

Romans - Commentaries by Alexander Hume Rule

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 1, Man's Condition; and What Is the Remedy? Part 4 (6:12-14)

Man being utterly ruined in himself, we have seen that all blessing must come through another. God, moreover, has been revealed as a Seeker, a Savior, a Lifegiver. It is all in Christ. The cross of Christ is the foundation of all blessing now. In it God has been glorified in His whole nature and character in the putting away of sin; and man as in the flesh has been set aside altogether, and a new man brought in in resurrection, the man Christ Jesus. In this second Man, risen and glorified, all blessing is final.

This brings in faith as the principle of blessing and of relationship with God — faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. No matter whether it be the salvation of the soul, or whether it be the Christian walk, it is by faith. We are justified by faith, saved by faith, have eternal life by faith; and we live by faith, and walk by faith. This is the principle of our whole relationship with God, in marked contrast with the principle of works under the law.

Now there are two ways by which the enemy has sought to corrupt this truth, or annul it altogether. One is by the principle of antinomianism; the other, legalism. The former says: "If you are saved by grace, through faith, and without works, then you can do as you please — give loose rein to the flesh with all its lusts and passions, provided only you believe." The latter says: "You must be made perfect by the flesh, under the law." It may admit and hold that you are justified by faith, but also insist on your being at least under the law as a rule of life.

Both of these systems are antagonistic to the gospel. Both give the flesh a place, an allowed standing. The one would give the flesh full liberty, and thus turn the grace of God into lasciviousness; the other would regulate the flesh by putting it under a system of commands and restraints, forgetting that the mind of the flesh is enmity against God, and not subject to the law of God, nor can be. See Romans 8:7.

To one who has known true liberty — the liberty which the gospel gives — both of these systems are utterly repulsive. The horrible wickedness of the former must be felt by every one who has ever in truth had to do with God about sin. The latter is more subtle, but not less dangerous, and is what the Apostle Paul in Galatians calls "another gospel," or "a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6).

It may be said that no one could soberly hold such a doctrine as that the flesh is to be allowed full liberty. Perhaps not. But it matters little whether soberly, or otherwise, if it be held at all. No man could hold such a doctrine in the presence of God. But when man gets away from God in his soul, or has never known Him, and is given up to the foolish wanderings of his own depraved mind, who can tell what the end will be? One has heard in connection with the holiness doctrines of the present day, such a thing as that the believer may be in the enjoyment of the most blessed communion with God in the new nature, while indulging the old nature in the grossest sins. The godly soul recoils with horror from such a thought. Yet how much of this thing there has been! Who has not heard of the doctrine of Indulgences promulgated before and at the time of the Reformation, according to which, indulgence in the grossest sins was granted for so much money? It may be said, We do not live in such times. This may be true in a sense; but let it not be forgotten that the heart of man is just the same now as then, and that under the cover of a fair outward profession every kind of wickedness may go on. 2 Timothy 3:13 is positive proof of this. And it is there added, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

The reader may say, "But this is not among Christians." Very likely they are not true Christians, but at any rate they bear the Christian name. They have the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.

And do you think the true Christian is not capable of falling into such evils? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). You tell me you are a child of God, and you could not do such things; but let me ask you a plain question: Did you never yield to some sin — some temptation — with the secret feeling in your heart, "Well, I am saved anyway, and I cannot be lost," while, if you had felt that your eternal destiny depended on that act, you would have recoiled from it with horror? Tell me now, is not this the same thing? Is not this abusing the grace of God? It may be some little thing, but it shows the principle, and shows, too, the lightness of our wretched hearts in the presence of what it cost God to put away sin. Let the sin be little or great, as man estimates it, it required the untold agonies of Jesus, the Son of God on the cross, to put it away. Oh! what grace on the part of the blessed God to give His Son to be lifted up on that cross. And how light and frivolous our poor hearts often are in the presence of such grace! We would, perhaps, turn away with horror from some great sin which would bring us into public disgrace, while going on complacently enough with other things condemned of God, but allowed of men, just because they minister to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." Alas! where is Christ in all this? Have the sorrows of His cross passed from our minds? Or has that cross ceased to express to us God's thoughts of sin?

I am persuaded that antinomian principles often operate in the hearts of Christians when, perhaps, they are little aware. If the flesh is allowed at all, it is sin. If its lusts are allowed on the plea of being under grace, it is what Jude calls, "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4) and probably the same thing as the Nicolaitanism mentioned in Revelation 2, God's hatred of which is declared in the plainest terms.

But what is the remedy? THE CROSS. God has condemned sin in the flesh in the sacrifice of His Son, so that now it has no recognized place before Him. He has done with it forever; and we are to own His judgment of the flesh which is in us, so that with us, as with Him, it may have no recognized standing whatever. We are, in virtue of the cross, entitled to account ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, because His death was for us, and sets us free, so that we may refuse our old master. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:12-14).

But we have to learn what we are, and what is in our poor wretched hearts. We have to prove the wretchedness of being in bondage, before we can know the joy of liberty. And even when we are free, we still have within us the flesh which lusts against the Spirit; and it is only as we walk in the Spirit, with exercised hearts, and in humble, prayerful dependence on God, that we have practical power against the flesh. The flesh never changes; it is always evil. And painful though the lesson be, we have to learn that there is nothing for it but death. And even when we have learned this, there is constant need for watchfulness and prayer, lest we be betrayed by the deceitfulness of our own hearts. Our only safety is in an abiding nearness to Christ.

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 1, Man's Condition; and What Is the Remedy? Part 3 (6:6-7)

All this is as man and for man, so that those who, through grace, are in Him, have their place and relationship and eternal portion with God, and in the new creation. Such is God's superabounding grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans this grace is developed in connection with justification and deliverance. And it is not merely that we are "justified from all things" — "justified by His blood" — we have "justification of life" as well. This involves having our life in Christ risen. He died for us, not only as bearing our sins, but that He might also bring us, through His death, out of the whole condition we were in as children of Adam. "Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed [justified] from sin" (Rom. 6:6-7). "Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4). Thus all that judgment could lay hold of, all that in which sin could wield its power, all that the law could address itself to, has come to an end before God, for faith, in the death of Christ; and now in Christ risen we have our life — a life beyond judgment, beyond condemnation — a life of which the blessed Spirit of God is the spring and power. This is the life in which we stand before God. Christ Himself is our life — Christ risen — and thus we have "justification of life," because we have a life to which no sin can attach, and which, in resurrection and glory, is forever beyond the reach of judgment. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

And here, too, we have a positive delivering power — not only a new position, but a power adequate to the new place in which we are set by grace — "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Not only have we life in Christ, but it is life characterized by the power of the Spirit, and makes free from the "law of sin and death." The believer has the life in which Jesus was raised from the dead, and he has also the Spirit which raised up Jesus, as the power of this life. It is a delivering power which sets the believer free from bondage to sin, through the death of Jesus as the door of escape from the house of bondage, and the life of Jesus risen, realized as the life we now live in the flesh by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Oh, to realize the blessed character of this life in the power of the Spirit, through communion with our risen Lord and Savior!

Reader, are you "free"? I do not ask if you are converted, or if your sins are forgiven; but are you free? Has the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made you free from the law of sin and death? Are you walking after the Spirit, and not after the flesh? The Spirit glorifies Christ. Is Christ your object? Is Christ ALL?

If we now turn to Ephesians, we shall see the way in which God meets man's need as dead in his sins. It is not the subject of justification and deliverance that is developed, but a new creation, in connection with God's eternal counsels.

And here God begins with Christ. There was His "eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:11) — counsels before the foundation of the world — but when He began to bring this into view, He began by raising up Christ from the dead. Man in Adam was dead — dead in trespasses and sins — the old creation a hopeless ruin, and this proved by the death of Christ. Christ's death on the cross was, so to speak, the end of the old creation before God. All was brought under God's judgment, and done with before Him — man dead in sins, and Christ dead for sins and sin, all was death. Here God begins by raising up Christ from the dead, and setting Him "at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Nor is this all; He "put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:20-23).

This is a new creation. Christ is the Head; and now that the old creation is gone in death, and under judgment, Christ is "the beginning of the creation of God," just as if the old had never existed. But Christ is not alone. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-7). Thus, in the counsels of God, and to faith and in spirit now, we are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus; and our associations are with Him in that new creation scene of which He is the head and the beginning. God, by the mighty operation of His power, has set us in Him. The same power that wrought in raising up Christ from the dead, setting Him above all thrones and dominions, and all created intelligences of all ages, has wrought in us who believe, quickening us with Christ, raising us up, and seating us in Him. And, blessed be God, the same power works in us to lead us into the apprehension of it in our souls.

This power is by the Spirit who dwells in us, as the blessed answer to all that Christ is and has entered into for us, making it all good in us, in the apprehension of our souls, strengthening us with might in the inner man, according to the riches of God's glory; that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith; that, being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19). Oh! what grace. Can it be possible? Yes, fellow-believer, it is possible. It is God's own word. It is not a question of what we are, or what we can do. God is revealing the glory of His grace according to His eternal purpose in Christ, and it is wholly a question of what He can do, according to the power by which He raised up Christ from the dead, and set Him in the highest glory. It is a question of His mighty power operating in us by His Spirit. And who shall set limits to this?

What is the result of this inward strengthening? Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, and we get rooted and grounded in love. The Spirit dwells in us, and strengthens us inwardly; and our hearts open to the Object that is before the Spirit — Christ in glory — Christ, the Head of the Church, His body, and the center of the new creation scene, and this Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. This is what we have been brought into through grace, and what has got a place in our hearts by faith, and through the operation of the Spirit. But being there we do not find ourselves alone; in the counsels of God we find ourselves in the company of “all saints,” that with them we may look out on the scene of heavenly blessing, and comprehend it all, and, at the same time, drink in the knowledge of Christ’s love — the love which, through suffering and death, and the bearing of divine wrath and judgment, has brought us into all the blessing.

This, fellow-believer, is not something to be known afar off, as a tale that is told, in which we have no personal interest. The heart of believers is the sphere in which is developed, by the Spirit, this wondrous scene, this limitless expanse of glory — “breadth, length, depth, height;” this ocean of love — love fathomless, shoreless — “the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

Is this the scene in which your soul now lives — from which it draws its life, and nourishment? Do you know it as your commonwealth, your home, that into which grace has introduced you in Christ for eternity? Then may you and I, and all who have tasted the blessedness, walk in the power of this truth, and learn its breadth, and length, and depth, and height, more and more. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Sin, death, judgment, the world, are all left behind, and we belong to a scene in which the surpassing riches of God’s grace and glory are displayed, and will be displayed through all eternity. We are in this now in Christ, and have the Spirit in us as the blessed answer to it all, to make it good in our hearts, according to the power of God.

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).

Things New and Old: Volume 33, Glad Tidings of God: No. 5 (3:21-26)

Righteousness of God.

The word of God pronounces man a sinner, and declares that between Jew and Gentile “there is no difference.” “There is none righteous, no, not one,” is a sweeping statement: it makes no exception. I have sinned, you have sinned, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

The word of God also declares that “ the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Put these two solemn truths together, and what do you see? All guilty, all condemned, all under God’s wrath, and every mouth closed.

Does the unsaved reader bow to these truths? Do they put you in your true place before God as a child of Adam? Then you know, that as a child of Adam, you are lost! You are utterly undone! But, blessed be God, though man’s resources fail, His never fail. God’s resources are inexhaustible. Hear Him tell out His own blessed resources for the poor lost sinner who is utterly destitute of righteousness: ‘: But now the righteousness of God, without the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption, that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:21-26.)

Here we have the announcement of divine righteousness, righteousness of God manifested as His blessed answer to the precious blood shedding of His own spotless Lamb. The Lamb was the provision of His love and sovereign grace, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” Through the sacrifice of this Lamb, God was perfectly glorified. His majesty and glory vindicated, and the manifestation of His righteousness is the blessed answer to the delight He has found in that sacrifice.

“What then is this righteousness? What is its basis? What is its scope? To whom, and on what principle is it applied? Let us examine God’s word as to these questions.

(1.) What is this righteousness? The word of God clearly shows that it is a different order of righteousness from that which is by law-keeping. If it were righteousness of law it would be man’s righteousness, for the law is the measure of human righteousness. But man has utterly failed as to righteousness, and hence something else was needed; and that is what we have here—God’s righteousness. It is another order of righteousness, and contrasted with man’s, as Paul says: “ Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Phil. 3:9.) Here the contrast is plain. It is not accomplished by law-fulfilling at all. It is not on that principle. It is not a Superior coming and saying, I must have so and so, and the demand met. It is not something wrought out for God because clue to Him. This is what would have been by law, but in this, man failed. What then is it? It is God’s consistency with His own nature and character in His dealings with others; first, with His own Son; second, with those who believe in Him. It is what God has done for man, not what man has done for God. It is God’s righteousness man-ward, not man’s righteousness God-ward. If man had been righteous toward God, it would have been only what was due to God. But God’s righteousness toward a poor sinner who believes in Jesus is something entirely unmerited. It is not earned or deserved. Instead of righteousness, wrath was deserved. Wrath was revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Man was ungodly and unrighteous, and so God’s wrath was upon him. But now, through grace, “righteousness of God” takes the place of “wrath of God” in the case of all who believe in Jesus. How, then, is this? It is by grace. “Being justified freely by his grace.” In God’s wondrous grace, the wrath which overhung the guilty sinner is replaced by righteousness in the case of every one who believes the gospel, and this is not the sinner’s righteousness, but God’s. We shall see, by-and-by, the basis on which this takes place; but it is important to see just now that it is not human, but divine righteousness, which has its source and character in God, not

man; and if it is God's, surely it must be perfect, making the sinner on whom it rests an object in which God Himself delights. God cannot reject or deny it, for it is His own, perfect, divine, according to His own nature. God is just, and the Justifier, justifying consistently with His own character.

(2.) What is the basis of this righteousness? We answer, The precious sacrifice of Christ. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

God acted in forbearance toward the Old Testament saints, passing over their sins. His righteousness in doing so was not then manifested. It is manifest now through the cross. The blood of Christ declares it. God has set forth Christ as a propitiatory or mercy seat, presenting His blood as an object for faith, for this very purpose. God's righteousness in passing over the sins of saints before the cross is no longer a dark question. The blood of Christ declares it.

But this is not all. God is—not now passing over sins, but—justifying sinners who believe the gospel. How is He righteous in doing so? Through the blood of Christ. Through the blood of His own spotless Lamb, He is just in justifying him who believes. His righteousness in justifying is thus declared. The blood of Christ is the basis of all God's dealings in grace with sinners; and through that blood, His dealings in grace are declared righteous. God has found an adequate motive in the blood of Christ for showing grace to sinners, and justifying those who believe; and He is righteous in doing this, in virtue of the blood. The display of His righteousness in justification is His blessed answer to the blood shedding of Christ. How is this?

Let me ask the reader's earnest attention to this question. Mark this: God is justifying sinners, not righteous people. And if God is justifying sinners, it cannot be on the ground of their works. Their works have only been sin, and for this very reason they need justification. God's motive in doing so, then, must be found in something altogether outside of the sinner. It is found in Christ and His blood. Again I ask, How is this? It is because Christ has perfectly glorified God as to the very thing by which the sinner dishonored Him, and on account of which he needed justification. This He has done through the shedding of His blood on the cross. God had been dishonored by sin. His law has been broken, His justice despised, His majesty and glory set at naught, His love and His grace trampled underfoot. Yes, reader, this is the part, and the only part, you and I have had in bringing about the stupendous work of redemption. Our wretched guilt only created the need for it. Blessed be God, this need has been met by Another. The Lord Jesus Christ has glorified God in every way in the very scene where He has been dishonored. He gave Himself an offering for sin, gave Himself freely, and drank the cup of judgment to the dregs, leaving not one drop for us to drink. He went down into a fathomless abyss of suffering. Waves from beneath, and waves from above rolled in upon His holy soul; and out of the depths He cried—depths of darkness and sorrow and anguish unutterable—depths which He alone could fathom—out of the depths He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Of sorrow's cup He had drunk before, He was the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; but what is this cry we hear from this unsounded abyss of suffering? His path down here was indeed a path of sorrow, and lay through a scene where His God was dishonored, and where man was suffering from his own sin, and yet hating and despising the One who came to give relief. Such was His path, a sorrowful path indeed, and the sorrow deepening at every step, as the hatred increased, and the snares set in His path multiplied. There was nothing around Him, nothing in all this sin-stricken, sorrowful scene, to comfort His weary, suffering heart. But He could always look up, and always find comfort there. The beams of a loving Father's face, and the radiancy of heavenly glory always shone upon Him; and thus He trod His sorrowful path, for while all was dark below, all was light above.

To be continued

Selected Ministry of A. H. Rule Volume 1, Glad Tidings of God (1:16-17)

THE GOSPEL — THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:16-17). Such were the words of one who knew in his own soul the power by which God had wrought in him through the gospel — a gospel not received from man, but which had been taught him by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1). Look at that man as he goes on his way to Damascus, with authority from the high priest, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord! The eye of the Lord is upon him, and his career of wicked persecution must come to an end. Suddenly a light from heaven, brighter than the noonday sun, bursts upon him in his murderous path, and the proud, persecuting Saul of Tarsus lies upon the ground, a poor, broken sinner, ready to obey the voice of Him who had been the object of his bitter hatred.

Reader, there was power there. It was the power of God. The proud persecutor was broken in pieces before God, and led to own Jesus Christ as Lord. Henceforth, the Lord Jesus became the object of his life. For Him he gave up everything, counting all loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. "Christ, and Him crucified" was now his theme. Man, whether Jew or Gentile, was only a poor sinner, but Christ was the Savior of sinners. "If one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor 5:14-15). Nothing but the power of God could avail for those "dead in trespasses and sins." But there was One in whom the power of God was manifested. It was He who died and rose again — who abolished death, and destroyed him who had the power of death, who also ascended on high leading captivity captive. Through the grace of God Saul of Tarsus was brought to the knowledge of Him as the Deliverer, and he who before was a blasphemer and a persecutor, now proclaimed salvation through Jesus.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

1 Tim. 1:15. Such were his words. Blessed saying! Worthy of all acceptation! He came into the world; that was grace. He came to save sinners; that was power as well as grace. It was worthy of all acceptation, for the chief of sinners, the ringleader was saved. If the chief was

saved, who need despair? If he found grace, surely there is grace for any poor sinner. If the power of God was equal to his salvation, surely it is enough for any, or for all. And this is what the Apostle would have us learn from his own conversion.

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (1 Tim 1:16). What a pattern! The chief of sinners! The boldest and most zealous blasphemer of the name of Jesus, and persecutor of His disciples! Yet in the grace of God, and through divine power, saved! Yes, more than saved. The power of God wrought in him, and raised him up a pattern for believers — the chief of the saved, may we not say? the boldest and most zealous servant of Christ, the champion of the truth and defender of the faith. Not only was the grace of God displayed in the chief of sinners, but also the power of God in his deliverance. Let us not forget it. The grace of God flows out to the poor sinner in the gospel — it is the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24) — but the gospel is also the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Is a poor sinner saved? — it is all grace, the result of the pure love of God. But divine power wrought in his salvation. The same power that wrought in raising Christ from among the dead, and setting Him at God's right hand in the heavenly places, also has wrought in those who believe in Jesus, quickening them with Christ, raising them up and seating them in Him.

If I am "dead in trespasses and sins," I want not only atonement in the presence of God meeting the question of my guilt, and the precious blood of Jesus blotting out "trespasses and sins," but I also want divine power to give me life, and bring me out from among the dead. How do I get that power? The precious bloodshedding of Jesus is the basis on which that power is put forth. God has found such wonderful value in that blood, that it is now His delight — and righteousness too — to put forth His power for the salvation of the sinner. He puts forth that power through the gospel. It is the gospel of God. Through His Son He declares it. It is the voice of the Son of God. The hour is now come when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear live. "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life." The voice of the Son of God is in the gospel. Have I heard that voice in the gospel? Have I heard the Son of God, speaking in the gospel to me a sinner dead in sins? Then I live; I have passed from death unto life. His precious blood-shedding is the basis of all. But I have heard the voice of the eternal Word, and it has proved the power of God to bring me out of the chambers of death.

I look at the cross. There I see Jesus dying — shedding His precious blood. That is atonement. There the claims of God about sin are all met. The will of God is done, and God is glorified. Christ, the second Man, entered the gates of death, and destroyed him that had the power of death. He fought the battle, won the victory, and came forth bearing the keys of death and hell, and ascended leading captivity captive. It is the power of God put forth on the ground of the precious work and sacrifice of Christ. All is unfolded in the gospel, and through the grace of God all avails for the poor sinner who believes in Jesus. The grace of God meets the sinner in his extreme need — in the depth of his ruin — cold in the death of sin — not a pulsation in the heart toward God; there it meets him, and not only gives him clearance from guilt, but also everlasting life, and everlasting deliverance from the power of death. The gospel brings not merely clearance from guilt — full and everlasting forgiveness of sins; but it also gives complete deliverance from the position and state in which it finds the sinner. It brings him out of death, and delivers him from the power of sin in the old and evil nature, and sets him free to walk in the presence of God and communion with Him, in the power of a new life, and in the energy of the Spirit of God, by whom he has been sealed as the workmanship of God — a new creation in Christ Jesus. Not only so, but it reveals to him heaven opened, and Jesus entered in — a Man in the glory of God; in whom he too, a believing sinner saved by grace, has entered into the presence of God, and found a place in the delight God has in His own Son, Heaven's beloved One.

And then, dear reader, all this is in the righteousness of God. Were it not righteous, the power of God could not be put forth. Grace reigns through righteousness. The precious work and sacrifice of Christ deserve it. God puts value on the blood of His dear Son, and according to that value He acts for the sinner in grace. It is righteous to do so. And it is the righteousness of God. It has its source in Him, and is according to His nature. The gospel reveals it. Precious revelation! Reader, may your heart and mine prize it! It is ours at an immense cost! But it is just like God to bestow it, for God is love! Love is the very essence of His being — love infinite as His being, love that springs up unbidden, and flows forth in rivers of mercy. Yet that love was barred by sin. Sin was in the way of its reaching the sinner. Righteousness and holiness forbade its bringing salvation to the sinner without the removal of sin. But love was not to be baffled, and the Lord Jesus became the expression of it — the expression of God's heart, on the cross, in putting away sin according to the claims of divine holiness. God was glorified. The blood was sprinkled on the throne. Its claims were eternally vindicated. Love is now free to flow on in its course unhindered. And what rivers of love are now flowing from the blood-sprinkled throne of God! and flowing, too, in righteousness! The gracious love of God flows down to the poor sinner, lifts him out of his shame, and gives him a standing in divine righteousness before God. It is not the righteousness of man, but of God. It is not what man has wrought for God, but what God gives to man. Wondrous gift! Reader, is it yours? What righteousness for a poor sinner! Righteousness bestowed freely in God's unspeakable love! More, as to righteousness, the sinner could not have. Nor could God give more, or ask more, for it is His own. It is perfect, divine. And it is just what is suited to the presence of God. God is bringing sinners to Himself; but He is also bringing them there according to His own nature. He is filling His own table with guests, but He will have them worthy of Himself — the best robe on them. He is finding His joy and delight in man brought into His presence and glory, but brought there according to His own perfection, in His own nature, in His own likeness, to be partakers of His own everlasting joy. For this, divine righteousness alone is suitable. This righteousness the gospel reveals. It is God's righteousness revealed on the principle of faith. The poor sinner does not merit it. It is given freely. All is grace. Works have no place. It is on the principle of faith, not of works. And it is revealed to faith. It is not only by faith, or on the principle of faith, but it is to faith; it applies itself wherever faith exists. No matter whether Jew or Gentile, it applies itself alike to both. The great question is not whether the sinner is Jew or Gentile, but whether he believes. The righteousness of God applies itself wherever there is faith. No matter what his circumstances, no matter how deep his guilt, no matter how deep his ruin and shame, the moment the poor sinner believes the gospel of God's grace, he gets a standing in divine righteousness in God's presence. It is grace from first to last. It is divine, not human. It has its source in the infinitude of the love that dwells in God's bosom.

The gospel is the power of God by which he is brought into the blessed consciousness of God's unfathomable love, and of his standing in divine righteousness in the presence of God, where His precious love is shed on all around. Reader, have you known this power? Can you say, "I stand in the presence of God, in divine righteousness, saved from guilt, from wrath, from the power of sin, a possessor of eternal life, a partaker of the divine nature, meet for His presence forever, and a sharer of the everlasting joy of my Father's heart"? Can you say this? Then, I say, you have known the gospel as the power of God unto salvation. Precious knowledge! May our hearts treasure it! and in God's presence drink from the overflowing joy of His bosom!

It may be asked: "Why speak of God's wrath in connection with glad tidings?" Just this: it is the fact that God's wrath against sin has been revealed that makes the revelation of God's righteousness necessary. God's righteousness revealed in the gospel is the door of escape from infinite and eternal wrath, for it is by God's righteousness that the sinner is justified through faith in the Lord Jesus. The gospel addresses itself to those who are exposed to divine wrath, and hence the necessity of speaking of the revelation of wrath, in order that those who are under it may be awakened to a sense of their danger, and see their need of deliverance which the gospel brings.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Rom. 1:18.) In these words the truth comes out as to what the nature of God is toward sin. His nature is against it. He can deal with it only in unsparing judgment. He cannot pass it by. His wrath from heaven is revealed against it, revealed alike against all ungodliness in the Gentiles, and unrighteousness in the Jews, who had the truth, but held it in unrighteousness. The moment sin, in whatever form, no matter where or in whom, is brought face to face with God, His holy nature can only be against it. And it is because Jews and Gentiles—all men—are alike involved in sin, against which the wrath of God from heaven is revealed, that the righteousness of God, on the ground of the blood-shedding of Jesus, is revealed in the gospel on the principle of faith, and to faith, thus opening the door of salvation to all who believe.

Let us look a little at the expression, "wrath of God revealed from heaven." Again and again in the Old Testament we see God's wrath, but never, I think, the same as here. We see His wrath in sending the flood and destroying the world of the ungodly; again, when He confounded the tongues at Babel; again, when He delivered Israel, and the hosts of Pharaoh were swallowed up in the sea; again, when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all pertaining to them, went down alive into the pit; and the two hundred and fifty princes were consumed by fire coming out from the presence of the Lord. And so we might go on and state a multitude of cases of a similar character. But all these were only the display of God's governmental wrath in His ways and dealings with men in this world. When evil became bold and defiant, God dealt with it in His government, putting a check upon it by earthly judgments.

But now it is no longer a question of God's government, on the earth: it is a question, of His nature, for God is now acting according to what He is, and not merely putting a check upon evil in a governmental way. Of old, God dwelt in the thick darkness. His hand was seen in His governmental ways and dealings with men, but He had not revealed Himself in the fullness of what He is in His own nature and character. But now, God is revealed. He no longer dwells in thick darkness. The veil is rent. The whole truth has come out. We see this in the cross. There we see what God is, and in the light of His presence we see what man is, and what sin is. We see what He is in His nature toward sin, and what He is toward the guilty sinner who bows to His truth. By the cross the truth is revealed that "God is love" in providing a sacrifice for the guilty. But the same cross also shows that the only thing in His nature toward sin is wrath. And here it is not merely governmental wrath displayed in earthly dealings with men, but it is wrath according to what He is in His holy nature against sin—wrath from heaven. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven," &c.

But how is this seen in the cross? It is seen in the cross, because God there had to say to sin according to His own majesty, and the holiness of His own nature. When Christ was made sin on the cross, God forsook Him, and the sword awoke against Him who was Jehovah's Fellow. There never was anything like it before, nor will there ever be again. At the river Jordan, the heaven opened upon Him, God anointed Him with His Spirit, and proclaimed His delight in Him; tempted in the wilderness, and an hungered, an angel ministered to Him; on the mount of transfiguration, the voice of God from the glory-cloud declared Him His beloved Son; in Gethsemane, sweating as it were great drops of blood, in view of drinking the dreadful cup, an angel strengthened Him. Thus all along the earthly path of ministry, and up to the hour when He was made sin on the cross, He was in the enjoyment of uninterrupted communion with God, His Father. On the cross all was changed. There all was darkness—waves from beneath, and waves from above—unmingled wrath and judgment His portion, and His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" More than anything else this shows what sin is as measured and dealt with by God. In His nature there is absolutely nothing but wrath toward sin.

"Wrath of God revealed from heaven" does not mean God's dealing with sin on the cross: it is not wrath executed, but wrath revealed. He will execute wrath by-and-by—divine, eternal wrath—upon the wicked; but this is not what we have in Rom. 1:18. Here it is the state-merit of a truth that has come to light—a truth that we read in the light of the cross. Now that He has dealt with sin on the cross, we can say that His nature, as against sin, has been revealed. It is wrath from heaven.

This, dear reader, is a most solemn truth, for if now wrath of God is revealed from heaven against sin, what are you and I to expect, if we have to say to God about our sins? Christ, bearing not His own sins but the sins of others, met with unmingled judgment and wrath. If we have to meet God in our sins, can we expect less? If God's Son had to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" surely that, too, must be our wail forever in the lake of fire, if we have to bear our own sins, for we can never expiate our guilt. What think you, reader? If you are an unbeliever, you are covered with guilt, and have no righteousness. And you must meet God, and meet Him, too, according to His own nature. His wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. How then will you meet Him? It is because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sin, and the sinner needs justification that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. And this righteousness is revealed, not to any special class or nation, but to faith.

Hence it avails for you, if you believe the gospel. The precious blood of Jesus is the basis of it. Through faith in that blood the sinner obtains forgiveness of sins, and God justifies him in righteousness. The moment the perishing sinner believes in Jesus, the same righteous hand that administered the stroke of justice to his Substitute is on his side. And if God be for us, who can be against us? O sinner, linger not. Take shelter by faith under the blood of Jesus, and righteousness will take the place of wrath. Believe in Jesus, and God is on your side. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36.)