

**Martin Luther's  
Preface to  
The Epistle to the  
Romans**



**New Creation Publications Inc.**

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## Foreword

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Martin Luther died nearly 450 years ago but his writing still speaks to us. He was awakened to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and the effects of his renewal quickly spread through Germany. His testimony to justification through faith alone continues to spread around the world.

In his longing for freedom of conscience, Luther was advised to read the Scriptures for himself. He did this, and lectured on it also. During A.D. 1515 he lectured on Romans, and, in the next two years, on Galatians. Somewhere in this time the passage, 'The just shall live by faith' brought personal assurance to him that he was accepted by God—through faith alone. He wrote: 'I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise'.

By 1521 he was before an ecclesiastical court in Worms, to give an account of his beliefs. It was here that he made his now famous statement: 'Here I stand! I cannot do otherwise'. An edict was pronounced against him, and, for 'safe keeping', he was spirited away by friends to Wartburg Castle where he stayed—disguised as a knight and under an assumed name—for nine months.

During this time he translated the entire New Testament from Greek to German. He also wrote brief summaries, or prefaces, to each book—similar to the Vulgate Bible. This 'Luther Bible', and its Prefaces, were phrased in the language of the common people.

The Preface which he wrote for Romans is longer than the others. It contains a summary of the whole letter and an outline of its doctrine. Its main terms are defined and related to each other. More particularly, it conveys the joy and power of the gospel so evident in Paul's Letter to the Romans. Luther said about Romans: 'The more thoroughly it is treated, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes'.

This small document has had a wide and deep influence through its history. The best known incident concerns John Wesley, who, in 1738, found his heart 'strangely warmed' as he listened to this Preface being read. He was converted, and again, the world felt the power of God's forgiveness.

May this booklet encourage many to read Paul's letter and, particularly, to know the truth of God's grace.

Grant Thorpe  
July, 1995

## **Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans**

### **Preface**

1. This epistle is in truth the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel. It would be quite proper for a Christian, not only to know it by heart word for word, but also to study it daily, for it is the soul's daily bread. It can never be read or meditated too much and too well. The more thoroughly it is treated, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

2. Accordingly, I, too, shall offer my service and with the ability God has granted me prepare an introduction to it by this preface in order that it may be better understood by everybody. For heretofore it has been miserably darkened by glosses and all sorts of twaddle, while in itself it is a shining light, quite sufficient to illumine the whole Scriptures.

### **Part I. Explanation of Terms Used in This Epistle**

3. In the first place, we must acquaint ourselves with matters of language and understand what Paul means by these words: *law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, Spirit*, and similar terms; otherwise we shall derive no benefit from reading this epistle.

**(a) Law**

4. As regards the term 'law' in this epistle, you must not understand it after the fashion of men, as denoting a doctrine that shows us what works we must, and what works we must not, do. That is the meaning of human laws, with which we comply when we do the works commanded, though our heart may have no share in them. God frames His verdict in accordance with the condition of our inmost heart. His law, accordingly, makes demands upon our inmost heart, and is not satisfied with mere works, but ***brands as hypocrisy and lies all works in which our inmost heart has no share.*** For this reason all men are called liars, Psalm 116:11, because no one of them keeps, nor can keep, the Law of God from his inmost heart; ***everyone discovers in himself aversion to what is good and a desire for what is evil.*** Now, where there is no unconstrained desire for what is good, the inmost heart is not attached to the Law of God. In such a case there is surely also sin and merited wrath of God, although to a superficial observer there may appear many good works and an upright life.

5. Hence Paul concludes, chapter 2:12, 13, that the Jews are all sinners, and says that only the doers of the Law are justified in the sight of God. He means to say that no one is a doer of the Law by works. This is the way he speaks to them, v. 22: 'Thou sayest a man should not commit adultery, and thou committest adultery;' likewise v. 1: 'Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.' As though he were to say: In public you are leading a good life in the works of the Law, and you are passing judgement on those who are not leading such a

life. You know how to teach everybody; you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye. Matt. 7:3.

**The Law Demands Willing Obedience**

6. For although you keep the Law outwardly by your works, from fear of punishment or love of reward, still you do everything without a free desire and love of the Law, with loathing and under restraint. You would rather do otherwise if there were no Law. ***It follows, then, that in your inmost heart you are an enemy of the Law.*** Your teaching others not to steal—what does it amount to when at heart you are a thief yourself, and would gladly be one publicly if you dared? In the long run even the manifest work (against the Law) is not omitted by these hypocrites. Thus you are teaching others, but not yourself; nor do you know what you are teaching. You have never yet correctly understood the Law. In fact, in addition to this the Law increases sin, as he says, chap. 5:20, because man's enmity against the Law becomes greater in proportion as the Law makes demands upon him, none of which he can fulfil.

**The Law Is Spiritual**

7. Therefore he says, chap. 7:14: 'The Law is spiritual.' What does that mean? If the Law were an affair for the body its demands could be met by works. But since it is ***spiritual***, no one can satisfy its demands except by doing all that he does ***from the inmost heart.*** But such a heart is bestowed by no one except the Spirit

of God; He makes men to agree with the Law, causing them to conceive a love of the Law from the heart and henceforth to do all, not from fear or constraint, but from a willing heart. In that way the Law is spiritual: it wants to be loved and fulfilled from a spiritual heart and requires such a spirit. *If He is not in the heart, there abide in the heart sin, loathing, and enmity against the Law*, which in itself is good, just, and holy.

8. You must become used, then, to this mode of speech, viz., that 'doing the things contained in the Law' is quite another thing than 'fulfilling the Law.' The things contained in the Law are all those things which man does, or is able to do, in relation to the Law of his free will and by his natural powers. However, while a person is engaged in such works there remains in his heart a loathing of the Law and a constraint; for this reason all these works are sheer waste and useless. That is what Paul means when he says, chap. 3:20: 'By the deed of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.' From this you see that the wranglers at the universities and the sophists are false guides when they teach men to prepare themselves for grace by works. How can a person prepare himself for what is good by works when he does no work without loathing and a dislike in his heart? *How can God be pleased with a work that proceeds from such an unwilling and rebellious heart?*

### **Fulfilment Possible Only Through Faith**

9. However, fulfilling the Law means to do its works *with delight* and *from love*, and to lead a godly and good life *freely*, without the Law's constraint, just as if there

were no Law and no punishment. Such a delight of unconstrained love, however, is instilled in the heart by the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says, chap. 5:5. But, as he says in his introductory remarks, the Spirit is not given except in, with, and by faith in Jesus Christ. Hence there is no faith except by the Word of God, or the Gospel, which proclaims Christ, namely, that He is the Son of God and man, that He died and rose again for our sakes, as he states, chap. 3:25; 4:25; 10:9.

10. That is the reason why faith alone justifies and fulfils the Law, for it fetches the Spirit from Christ's merit. The Spirit, however, creates a *willing and unconstrained* heart, such as the Law requires; and then good works spring directly from faith. That is what he (the apostle) means in chap. 3:31, after he has rejected the works of the Law in terms that might lead one to think he meant to make void the Law through faith. 'Nay,' he says, 'we establish the Law through faith,' that is, we fulfil it by faith.

### **(b) Sin**

11. As regards 'sin,' by this term Scripture denominates not only the external work of the body, but every movement and incitement to some external work that takes place in the inmost heart and all its powers. The term 'commit,' accordingly, denotes that a person falls completely and rushes into sin. For no external sinful work is done except a person rushes into it with his whole body and soul. Scripture takes particular notice of the heart and of the *root* and *main source* of all sins, which is *unbelief in the inmost heart*. Accordingly, even as faith alone justifies and obtains the Spirit and willingness

for good external works, so unbelief alone sins and rouses the flesh and the desire for evil external works, as happened to Adam and Eve in paradise. Gen. 3:6.

12. For this reason Christ calls only unbelief sin, when He says, John 16:8, 9: 'The Spirit will reprove the world of sin because they believe not on me.' Hence, before good or evil works are done (which are good or evil fruits), there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief, the latter being the root, sap, and main strength of every sin. For this reason it is called in Scripture the serpent's head and the head of the old dragon, which, in accordance with the promise made to Adam, must be bruised by Christ, the woman's Seed. Gen. 3:15.

### (c) Grace

13. The difference between 'grace' and 'gift' is this: *Grace*, in the proper sense of the term, denotes *God's favour and good will towards us*, which He cherishes in Himself, and by reason of which He is inclined to pour into us Christ and the Spirit with His gifts. This is manifest from chap. 5:15, where St. Paul speaks of 'the grace of God and the gift of grace, which is by . . . Jesus Christ.' Now, the gifts and the Spirit are increased in us daily and *are not yet perfect*; hence evil lusts and sins still remain in us, which war against the Spirit, as is stated Rom. 7:14f. 23; Gal. 5:17; Gen. 3:15, where enmity between the woman's Seed and the seed of the serpent is predicted. Notwithstanding this, grace accomplishes so much that we are *accounted completely and fully righteous in the sight of God*. For the grace of God is not divisible and piecemeal as the gifts are, but receives us altogether into God's favour for the sake of

our Advocate and Mediator Christ, and for the reason that there is in us a beginning of the gifts.

14. Now you will understand the seventh chapter, where Paul still chides himself a sinner, and nevertheless, in chap 8:1, declares that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, because of the imperfect gifts and the Spirit. We are still sinners because of the flesh in us that has not yet been mortified. However, since we believe in Christ and have the beginning of the Spirit, *God is favourably inclined and gracious to us*, so much so that He will not regard nor condemn our sins, but deal with us in accordance with our faith in Christ, until sin is slain.

### (d) Faith

15. 'Faith' is not the human notion and dream which some regard as faith. When they see that it is not followed by an improvement of life nor by good works, while they are, nevertheless, able to hear and talk much of faith, they fall into the error of saying: Faith is not sufficient; we must do works if we want to become godly and be saved. The reason is because, when hearing the Gospel, they go to work and by their own power frame up a thought in their heart which says: I believe. That they regard as genuine faith. But, inasmuch as it is a human figment and thought of which the inmost heart is not sensible, it accomplishes nothing and is not accompanied by any improvement.

16. On the contrary, *faith is a divine work in us*, which transforms us, gives us a new birth out of God, John 1:13, slays the old Adam, makes us altogether different men in heart, affections, mind, and all powers, and brings

with it the Holy Spirit. *Oh, it is a living, energetic, active, mighty thing, this faith.* It cannot but do good unceasingly. There is no question asked whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked the works have been done, and there is a continuous doing of them. But any person not doing such works is without faith. He is groping in the dark, looking for faith and good works, and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are, although he indulges in a lot of twaddle and flummery concerning faith and good works.

17. Faith is a *living, daring confidence in the grace of God*, of such assurance that it would risk a thousand deaths. This confidence and knowledge of divine grace makes a person happy, bold, and full of gladness in his relation to God and all creatures. The Holy Ghost is doing this in the believer. Hence it is that a person, without constraint, becomes willing and enthusiastic to do good to everybody, to serve everybody, to suffer all manner of afflictions, from love of God and to the praise of Him who has extended such grace to him. Accordingly, *it is impossible to separate works from faith*, just as impossible as it is to separate the power to burn and shine from fire. Accordingly, beware of your own false thoughts and of idle talkers, who pretend great wisdom for discerning faith and good works and yet are the greatest fools. Pray God that He may create faith in you; otherwise you will be without faith for ever and aye, no matter what you may plan and do.

#### **(e) Righteousness**

18. Now, faith such as I described is 'righteousness,' and is called the righteousness of God, or the righteous

ness that is valid in God's sight, because He bestows it and counts it for righteousness for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. This righteousness causes a person to render to each his due. For through faith man becomes void of sin and conceives a love for the commandments of God. Thus he gives due honour to God and pays Him what he owes. On the other hand, he willingly serves his fellow-man in whatever way he can, and in that way also pays his debts to everybody. Such righteousness human nature, man's free will, and our powers cannot achieve. For just as little as anybody can kindle faith in himself, just as little can he remove this unbelief. How, then, is he to remove one single sin, even of the paltriest kind? Therefore, whatsoever is done without faith or in unbelief, no matter what a splendid appearance it may present, is falsehood, hypocrisy, and sin. Rom. 14:23.

#### **(f) Flesh and Spirit**

19. As regards the term 'flesh' and 'spirit' in this epistle, you must not understand 'flesh' to mean only unchaste matters, nor 'spirit' to mean the inward matters of the heart. St. Paul, as well as Christ in John 3:6, calls everything flesh that is born of flesh, hence the entire person with his body and soul, his reason and all his senses, because everything in him lusts after the flesh. Thus you will understand that you must call any person 'carnal' who is full of his own imaginations concerning sublime, spiritual matters, teaching and twaddling about them. You can readily gather this from what is said concerning the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:20, where also heresy and hatred are called works of the flesh. Moreover, in Rom. 8:3, the apostle says that the

Law is weakened by the flesh. This does not refer to unchastity, but to all sins, chiefly, however, to unbelief, which is the greatest vice affecting the spirit.

20. On the other hand, you will have to call even that person 'spiritual' who is engaged in most obvious work, as, for instance, Christ when He was washing His disciples feet, and Peter when he was rowing his boat and fishing. Accordingly, '*flesh*' denotes a person who spends his life inwardly and outwardly in serving the interests of his flesh and temporal existence, while '*spirit*' denotes a person who spends his life inwardly and outwardly in serving the spirit and the interests of the life to come.

21. Without this understanding of the terms noted you will never grasp this epistle of St. Paul, nor any book of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, beware of all teachers who employ these words in a different sense, no matter who they are, even if they should happen to be Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Origen, and men like them or still higher than they.

Part II.

Now we shall take the Epistle itself.

### **Ch. 1—The Gross Sins of Men**

22. It behoves a preacher of the Gospel, first of all, by means of the revelation of the Law concerning sins, to reprove and denounce as sin *everything in a person's life that does not proceed from the Spirit and from faith in Christ, in order that men be enabled to know themselves and their misery, become humble, and crave*

*help*. Therefore St. Paul, following this rule, starts in the first chapter to rebuke gross sins and unbelief which are manifest, such as the sins of the Gentiles were and as are still in those who live without the grace of God. He says that by the Gospel is revealed the wrath of God from heaven upon all men because of their ungodliness and unrighteousness. For although they know, and perceive every day, that there is a God, still their nature, outside of grace, is in itself so evil that they neither thank Him nor honour Him, but inflict blindness on themselves and without ceasing fall into worse evils, until, after practising idolatry, they commit, without shame, the most abominable sins and every vice and, moreover, do not rebuke them in others.

### **Ch. 2—Hypocrisy and Self-righteousness**

23. In the second chapter this reproof is still further extended, so as to embrace those who are outwardly pious or sin in secret. Of this class were the Jews, and are all hypocrites today, who lead a good and honest life without real love for it, because at heart they are enemies of God's Law. Yet they are ready to pass judgment on other people, as is the manner of all hypocrites, so as to esteem themselves pure, although they are full of avarice, hatred, pride, and all vileness. Matt. 23:25. These are the very people who despise the goodness of God and heap up wrath for themselves because of their hardness. Thus St. Paul, as a true expounder of the Law, does not suffer anyone to pass for a sinless person, but denounces the wrath of God to all who would lead a good life *by their natural strength or free will*. He does not suffer them to pass for anything better than manifest

sinners; in fact, he tells them that they are hard-hearted and impenitent.

### Ch. 3—All Men are Sinners

24. In the third chapter the apostle casts them all on the same heap, saying that *one is no better than the other, and all of them are sinners in the sight of God*. The only difference is that the Jews have had the Word of God, though many of them did not believe it. But that has not made the faith and truth of God of no effect. Incidentally, the apostle introduces the passage from Psalm 51:4, which declares that God is righteous whenever He judges. This point he takes up again in what follows and proves by the Scriptures that all are sinners and no one is justified by the deeds of the Law, but that the Law has been given only that man might know sin.

#### Salvation by Grace

25. Next the apostle begins to teach the true way of becoming godly and being saved. He says:—'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' They must all be saved *without any merit of theirs, by faith in Christ*, who has earned our salvation by shedding His blood. He has been set before us as a *Mercy-seat* by God, who forgives us all our past sins. In this manner he proves that only the righteousness which God gives to faith can help us. This righteousness was revealed at that time by the Gospel, but had been witnessed previously by the Law and the prophets. Thus the Law is established by faith, and the deeds of the Law, together with their glory, are dashed to the ground by this argument.

### Ch. 4—Good Works the Outward Signs of Faith

26. Having revealed sin in the first three chapters and having taught the way of faith unto righteousness, the apostle now begins to meet several objections and claims. First, he takes up the one which is commonly advanced by all when they hear that faith justifies without works. They say: Are we, then, not to do any good works? He reminds himself of Abraham and says: What has Abraham accomplished with all his works? Was it all in vain? Did his works not benefit him at all? He winds up by declaring that Abraham was justified without any works, by faith alone, so much so that prior to the work of circumcision he is extolled in Scripture as a righteous man solely for the sake of his faith. Gen. 15:6. Now, if the work of circumcision, which God enjoined upon him and which was a goodly act of obedience, contributed nothing to his righteousness, surely no other good work will contribute anything to a person's righteousness. But just as the circumcision of Abraham was an external sign, exhibiting his righteousness by faith, so all good works are *merely external signs* flowing from faith and, as good fruits, attesting that a person is already inwardly righteous in the sight of God.

27. By this argument, as by a powerful example drawn from Scripture, St. Paul establishes his former teaching concerning faith in chap. 3:27, and, in addition, introduces another witness, David, in the thirty-second psalm, who also says that man is justified *without works*, although he does not remain without works after he has become justified. Continuing, he expands the example which he has introduced, so as to make it cover all other works of the Law, and concludes that the Jews

cannot be the heirs of Abraham because of their descent, much less on account of the work of the Law, but that, if they wish to be genuine heirs, they must *inherit Abraham's faith*, inasmuch as Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of the faithful prior to the Law, both that of Moses and that of circumcision. Moreover, the Law works wrath rather than grace, because no one obeys the Law willingly and from love; hence by the Law comes disfavour rather than grace. Therefore it must needs be that faith alone obtains the mercy promised to Abraham. These examples have been recorded also for our sakes, in order that we might believe.

### Ch. 5—The Fruits of Faith

28. In the fifth chapter the apostle proceeds to discuss the fruits and the works of faith, such as peace, joy, love of God and of all our fellow-men; moreover, assurance, boldness, cheerfulness, courage, and hope amidst tribulation and sufferings. For all these things follow where there is genuine faith, because of the superabundant treasure which God has bequeathed to us in Christ, when He caused Him to die for us before we could pray Him to do this, nay, while we were still enemies. Thus we arrive at this result, viz., that faith justifies without any works, and yet it does not follow from this that we must not do any good works, but that genuine works will not be wanting. Of these works those who are saints by their own merit know nothing; they frame up works of their own, in which there is neither peace, joy, assurance, love, hope, boldness, nor the quality of any genuine Christian work and faith.

29. Next the apostle attempts a pleasure stroll for a diversion, and tells whence sin and unrighteousness, death, and life, come, and in a splendid comparison places these two, Adam and Christ, over against each other. He means to say: For this reason Christ had to come, as another Adam, who was to bequeath His righteousness to us *by a new, spiritual birth* through faith, just as the former Adam had bequeathed sin to us through the old, carnal birth.

30. By this illustration it is made plain, and the teaching is confirmed, that no one can by means of works advance himself out of sin unto righteousness, just as little as he can control his physical birth. This is also proved by the fact that the divine Law, which, if any-thing, might be expected to aid man toward righteousness, has not only come without such aid, but has even increased sin. For man's evil nature becomes all the more incensed against it and seeks to gratify its lust in proportion as the Law checks it. Hence the Law makes Christ all the more necessary and requires more grace to aid nature.

### Ch. 6—The Daily Struggle With Sin

31. In the sixth chapter the apostle takes up a special work of faith, viz., the struggle of the Spirit against the flesh, which aims at the complete mortification of the remaining sins and lusts left over after justification. This teaches us that we are not so utterly freed from sin by faith that we can be *idle, lazy, and secure*, as though sin did no longer exist. There still is sin, but for the sake of faith, which battles with it, *it is not imputed for condemnation*. Hence, as long as we live, we have all we

can do to tame our body, to mortify its lusts, and to force its members to obey the Spirit and not the lusts. By doing this, we share the death and resurrection of Christ and perfect our baptism (which typifies the death of sins and the new life of grace), until we become completely rid of sin and rise with Christ also in our bodies and live for ever.

32. We can do this, the apostle says, because we are under grace and not under the Law. He explains his meaning thus: To be without the Law is not the same as having no law and being at liberty to do as one pleases, while to be under the Law means to engage in works of the Law without grace. In the latter case sin surely reigns by means of the Law, because no one is by nature a lover of the Law. This state of affairs, however, constitutes a great sin. But grace makes the Law pleasant to us, and then there is no more sin, and the law is no longer against us, but in harmony with us.

### **Christian Liberty**

33. This condition, now, is genuine freedom from sin and from the Law. Regarding this matter the apostle writes to the end of this chapter, telling us that it is a liberty to do good gladly and to lead a good life without constraint by the law. This liberty, therefore, is a spiritual liberty, which does not abolish the Law, but supplies us with the things which the Law demands; viz., willingness and love. These render satisfaction to the Law, so that it can no longer urge us nor make demands upon us. Suppose you were in debt to your landlord and unable to pay. You might obtain your release from him in one of two ways; either he might not take anything

from you and tear up your account, or some good person might make payment for you, giving you enough to liquidate your account. In the latter way Christ has made us free from the Law. Therefore the liberty which He gives *is not a wild, carnal liberty*, which is not under obligation to do anything, but it is very active in many ways, and yet it is not subject to the Law's demands, and not indebted to it.

### **Ch. 7—Dead to the Law**

34. In the seventh chapter the apostle confirms this teaching by an illustration taken from married life. When a husband dies, his wife, too, becomes free, and each is released from the other. Not in this sense, that the woman is not to take another husband, but rather in this sense, that she is now truly free to take another, which she could not do before she became released from her former husband.

35. Likewise, under the sinful old man our conscience is bound to the Law; when he has been mortified by the Spirit, the conscience is free, and each is released from the other. Not in this sense, that henceforth it is to do nothing, but in the sense that it is now to cling truly to Christ, the other husband, and yield the fruit of life.

36. Continuing, the apostle expands his teaching concerning sins and the Law, and shows how sin begins to become quite active and grow powerful through the Law. For the old man becomes more incensed against the Law, because he cannot pay what the Law demands. For sin is his nature, and of himself he cannot but sin. Therefore, the Law is his (instrument of) death, and

inflicts on him all manner of torment. *Not that the Law is evil*, but the person's evil nature cannot tolerate what is good, and that good is required of him, just as a sick person cannot bear that people ask him to run and leap like a hale person.

37. St. Paul, then, in this epistle, draws the conclusion that the Law, when correctly understood and fully comprehended, accomplishes no more than that it brings our sins to our remembrance, slays us by means of them, and makes us subject to the wrath everlasting. All this is well learned *by the experience of our conscience* when it has been fully smitten by the Law, and we find out that we must have something else, *something better than the Law*, to make us godly and to save us. But those who do not understand the Law correctly are blind. They strut about in their conceit and imagine that they can satisfy the Law by their works. For they do not know how much the Law demands, namely, a willing, cheerful heart. They do not look Moses straight in the eye; the veil is before them, and the meaning of the Law is hidden from them.

### **The Conflict Within the Believer**

38. Next he shows how the Spirit and the flesh struggle with one another in an individual and offers himself as an example, to teach us the right understanding of this work of slaying sin in ourselves. He calls both the Spirit and the flesh a law; for as the nature of the divine Law is to urge and make demands, so the flesh in its struggle with the Spirit urges and makes demands and rages in an effort to achieve its desire. On the other hand, the Spirit keeps urging and makes demands in

opposition to the flesh and wants to achieve His desire. *This struggle lasts as long as we live*; it is more violent in one person, less so in another, according as the Spirit or the flesh grows stronger. And yet the entire person is himself both Spirit and flesh, struggling with himself until he becomes altogether spiritual.

### **Ch. 8—Afflictions An Aid Against the Flesh**

39. In the eighth chapter the apostle comforts these strugglers, telling them that their flesh does not condemn them. Furthermore, he shows what is the nature of the flesh and of the Spirit, and how the Spirit is derived from Christ, who has given us His Holy Spirit. This Spirit makes us spiritual, subdues the flesh, and assures us that as long as we follow the Spirit, resist sin, and endeavour to slay it, we are, nevertheless, the children of God, no matter how violently sin rages in us. However, since nothing serves the purpose of bruising the flesh as well as crosses and sufferings, he comforts us in our sufferings by reminding us of the help afforded by the Spirit of love and by all creatures. He tells us that both the Spirit groans within us and all creatures are yearning with us for deliverance from the flesh and from sin. Thus we see that these three chapters, 6, 7, and 8, urge upon us this single work of faith which is called mortifying the old Adam and taming the flesh.

### **Ch. 9-11—Predestination or Election**

40. The apostle's teaching in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters is concerning the eternal predestination of God, whence it originally flows, whether a

person is to believe or not, become rid of his sins or not, in order that our becoming godly may be taken *entirely out of our own hands and placed in the hands of God*. And this is of the very highest importance. For we are so feeble and full of uncertainty that, if it depended on us, not a single person would be saved; the devil would surely overpower all. But God being reliable so that His predestination does not fail, and no one can defeat His purpose, we have still reason for hope over against sin.

41. However, at this point a limit has to be staked off against presumptuous and arrogant spirits, who lead their reason to this point first, start from the top, undertake to explore before everything else the abyss of divine predestination, and worry to no purpose over the question whether they are predestinated. These people become the cause of their own downfall; they either despair of their salvation or abandon themselves to recklessness

42. As to yourself, I say: *Follow the order of this epistle*. Occupy your mind with Christ and His Gospel in order that you may know your sin and His grace, and then wrestle with your sin, as chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 have taught you to do. After you have arrived at the eighth chapter and are subjected to crosses and sufferings, you will be rightly taught *how comforting predestination is*, as explained in chaps. 9, 10, and 11. For outside of a condition of suffering, cross-bearing, and mortal anguish, a person cannot contemplate predestination without injury to himself and without harbouring a secret grudge against God. Therefore Adam must be quite dead before a person can bear to listen to this teaching and drink of this strong wine. Beware, then, of drinking wine while you are still a suckling infant. There is a proper limit, time, and age for every doctrine.

## Ch. 12—God-pleasing Worship

43. In the twelfth chapter the apostle teaches us the true worship of God, and declares all Christians priests, calling upon them to offer up sacrifices, which are to be not money or cattle, as under the Law, but their own bodies and the slaying of their lusts. Next he describes the out-working conduct of Christians in their spiritual government; how they are to teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act towards their friends, enemies, and everybody else. These are works such as a Christian does. For, as was stated before, faith is never idle.

## Ch. 13—Our Duty Towards Government And All Men

44. In the thirteenth chapter the apostle instructs us how to honour and obey the civil government, which has been ordained for the following purpose: Although it does not make people pious in the sight of God, still it effects this much, that the godly enjoy external peace and protection, and the wicked are not free to do evil without fear, with impunity, and unmolested. For this reason the civil government must be honoured even by the godly, although they have no need of it. Finally, he comprises everything under the head of love, and encloses it in the example of Christ; as He has done for us, we are to do likewise and follow after Him.

## Ch. 14—Our Duty Towards Weaker Brethren

45. In the fourteenth chapter the apostle teaches us how to treat tenderly the weak consciences of

believers, and to spare them, by using the liberty of Christians, not to the injury, but to the advancement of weak brethren. For wherever this is not done, discord and contempt of the Gospel, which is of paramount importance, will ensue. Accordingly, it is better to yield somewhat to those weak in faith until they become stronger than to permit the teaching of the Gospel utterly to perish. To do this is an especial work of love, and it is quite necessary even to-day, because by boldly and inconsiderately eating forbidden meats and taking other liberties when there is no necessity for it, the tender consciences of people become confused before they learn to know the truth of this matter.

### Ch. 15—Christian Love

46. In the fifteenth chapter the apostle places before us the example of Christ, to teach us that we must bear with other weak brethren, such as show their frailty by manifest sins or by unpleasant manners. Such persons we must not cast aside, but bear with them until they, too, are improved. For so Christ has treated us, and is still treating us every day; He tolerates in us a great many things that are not virtues, but evil habits, in addition to all our imperfections, and succours us unceasingly.

47. In conclusion, he prays for them, praises them, commends them to God, indicates to them his office as a preacher, and solicits in a very seemly manner a contribution for the poor at Jerusalem. In short, it is all love that he is talking about and inculcating.

### Ch. 16—Salutations and a Warning

48. The last chapter is a chapter of salutations, but he weaves into it *a very solemn warning against doctrines of men* which are introduced along with the teaching of the Gospel and cause offences. It reads as if he had foreseen with certainty that *out of Rome and through the Romans* would come the misleading, offensive canons and decretals, and all the brood and breed of human laws and commands which now have overwhelmed the whole world, so that they have done away with this epistle and all the Holy Scriptures, together with the Spirit and faith, leaving nothing except their idol, the belly, as servants of which St. Paul denounces them in this chapter. God save us from them! Amen.

### Summary

49. You find, then, in this epistle, the greatest abundance of things that a Christian ought to know what the Law is, the Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, cross-bearing, also how we are to conduct ourselves in every relation toward those of strong and those of weak faith, toward friends, toward enemies, and toward ourselves. Moreover, all this teaching has been masterfully built up on Scripture ground, and illustrated by the apostle's personal example and by the example of the prophets, so that there is nothing left for us to desire. It seems, therefore, that the apostle's object in this epistle was to draw up *a syllabus of the entire Christian and evangelical doctrine*, and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For any person who has

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received this epistle into his heart has without question the light and strength of the Old Testament in himself. Accordingly, let every Christian become familiar with this epistle, and put it into constant practice. To this end may God grant us His grace! Amen.