

William Tyndale's Prologue Upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans (Matthew's Version Abridged)

William Tyndale first published this in his 1534 New Testament, and John Rogers then incorporated it in the Matthew Bible with some modifications. Tyndale largely followed and expanded Martin Luther's prologue, and also added the last section, 'Sum and Whole Cause of the Epistle.' Here it is updated, organized, and abridged, removing much repetition, though it remains a lengthy foreword.

SEEING AS this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the new testament, and most pure evangelion – that is to say, glad tidings, and that which we call the gospel – and is also a light and a way into the whole scripture, I think it meet that every Christian not only know it by memory, but also exercise himself in it continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No one can read it too often or study it too well. For the more it is studied, the easier it is, and the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is, and the more thoroughly it is searched, more precious things are found in it, so great a treasure of spiritual things lies hid herein.

I will therefore bestow my labour and diligence through this little prologue to prepare a way in to it, so far forth as God may give me grace, so that everyone may understand it. It has been darkened by false commentary, but nevertheless is of itself a bright light, sufficient to illumine all the scripture.

First we must mark diligently the manner of speaking of the apostle, and above all things know what Paul means by the words *law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, and spirit*.¹ Otherwise, no matter how often you read it, you will but lose your labour.

The law and what it requires

This word *law* may not be understood here the usual way (or to use Paul's term, after the manner of men, or after man's ways), so that you would say that the law here is nothing but regulation that sets out what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. This is how it is with man's law, which is fulfilled with outward works only, even if the heart be ever so far off. But God judges the ground of the heart, yea and the thoughts and the secret movings of the mind.

And therefore his law requires the ground of the heart, and love from the bottom of the heart. It is not satisfied by the external work only, but rebukes most of all those works which do not spring of love from the ground and low bottom of the heart, even if they appear outwardly ever so honourable and good, as Christ in the gospel rebukes the Pharisees above all others who were open sinners. He calls them hypocrites, which is to say dissemblers, and painted sepulchres. Which Pharisees lived among men most purely insofar as the outward deeds and works of the law were concerned. Yea, and Paul in the 3rd chapter of his epistle to the Philippians says of himself that concerning the law he was such a one as no man could complain of, and yet notwithstanding was a murderer of the Christians, persecuted them, and tormented them so terribly that he compelled them

¹ There is some ambiguity in the use of 'spirit' in this prologue. At times it is not certain if the human spirit after regeneration is intended, or the Holy Spirit, or both together. Consider John 3:6. This editor has carefully considered when it seemed best to capitalize according to the context, though ambiguity remains.

to blaspheme Christ. He was altogether merciless, as many who now pretend to outward good works are.

But no one keeps the law from the ground of the heart, nor can so keep it, even if he appears outwardly full of good works, because all men are naturally inclined to evil. We find in ourselves disinclination and distaste to do good, but a bent and a taste to do evil. Now where there is no free inclination or desire to do good, there the bottom of the heart does not fulfil the law. And there no doubt also is sin, and wrath is deserved before God, even if there is an outward appearance of good living.

Moreover, the law increases sin, as he says in the fifth chapter, inasmuch as it requires so many things clean contrary to man's nature. A person becomes more and more an enemy of the law the more it demands of him what he cannot or does not wish to do.

And so he says in the seventh chapter that the law is spiritual, as if saying, if the law were fleshly and but man's discipline, it could be fulfilled, satisfied, and reconciled with bodily deeds. But the law is spiritual, and no one fulfils it unless all that he does springs of love from the bottom of the heart. Such a new heart, and an eager dedication to the law, you can never come by of your own strength and effort, but only by the operation and working of the Spirit.

For only the Spirit of God makes a man spiritual and conformable to the law, so that now henceforth he or she does nothing out of fear, or for money or advantage, or for vainglory, but of a free heart and of inward desire. The law is spiritual, and demands to be both loved and fulfilled by a spiritual heart, and therefore of necessity requires the Spirit, which makes a person's heart free, and disposes him in spirit to love and serve the law. Where such a spirit is not, there remains sin, grudging, and enmity against the law – which law nevertheless is good, righteous, and holy.

To fulfil the law is to do the work of the law, and whatever it commands, with love, desire, inward affection, and real pleasure. And it is to live godly and well freely, willingly, and without the compulsion of the law, even as if there were no law at all. Such willingness and free liberty to love the law come only by the working of the Spirit in the heart.

Now the Spirit is not otherwise given than by faith alone, in that we believe the promises of God – that he is true, and will fulfil all his good promises toward us for the sake of Christ's blood. I am not ashamed, says Paul, of Christ's glad tidings, for it is the power of God for salvation to as many as believe (Romans 1:16). For at once, simultaneously as we believe the glad tidings preached to us, the Holy Spirit enters into our hearts and breaks the bonds of the devil, who before possessed our hearts in captivity, and held them so that we could have no desire for the will of God in the law.

And as the Spirit comes by faith alone, even so faith comes by hearing the word or glad tidings of God when Christ is preached: that he is God's Son, and man also, dead and risen again for our sakes, as Paul says in the third, fourth, and tenth chapters. All our righteousness then comes by faith, and faith and the Spirit come of God, and not of us.²

² Here are removed problematic sentences that were added to Tyndale's prologue between 1534 (as it is contained in David Daniell's modern spelling edition) and 1537, when John Rogers brought it into the Matthew Bible. It was asserted that the Holy Spirit is ever present in us, even before faith, and the author attempted then to explain how we may say nonetheless that "faith brings the Spirit." This editor does not know if Rogers added these sentences of his own accord, or if it was a revision that Tyndale later made, or one that Rogers felt he would desire.

From this it comes that faith alone justifies, makes righteous, and fulfils the law. For it brings the Spirit through the merits of Christ. The Spirit then brings desire, unbinds the heart, makes it free, sets it at liberty, and gives it strength to work the deeds of the law with love, as the law requires. Then at the last, out of the same faith so working in the heart, spring all good works of their own accord. This is what he means in the third chapter. For after he has cast away the works of the law, such that it seems as if he would break and nullify the law through faith, he answers possible objections, saying that we do not destroy the law through faith, but we maintain, further, or establish the law through faith. That is to say, we fulfil the law through faith.

Sin

Sin in the scripture is not only the outward work or deed that the body does. It includes everything that is involved, including whatever accompanies, moves, or stirs to the outward deed, and that from which the works spring, such as unbelief, and proneness and readiness to do the deed in the ground of the heart, with all the powers, affections, and appetites with which we can but sin. When a person sins, he is carried away headlong into it, thus showing all that he is, due to the poison inclination and corrupt nature in which we are conceived and born. For there is no outward sin committed unless a person be carried away altogether, with nature, soul, heart, body, will, and mind, to do it.

The scripture looks singularly to the heart, and to the root and original source of all sin, which is unbelief in the bottom of the heart. For as faith alone justifies us and brings the Spirit and predisposition to perform the outward good works, even so unbelief alone damns us, exalts the flesh, and stirs up the will to do evil outward works, as happened to Adam and Eve in Paradise (Genesis 3).

And so Christ calls unbelief sin, and that notably at John 16:9. The Spirit, says he, will rebuke the world of sin, because they do not believe in me. And at John 8:12 he says, I am the light of the world. And therefore in the twelfth chapter of John he bids them, while they have light, to believe in the light, so that they may be the children of light. For he who walks in darkness does not know where he goes. Now, as Christ is the light, so is the ignorance of Christ the darkness that he speaks of, in which he who walks does not know where he goes; that is, he does not know how to work a good work in the sight of God, or what a good work is. And therefore in the ninth he says, As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world, but the night comes, when no man can work. Which night is but the ignorance of Christ, in which no one can please God.

And Paul at Ephesians 4:17 exhorts them not to walk as other Gentiles, who are strangers from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. And again in the same chapter (Ephesians 4:22) he says, Put off the old man, which is corrupt through the lusts of error, that is to say, ignorance. And Romans 13:12: Let us cast away the deeds of darkness; that is to say, of ignorance and unbelief. And 1Peter 1:14: Do not fashion yourselves to your old lusts of ignorance. And 1John 2:10,11: He who loves his brother dwells in light, but he who hates his brother walks in darkness, and does not know where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. By *light* he means the knowledge of Christ, and by *darkness* the ignorance of Christ. For it is impossible that he who knows Christ truly should hate his brother.

Furthermore, to perceive this thing more clearly, understand that it is impossible to sin any sin at all unless a person first breaks the first commandment: You shall love your

Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your power, and with all your might. The whole reason why I sin against any inferior precept is that this love is not in my heart.

Therefore, before all good works as good fruits, there must be faith in the heart from whence they spring. And before all bad deeds as bad fruits, there must be unbelief in the heart, being the root, source, pith, and strength of all sin. Which unbelief and ignorance is called the head of the serpent and of the old dragon, which the seed of the woman, Christ, must tread underfoot, as it was promised to Adam.

Grace, gift

Grace and gift have this difference: *Grace* properly is God's favour, benevolence, or kind mind, which of his own self, without our deserving, he bears to us, and whereby he was moved and inclined to give Christ to us, with all his other gifts of grace. *Gift* is the Holy Spirit and his working, whom God pours into the hearts of those on whom he has mercy and whom he favours.

Though the gifts of the Spirit increase in us daily, and have not yet their full perfection – yea and though evil desires and sin that fight against the Spirit remain in us, as he says here in the seventh chapter and at Galatians 5:17, and also as it was spoken before at Genesis 3:15 of the strife between the woman's seed and the seed of the serpent – yet nevertheless, God's favour or grace is so great and so strong over us for Christ's sake, that we are counted fully whole and perfect before God. For his favour toward us is not incremental, increasing little by little like the gifts do, but he receives us wholly and immediately, in full love, for the sake of Christ, our intercessor and mediator, and because the gifts of the Spirit, and the battle between the Spirit and evil lusts, are begun in us already.

Of this now understand the seventh chapter, where Paul accuses himself as a sinner, and yet in the eighth chapter says that there is no damnation to those who are in Christ, and that because of the Spirit, and because the gifts of the Spirit are begun in us. Sinners we are, because the flesh is not full killed and mortified. Nevertheless, inasmuch as we believe in Christ, and have the earnest and beginning of the Spirit, and would very gladly be perfect, God is so loving and favourable to us that he will not look on such sin, neither will count it as sin, but will deal with us based on our belief in Christ, and according to the promises that he has sworn to us, until sin be full slain and mortified by death.

Faith

Faith is not man's opinion and dream, as some imagine, and form their own ideas when they hear the story of the gospel. The cause is that when they hear the gospel or glad tidings, they fashion by their own strength certain imaginations and thoughts in their hearts, saying, I have heard the gospel; I remember the story; lo, I believe! And this they count true faith – which nevertheless, since it is but man's imagination and assumption, does not profit. Neither do good works or a lasting amendment of life follow.

But true faith is a thing wrought by the Holy Spirit in us, which changes us, transforms our nature, begets us anew in God, and makes us the children of God, as you read in the first of John. A faith that is genuine kills the old Adam, and makes us altogether new in the heart, mind, will, desire, and in all our affections and powers of the soul, and brings the Holy Spirit with her.

Faith is a living thing, mighty in working, courageous and strong, ever doing, ever fruitful, so that it is impossible that the person endued with faith should not work good works. A person of faith does not ask whether good works are to be done or not, but has done them already, before mention be made of them. And he is always doing, for such is his nature now: a living faith in his heart, and the active moving of the Spirit, constrain him and stir him to this. Whoever does not do good works is an unbelieving person, and faithless, and looks around groping after faith and good works, but does not know what faith or good works are, even when he talks ever so much about faith and good works.

Faith is then a living and steadfast trust in the favour of God, whereby we commit ourselves altogether to God. And that trust is so surely grounded and sticks so fast in our hearts that a man would not once doubt of it, though he should die a thousand times for it. And such trust wrought by the Holy Spirit through faith makes a person glad, joyful, cheerful, and true-hearted, toward God and toward all creatures. And thus he or she is willingly and without compulsion glad and ready to do good to all, to render service to all, to suffer all things, so that God who has given him such grace may be loved and praised. So it is impossible to separate good works from faith, even as it is impossible to separate heat and burning from fire.

Therefore take heed to yourself. Beware of your own suppositions and imaginations, which to judge of faith and good works will seem wise, but indeed are blind, and of all things most unwise. Pray God that he will assent to work faith in your heart, or you will remain evermore faithless, however much you surmise, imagine, strengthen your resolve, wrestle with yourself, or do what you will or can.

Righteousness

Righteousness is even the faith spoken of above, which is the righteousness of God, or the righteousness that is of value before God. For it is God who gives it, and it alters a person, and gives him a new spiritual nature, and makes him free and generous to pay every one his due. For through faith a person is purged of his sins and becomes eager for God's law, by which he honours God, and pays him what he owes him; and he serves people willingly whenever he can, and pays each his due. Such righteousness nature, free will, or our own strength, can never bring to pass.

Flesh, spirit, spiritual

Flesh and spirit may not be understood here as if flesh denotes only that which pertains to unchastity, and the spirit that which pertains to the inward heart. But Paul considers flesh here, as Christ does in John 3, all that is born of flesh – the whole person, with life, soul, body, wit, will, reason, and whatever he is within himself and whatever he does outwardly. For these all, and all that is in man, lean to the world and the flesh. Consider flesh therefore whatever (as long as we are without the Spirit of God) we think or speak of God, of faith, of good works, and of spiritual matters. Call flesh also all works that are done without grace and without the working of the Spirit, however good, holy, and spiritual they seem to be, as you may see in the fifth chapter to the Galatians.

Likewise on the other hand, consider spiritual the person who is renewed in Christ, and also all deeds that spring of faith, seem they ever so common, such as the washing of the disciples' feet done by Christ, and Peter's fishing after the resurrection.

Review of the epistle

1st chapter

Since it becomes the preacher of Christ's glad tidings to begin with an exposition of the law, to prove all men sinners and children of wrath by inheritance, and how to sin is their nature, and that by nature they cannot help but sin, and so to humble the pride of man, and bring him to the knowledge of himself and of his misery and wretchedness so that he might desire help, likewise does Saint Paul. He begins in the first chapter to rebuke unbelief and the gross sins that everyone can see, as the idolatry and the obvious sins of the heathen were, and as the sins now are of all who live in ignorance without faith and without the favour of God.

And he says that through the gospel is revealed the wrath of the God of heaven upon all mankind, for their ungodly and unholy living. For though it is known and daily understood by the creatures that there is but one God, yet human nature of itself, without the Spirit and grace, is so corrupt and so poisoned that it cannot thank him, nor worship him, nor give him his due honour, but blinds itself, and falls continually into a worse case – even until people come to the worshipping of idols and the working of shameful sins that are abominable and against nature. And moreover, they suffer the same sins unrebuked in others, having delight and pleasure in them.

2nd chapter

In the second chapter, he proceeds further and rebukes all those holy people also, who, without desire and love for the law, live well outwardly in the face of the world, or sin secretly and condemn others gladly.

It is the nature of hypocrites to think themselves pure and yet hate the law inwardly, and to be full of covetousness, envy, and all uncleanness (Matthew 23). They it is who despise the goodness of God, and according to the hardness of their hearts heap together for themselves the wrath of God. Furthermore, Saint Paul, as a true expounder of the law, suffers no one to be without sin, but declares that all are under sin who would live well by free will and by nature, and suffers them not to be better than the open sinners; yea, he calls them hard-hearted, and such as cannot repent.

3rd chapter

In the third chapter he lumps together both the Jews and the Gentiles and says that one is as the other: both sinners, with no difference between them, except only that the Jews had the word of God committed to them. And though many of them did not believe on it, yet God's truth and promise are not thereby hurt or diminished. And he makes an aside to quote the saying of the 51st Psalm, that God remains true in his words, and overcomes when he is judged. After that he returns to his thesis again, and proves by the scripture that all without difference or exception are sinners, and that by the works of the law no one is justified, but that the law was given only to show and reveal sin.

Then he begins and shows the true way to righteousness, and how man must be made righteous and safe. He says all are sinners, and without praise before God. They must therefore, without any regard to their own merit, be made righteous through faith in Christ, who has merited such righteousness for us. He has become to us God's mercy-stool for the remission of sins that are past, thereby proving that Christ's righteousness

alone helps us, which comes on us through faith. Which righteousness, Paul says, is now declared through the gospel, and was testified of before by the law and the prophets.

Furthermore (says he), the law is helped and furthered through faith, though the works of the law, with all their boast, are brought to nothing, and are proved not to justify.

4th chapter

After sins have been revealed for what they are in the first three chapters, and the way of faith to righteousness laid, Paul begins to answer certain objections and criticisms. First, if faith only justifies, why does a person need to be occupied in doing good works? He puts forth Abraham as an example, saying, What did Abraham accomplish with his works? Was all in vain? Did his works not profit? And he concludes that Abraham, without and before he did any works, was justified and made righteous by faith alone, insomuch that even before the 'work' of circumcision, he was praised in the scripture and considered righteous for his faith alone (Genesis 15).

So Abraham did not perform the work of circumcision to be helped to righteousness – which work God yet commanded him to do, and it was a good work of obedience. Likewise, surely no other works help at all for justification. But just as Abraham's circumcision was an outward sign, by which he demonstrated the righteousness that he had by faith, and his obedience and readiness to do the will of God, even so are all other good works outward signs, and the outward fruit of faith and of the Spirit, which do not justify a man, but demonstrate that a man is justified already before God inwardly in the heart, through faith and through the Spirit purchased by Christ's blood.

Here now Saint Paul reinforces his teaching on faith, previously set out in the third chapter, and brings also the testimony of David in the 32nd Psalm, which calls a man blessed, not for works, but in that his sin is not brought into account, and in that faith is imputed for righteousness – though he will not continue afterwards without good works, once he is justified.

After that, he extends his example to all other works of the law, and concludes that the Jews cannot be Abraham's heirs because of blood and kindred only, and much less by the works of the law. Rather, they must inherit Abraham's faith if they will be the true heirs of Abraham. For it was before both the law of Moses and the law of circumcision that Abraham was made righteous by faith, and called the father of all who believe. He was not called the father of those who do works.

Moreover, Paul says that the law causes wrath, since no one can fulfil it with love and eagerness. As long as grudging, hate, or indignation against the law remain in the heart, not being taken away by the Spirit that comes with faith, then surely it shows us that the wrath of God is upon us, and not favour.

Therefore faith alone receives the grace promised to Abraham. And these examples were not written for Abraham's sake only, says Paul, but also for us, to whom, if we believe, faith shall be reckoned likewise for righteousness, as he says in the end of the chapter.

5th chapter

In the fifth chapter, he commends the fruits and works of faith: peace, joy, inward love to God and man; moreover boldness, trust, confidence, courage, and steadfast hope in tribu-

lation and suffering. For all such follow where the faith is genuine, through and for the abundant grace and gifts of the Spirit that God has given us in Christ, in that he gave him to die for us when we were yet his enemies. Now then, we see that faith alone, before any good works, justifies. And yet it does not follow that therefore we should do no good works. Rather, properly performed works do not lag behind, but accompany faith, even as brightness does the sun, and are called by Paul the fruits of the Spirit. Where the Spirit is, it is always summer, and there we may always find good fruits; that is to say, good works.

This is Paul's order: that good works grow out of the Spirit, the Spirit comes by faith, and faith comes by hearing the word of God, when the glad tidings and promises that God has made to us in Christ are preached truly, and received in the ground of the heart. Of this – God's Spirit and his fruit – our holy hypocrites have not once known, nor yet tasted how sweet they are, though they invent many good works out of their own imagination, in order to be justified thereby. In their works there is not one crumb of true faith or spiritual love, or of inward joy, peace, or quietness of conscience, seeing they do not have the word of God for them, that such works please God. But they are even the rotten fruits of a rotten tree.

After that, Paul breaks forth and unfolds the big picture, and shows from whence sin and righteousness, death and life, come. And he compares Adam and Christ, reasoning and arguing that Christ necessarily came as a second Adam, in order to make us heirs of his righteousness through a new spiritual birth without our prior merit, even as the first Adam made us heirs of sin through the bodily birth without our prior fault. Whereby it is obvious and proved absolutely that no one can bring himself out of sin to righteousness, any more than he could have brought about his bodily birth.

And Paul shows here that the very law of God, which should have helped if anything could help, not only came and brought no help, but even increased sin, because our evil and poisoned nature is offended and displeased with the law. And the more it is constrained by the law, the more it is provoked to satisfy its own desires. Therefore by the law we see that we need Christ to justify us by his grace, and to help nature.

6th chapter

In the sixth, Paul sets forth the chief and principal work of faith: the battle of the Spirit against the flesh – how the Spirit labours and makes us strong to kill the sin and the wrongful motions and desires that remain in the flesh after our justification. And this chapter teaches us that we are not so free from sin through faith that we may go up and down idly from now on, careless and sure of ourselves, as if there were now no more sin in us. Yes, there is sin remaining in us. But it is not counted against us, because of faith and the Spirit, which fight against it.

Therefore we have enough to do all our lives long to tame our bodies, and to compel the members to obey the Spirit, and not the appetites, so that we may conform to Christ's death and resurrection, and may fulfil our baptism, which signifies the morti-fying of sins and the new life of grace. For this battle does not end in us until the last breath, until sin be utterly slain by the death of the body.

This thing – I mean to tame the body and so on – we are able to do (says he) because we are under grace, and not under the law. What it is not to be under the law, he himself explains. For not to be under the law does not mean that you may satisfy yourself as you

please. But not to be under the law is to have a free heart renewed with the Spirit, so that you have the inner desire, of your own accord, to do what the law commands, without compulsion – yea, even as if there were no law. For grace – that is to say, God’s favour – brings us the Spirit and makes us love the law, so that there is now no more sin through opposition to the law. Neither is the law against us any more. Rather, it agrees with us, and we with it.

But to be under the law is to contend with the works of the law, and is to work without the Spirit and grace. As long as this is the case, surely sin reigns in us through the law – the law is revealing that we are under sin, which has power and dominion over us because we cannot consent to the law. Which thing is great sin, because the law is the will of God.

So then, this is the true freedom and liberty from sin and from the law, of which Paul writes to the end of this chapter. It is a freedom to do only good with eagerness, and to live well without the compulsion of the law. Therefore this freedom is a spiritual freedom. It does not suspend the law, but supplies that which the law requires and with which it is fulfilled, namely love and a willing heart (Romans 3:31). Where these are, the law is silenced, and accuses us no more, compels us no more, neither has anything more to demand of us.

But it is not as though we ourselves could pay sin’s debt to the law. If you were in debt to a man and were not able to pay, there are two ways you might be released. One way would be for the man to require nothing of you and to write off the debt. Another way would be if some other good man paid the debt for you and gave you what you need to satisfy your obligation; this is how Christ has made us free from the penalty of the law. And therefore this is no wild fleshly freedom that should do nothing, but it does all things, and yet is free from the demand and debt of the law.

7th chapter

In the seventh, Paul considers the foregoing with an analogy drawn from the state of matrimony. Then he declares more largely the nature of sin and of the law, and confirms that the law reveals sin and brings us to the knowledge of ourselves.

Furthermore, he declares how the Spirit [or spirit, as in our renewed spirit] and flesh fight against each other, and makes an example of himself. The flesh drives and fights against the Spirit and will have its desires satisfied, and on the other side the Spirit drives and fights against the flesh, and will have its desires satisfied. This fight endures in us as long as we live: in some people more, and in some less.

8th chapter

In the eighth chapter he comforts such fighters so that they will not despair because of the flesh, nor think that they are less in favour with God. And he shows how it is that the sin that remains in us does not hurt, because there is no danger to those who are in Christ, who do not walk after the flesh, but fight against it. And he expounds more largely the nature of the flesh and of the Spirit, and how the Spirit comes by Christ. Which Spirit makes us spiritual, tames, subdues, and mortifies the flesh, and assures us that we are nevertheless the children of God, and also beloved, though sin rage ever so much in us, as long as we follow the Spirit and fight against sin, to kill and mortify it.

And because nothing is as effective for the mortifying of the flesh as the cross and tribulation, which yet are difficult to bear, Paul comforts us in our passions and afflictions. He confirms the assistance of the Spirit, who makes intercession to God for us mightily with groanings that pass man's utterance, so that man's speech cannot express or contain them; and he mentions the mourning of the creatures with us, out of the great desire that they have that we be freed from sin and the corruption of the flesh.

So see we that these three chapters – the sixth, seventh, and eighth – drive us to the true work of faith, which is to kill the old man and mortify the flesh.

9th, 10th and 11th chapters

In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters, Paul treats of God's predestination, by which is determined entirely whether we will believe or not believe, be set free from sin or not be set free, and by which our justification and salvation are taken completely out of our hands and put in the hands of God alone. And this is most necessary, because we are so weak and so uncertain. If it depended on us, there would of a truth be no one saved; the devil would surely deceive and overcome us. But now God is true, unchanging, and utterly to be relied upon. His predestination cannot prove false. Nor can anyone resist or oppose him. Therefore we have hope and trust against sin.

But follow the order of this epistle. First, make Christ your study and concern. Learn what the law and the gospel are, and the office of both, so that you may in the one know yourself, that you have of yourself no strength but to sin, and in the other know the grace of Christ. And then see that you fight against sin and the flesh, as the first seven chapters teach you. After that, when you come to the eighth chapter, and are under the cross and suffering of tribulation, the necessity of predestination will be sweet, and you will feel how precious a thing it is. For unless you have borne the cross of adversity and temptation, and have felt yourself brought to the very brim of desperation, yea and to hell's gates, you cannot come to grips with the doctrine of predestination. For it will not be possible for you to think that God is righteous and just. Therefore the old Adam must be well mortified, and fleshly reason destroyed, before you can accept and drink such strong wine.

Take heed to yourself therefore, not to drink wine while you are yet but a babe. For all learning is progressive, and has its time, measure, and age. In Christ there is a certain childhood in which one must be content with milk for a season, until he or she is stronger and able to eat stronger meat.

12th chapter

In the twelfth chapter, he gives exhortations. For Paul observes this method in all his epistles. First he teaches Christ and the faith. Then he exhorts to good works and to continual mortifying of the flesh. So here he teaches good works indeed, and the true serving of God. He makes all men priests to offer up not money and animals, as was the way in the time of the law, but their own bodies, by killing and mortifying the desires and affections of the flesh.

After that, he describes the social intercourse of Christians: how they ought to govern themselves in spiritual things; how to teach, preach, and rule in the congregation of Christ; to serve one another; to suffer all things patiently; and to commit retribution and vengeance to God – in conclusion, how a Christian ought to conduct himself toward all

people, be they friend, foe, or whatever. These are the true works of a Christian, which arise from faith.

13th chapter

In the thirteenth, he teaches us to honour the worldly and temporal sword; that is, the police and the secular authorities. They are appointed for the aid of the commonwealth: to maintain peace, to punish evildoers, and to defend the good. Therefore the good ought to honour the temporal sword, though as concerning themselves they do not need it, but would abstain from evil of their own accord.

Finally, he knits up all in love, and sets forth Christ as an example to us.

14th chapter

In the fourteenth chapter, he teaches to deal discreetly with the consciences of those who are weak in the faith, who do not yet understand the liberty of Christ perfectly enough, and to indulge them out of Christian love, and not to use the liberty of the faith harmfully.

There should be consideration for the weak, because where such consideration is not, arguments follow, and rejection of the gospel. It is better therefore to bear with the weak a while, until they become stronger, than that the teaching of the gospel should come altogether underfoot. And such work is a singular work of love, and where love is perfect, there will certainly be such a regard for the weak – a thing that Christ commanded and charged to be had above all things.

15th chapter

In the fifteenth chapter, he sets Christ forth again as an example, to be longsuffering with others who are weak, including those who fall repeatedly, open sinners, the unlearned, the inexperienced, and people with offensive ways and manners. We ought not to cast them away at once, but to bear with them until they become better, and exhort them in the meantime. For that is how Christ was in the gospel, and now deals with us daily, bearing with our imperfections, weakness, behaviours, and ways not yet conformed to the teaching of the gospel, but smelling of the flesh – yea, and sometimes breaking out into carnal deeds.

After that, he wishes them increase of faith, peace, and joy of conscience, praises them, and commits them to God. He also seeks aid from them for the poor saints who were at Jerusalem.

16th chapter

The last chapter is a chapter of recommendations, wherein Paul adds a good admonition to beware of the precepts and doctrines of men, who beguile the simple with sophistry and with teaching that is not in accordance with the gospel, and draw them away from Christ. Compare therefore all teachings to the scripture, and see whether they agree or not. And commit yourself wholly and altogether to Christ, and so shall he with his Holy Spirit and with all his fullness dwell in your soul.

Sum and whole cause of the epistle

The sum and whole cause of the writing of this epistle is to prove that man is justified by faith alone. Whoever denies this proposition, to him not only is this epistle and all that

Paul writes, but also the whole scripture, so locked up that he can never understand it to his soul's health. To bring us to the understanding and conviction that faith alone justifies, Paul proves that the whole nature of man is so poisoned and so corrupt, yea and so dead concerning godly living or godly thinking, that it is impossible for a human being to keep the law in the sight of God – that is, to love it, and of love and eagerness keep it as naturally as one eats or drinks – until the soul is quickened and healed through faith.

And by justification, understand reconciliation with God, restoration to his favour, and forgiveness of your sins. And when I say that faith alone justifies, understand that only faith and trust in the truth of God and in the mercy promised to us in Christ Jesus, and him crucified, obtains this reconciliation with God, confers Christ's innocence upon us so that we are pronounced righteous, and assures our consciences that our sins are forgiven, and we in the full favour of God.

When I say God justifies us, understand by this that only for the sake of Christ, and only for his merits, and because he earned it, does God receive us to his mercy, favour, and grace, and forgive us our sins. And when I say Christ justifies us, understand thereby that Christ has redeemed us, bought and delivered us out of the wrath of God and damnation, and has with his work alone, bearing in his own body the punishment for our sins, purchased for us the mercy, favour, and grace of God, and the forgiveness of our sins.

Furthermore, set before your eyes the works of Christ and your own works. Christ's works alone justify and make satisfaction for your sin, and your own works do not. Nor can your own works quiet your conscience and make you sure that your sins are forgiven you. For the promise of mercy is made you for the sake of what Christ did, and not for what you do or have done.

Now go to, reader, and according to the order of Paul's writing, so proceed. First, behold yourself diligently in the law of God, and see there your just damnation. Second, turn your eyes to Christ, and see there the exceeding mercy of your most kind and loving Father. Third, remember that Christ did not make this atonement in order that you should anger God again. Nor did he die for your sins in order that you should still live in them, nor cleanse you so that you may return as a swine to your old puddle again, but in order that you should be a new creature, and live a new life in accordance with the will of God, and not of the flesh. And be diligent, lest through your own negligence and unthankfulness you should lose this favour and mercy again.

Farewell,

W. T. (1534)

with also R. M. D. (2015)