the "water baptism" frequently spoken of in New Testament writings. My own remarks are rather ambiguous in this regard. I used the idea of a "merger" with Christ in discussing these passages. Water baptism is clearly not the only baptism spoken of in the New Testament. We read of baptism in the Holy Spirit, in fire, and in the cloud and the sea during the Exodus. Christ spoke of being under stress until He experienced a baptism, perhaps the same one promised James and John, the baptism of His suffering and death.

Vital in the study of baptism is the use of the Greek preposition *eis*. Its primary meaning is "into," but it has a host of related meanings such as "to," "until," "for," "with reference to," etc. Its usages with baptism are indicated in the following quotations.

Matthew 3:11: I baptize in water *eis* repentance.

Acts 2:38: be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ  
*eis* remission of your sins...

Romans 6:3: baptized *eis* Christ Jesus...  
baptized *eis* His death?

6:4: buried with Him by (this) baptism *eis*  
(this) death...

1 Corinthians 1:13: or *eis* the name of Paul were you  
baptized?

1:15: that you were baptized eis my name  
10:2: baptized eis Moses in the cloud and  
in the sea...

12:13: in one Spirit we were baptized eis  
one body...

Galatians 3:27: baptized eis Christ...

Colossians 2:12: buried with Him (Christ) in (that)  
baptism in which you were also raised  
with Him...

Though we can be rather confident in some of these passages, there is no way of knowing with total certainty whether to use “into” or “unto.” “Into” suggests an “immersion into” or “plunging into” resulting in total identity with some one or some medium. “Unto” seems to have the sense of “with reference to” or “for” some object and seems most appropriate in passages such as Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 1:13,15. What would it mean to be baptized “into the name of Paul?” But I prefer “into” in 1 Corinthians 10:2, “baptized into Moses,” and 12:13, “baptized into one body.”

Now what about Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:27? Here we do not have “baptized eis the name of the Lord Jesus” as in Acts 8:16 and 19:5 where “unto” is most appropriate. It is simply “baptized eis Christ Jesus” the simplest, most concise statement relating baptism to Christ and occurring only in these two places. Is this a baptism “in reference to,” or “for” or “unto” Christ? Or is it a “merging into” or “plunging into” Christ so as to be completely identified with Him? I prefer the latter sense. A baptism “unto” or “in reference to” Christ would make sense to me, but not a baptism “unto” or “in reference” to His death. This, to me, speaks of being so “merged” into the death of Christ that Paul can speak of being crucified with Him. And subsequently, one is identified with Him in His resurrection, now virtually, but eventually in reality. So this must take us back to the actual death (crucifixion), burial, and

resurrection of Christ, even though baptism by immersion has been viewed as a symbolic reenactment of these events. But it is difficult for me to believe that a ritual performed by human hands can accomplish the significant union described here by the Apostle Paul. No, it seems to me that the words of 1 Corinthians 1:30 apply:

But of him (God) are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption...

Romans 6:1-11 would indicate that these things are ours by faith and reckoning, not by a sacramental rite, no matter how cherished and respected.

Union with Christ, being identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection is of profound meaning and importance in the ministry of Paul. It is all summed up in his beautifully succinct phrase, "In Christ." In 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 Paul makes (water) baptism to be of almost insignificant importance. It seems to me that if Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12 describe far-reaching accomplishments and effects of water baptism, Paul could not have treated it in the rather casual manner he uses to speak of it in the Corinthian passage.