

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of February 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Delivered Sunday 14 February 2016

God Justifies the Wicked – Romans 4:1-5

We have just read Paul's salutation to the Christians at Rome – whom, for some time, he has been hoping to visit. He addresses them as: *those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

Later at verses 16,17 the Apostle Paul, referring to God's long promised gospel, regarding His Son (Jesus Christ), says:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' (NIV)

Paul is not ashamed of this gospel: It is full of God's power (the Greek carries the meaning where in today's language, we might say it's 'dynamite'). This gospel saves all people who believe, showing how we are able to be put 'right with God'. For as Paul goes on to make abundantly clear we are not in any way 'right with God' normally. Paul's main point is that the gospel he preaches, first to the Jew and then the Gentile, shows how we 'fallen' humans can be made 'right with God' through the means of faith.

This main point, Justification by Faith, IS the gospel of which Paul is not ashamed. It is vitally important to all true Christians, especially today, where the prophesied 'other gospels' are so pervasive.

In the early years of the Reformation, where Justification by Faith was being understood it was recognised that the mark (article) of a standing or falling church was this central doctrine.

Many, perhaps most, Churches today calling themselves Christian would fail this mark. [And in making this judgement we must first, and perhaps only examine our own Presbyterian Church in Australia – especially in the first three quarters of the Twentieth Century.]

Here is a simple test if you are a visitor to a Church: look at the hymns; listen to the prayers; note the choice of readings; and meditate on the preaching. A Church may have many faults but if it shows forth Justification by Faith as its understanding of the true gospel then it is a Christian Church. But if a Church even with many strong points

– including great emphasis on doing all things in the Name of Christ – yet does not clearly champion Justification by Faith. It is not a true Christian Church.

Justification by faith when shown forth clearly, answers the most important question for us all:

How can a guilty sinner, like me, be righteous before God?

Not How can a sad person, like me be made happy.

Not How can a mixed up person, like me be put straight.

Not How can a person who has let things get hold of him be delivered from them.

But how can someone who is guilty, having offended God; failed to keep his word; broken God's laws while all the time knowing that God is holy and pure and fearfully just. How can a person like me be righteous before God? That is 'put right' with God.

ONLY, the message in the Bible that answers this, is THE gospel. Any other message (gospel), even though it may use the Name of Christ 100s and 100s of times is NOT the gospel.

Despite the contrary with all the man-made world religions and sects, it is only in the Bible that it is revealed that: **GOD JUSTIFIES THE WICKED.** (Romans 4:5)

The verse from Romans 4 which provides my title, 'God Justifies the Wicked' is one of the pivotal ideas in true Reformed theology. It is a momentous idea given in God's special revelation, the Bible. No where else can it be found!

No DIY religion ever says that, **God Justifies the Wicked.**

What does it mean to justify?

Justification is a pronouncement or a declaration. When granted by God's Sovereign Grace, it occurs, in an instant. It is not a process.

A just judge may pronounce an accused, who is proven innocent: not guilty – that is the accused is declared justified. The judge did not make the accused innocent only pronounced the declaration of justification. If however the accused is proven guilty the pronouncement of the judge is one of condemnation and the promise of punishment is 'handed down'.

With the ultimate judge, God, human logic would require the same.

The problem is there is **no one who is innocent.** So God's pronouncement should **only** be that of condemnation and the subsequent promise of punishment. For all and always.

This is what we could expect in any DIY religion: Only if we do what we consider 'the right thing' will we be justified. Declared in the 'right' with our invented idea of God. So through our logic we use that 'circular argument' that since we do what is just in our

own eyes, our god will reward us as we hope.

But the real God says that He will justify the wicked. He can only justify the wicked (if He justifies any) because 'all have fallen short' of God's requirements. No matter how well we satisfy our own idea of righteousness.

How can a perfectly just God, justify the wicked?

The gospel, the 'good news', resolves this problem:

God remains the perfect, infallible, judge through: the incarnation; the sinless life of perfect obedience; the sacrificial death; and the glorious resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is just in declaring true believers justified because of, and only because of, something that can be likened to *imputation*.

Our real and massive guilt, (where we continually disobey and dishonour God's glory) is *imputed* (or credited) to the pure, perfect, sinless Jesus. The 'proper' man as Luther calls Him. The second Adam, says Paul. The one true, pure and perfect sacrifice. The Saviour of each and every elect person that God has given to Christ to save, since before time began.

An *imputation* is something earned by someone which is conferred on another. It is Christ who satisfies the Covenant of Works. Who becomes sin for us. He does that work, but the benefit is *imputed* or credited to us. Thus demonstrating the overarching Covenant of Grace. The Covenant by which we receive the gift (not the wage) that we did not earn and do not deserve, solely through Christ, by God's Sovereign Grace.

That is the Gospel? Well actually not!

So far this understanding of the Gospel leaves us neutral in God's eyes. Our sin no longer condemns us because that sin has been credited to (and accepted by) Christ. But does this lack of condemnation alone, commend us? Should God enthusiastically embrace us as the father did the prodigal? [Remember the younger son was in a very poor state as he was coming home. The father ran to meet him providing a special robe to cover the ravages of a sinful life.]

Similarly then, there is a second *imputation* that completes the declaration of justification. That makes us worthy in God's sight to be welcomed as adopted children to His family, the Kingdom of God.

No one with human nature, since Adam, has *been able* to live a sinless life on earth of perfect obedience and fulfil the Covenant of Works, except Jesus. No one with human nature, including Adam, has actually *succeeded* in living a sinless life on earth, demonstrating perfect obedience and absolutely fulfilling the Covenant of Works EXCEPT the **man**, Jesus the Christ! (The Messiah)

Jesus, the man, is the only human, embodiment of the 'Righteousness of God'. A righteousness that only He could and does earn. But which in God's Sovereign Grace, is *imputed* to the true believer.

This, often overlooked, reciprocal *imputation* is what makes us sons and daughters of the one true God. Hallelujah!

Finally, faith is the instrument (but not the ground) by which the double *imputation* is conferred on the true believer.

In the early history of the Reformation we find the five solas:

In this is the summary, of God's plan for the manifestation of His glory through the salvation of the elect.

Sola Scriptura: (scripture alone) The only authority we have for our knowledge of God's plan for our salvation is His special revelation through the Scriptures He has caused to be written. Even the record of the full revelation by Christ the Living Word is fore-shadowed in the Old Testament and described in the New Testament, where the Holy Spirit actively reminded the Apostolic authors of what Christ did and said. (John 14:26)

Sola Gratia: (grace alone) The whole of God's plan and implementation for the salvation of the elect is undeserved and as such is His **merciful** grace. [Centuries ago European wars were fought in such a way that families 'followed' the travelling armies. A young soldier in Napoleon's army had incurred a death sentence. However his mother pleaded with Napoleon for mercy. Napoleon asked her, what had the boy ever done to deserve mercy. She replied: "If he deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy".]

Sola Fide: (faith alone) Our justification, resulting in salvation, is appropriated by faith alone. Not by any additional merit. Not by good works; penance; indulgences; or the merit or actions of any ordinary human(s). We are justified by faith alone.

Sola Christus: (Christ alone) That faith is not of ourselves as something for which we can claim any merit. It is the faith (trust, reliance, belief, love) in the finished work of Christ, from which all the merit flows. Such faith is itself a gift – part of God's grace.

Soli Deo Gloria: (to the Glory of God alone) We live for the Glory of God alone. The first question of the Catechism (shorter and longer) reminds us:

What is the chief and highest end of man?

Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.

Glory belongs to God alone. God's glory is the central purpose of salvation, not improving the lives of people – although that is a wonderful by-product. God is not a means to an end – He is the means and the end.

And so we often recite: Justification is by Faith (as qualified, above) **alone**. But as Paul and James later point out, this faith **MUST** be real. A real faith, graciously given by God, at the very point of conversion has a real effect on the believer. Yes! At

conversion the process of changing: the 'fallen' nature; the heart of stone; the captured will and the inability to do anything that is spiritually good, begins. A new believer 'turns their life around', that is, 'repents', and the lifelong process of sanctification has its birth – the 'new birth'.

Such a new life must be different from the old.

Put another way. If there is no change (although possibly small at first and only gradually developing) then there has been no conversion. No gift of faith or justification has been given. The alleged faith is false.

And so while justification is by faith (in Christ) alone, it is never found (seen) alone in a true believer.

Thus the two great blessings God bestows are:

A new record – justification at the instant of conversion, and

a new heart – which starts then and continues throughout the new life (sanctification).

At 'rebirth' we receive 'spiritual' life – where we were previously dead in sin.

And we receive a living faith, which is revealed and validated by Christ's good works which we are made able to do, and must do.

God justifies the wicked!! BUT not with the intention that they **remain wicked**.

How wonderful is this doctrine – it is truly good news.

It's so heavenly; so different; so other. It could only come from heaven. No human mind could ever invent it. No human mind ever has!

It's only found in the book where God reveals Himself, by His Spirit through the Prophets and the Apostles. A truly heavenly document. It's what makes true Biblical Christianity unique.

It's the only basis of all our hopes.

Picture, if you will the pathway of your life. There are special events along the way and also sad memories of relatives and friends that have passed on. You look to the future and there somewhere is a grave with your name on it.

When you come to your dying moment what will you be relying on?

“I've done my best?” Won't do.

“I've lived a good life?” Won't do.

Only This:

GOD JUSTIFIES THE WICKED! If that wasn't in the Bible you would have no hope. **BUT IT IS!**

Prayer:

Father we thank You for this unique Word. We could never have dreamed it, imagined it or invented it, but You have revealed it.

It is 'good news'. We give You thanks for it.

Your great love sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. Your only begotten Son, with the promise that whoever believes in Him – puts their faith in Him, trusts Him, comes to Him – will not perish but have everlasting life.

We are thankful that he who is “in” Your Son has life, while he who is not, will never see true life.

We thank You that once again as the Gospel is preached, the door is not yet closed for those that are still 'outside'.

Come to Him – He who says, “I am the door”. He who invites you to Him.

May this prayer flow from all the saints gathered here today.

In Jesus Name. **AMEN**

[2275]

Delivered Sunday 21 February 2016

Justification by (through) Faith

acknowledgement to Stuart Olyott (#12 back-to-basics)

Today we continue to consider the doctrine of Justification through Faith. Last week we noted Paul saying that he was not ashamed of God's powerful, predicted, gospel – concerning God's Holy Son, Jesus Christ.

Powerful because it brings salvation to everyone who believes. It is the revealing of God's righteousness, wherein the Sovereign Lord God, absolute in truth, mercy and justice, displays His absolute glory by reconciling separated, disobedient, 'fallen', human-kind to Himself through faith in the work and person of God the Son.

The two components of this mighty accomplishment:
Christ's taking on Himself the punishment of our sin – satisfying justice.
Christ's perfect life and person being applied to, or covering, us – so that God regards as if we were righteous like Jesus.

Now we need to continue to clear up some potential for misunderstanding.

Remember it's NOT my faith that makes me righteous

Some people, however, preach: giving the idea that FAITH is a good work!

A good work that pleases God! A work that God accepts INSTEAD of obedience. Something, they imply, that God considers to be just as good as keeping His holy law and worthy of a reward – justification. They give the impression that I am saved BY my faith.

I'm not saved by this!!

Faith is definitely NOT the ground (or basis) by which I am accepted by God. God accepts me because He has no reason to punish me because Jesus Christ died in my place and further He embraces me because Jesus Christ's perfect life has been put to my account. It's the person and the work of Christ which is the ground of righteousness. And ONLY that. Where does faith come in then? Faith of itself is nothing. You can have faith in Buddha, Mohamed or even at a similar level, your next door neighbour – that he will return your mower. It must be (and can only be) faith in Jesus Christ. He's the only sin-bearer. He's the only Saviour!

Faith is the hand which receives this gift of righteousness. It's the means by which God gives to me this gift of righteousness and puts, or hands it over to me. It's the instrument by which all this becomes mine, in my experience. BUT it is NOT the source of that righteousness.

So when we say, Justification by (or through) Faith what we mean (in full) is:

Justification by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive through the means of faith. By coming to Jesus and relying on Him and following Him. We must never give the impression that faith saves. **Jesus Christ Saves.** It's faith by which salvation becomes yours.

People look to their faith and ask, “Is **my** faith strong or weak”. They will be damned doing this! You must be looking at Jesus. Look at Him. See and trust Him. Put your weight upon Him. That's faith. **But stop looking at yourself.** Look to Him! That's the way Justification and God's righteousness comes to us.

Some further important points:

1. **Justification is an act.** It's complete in a moment. Complete! Not a process that takes time. This means that when you come to the Saviour, IMPUTATION takes place the moment you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. A grace which comes from the Holy Spirit working within you. At that very moment your sins are taken away because of the work of His cross. And also at that moment, righteousness is put to your account. Complete Justification. God doesn't hold against you any more, your sins AND God embraces you without any hesitation, because Jesus Christ's life and righteousness is put to your account. There is nothing more to be done. It is finished it is complete. You are justified!

Remember then. You're either justified or you're not. There's no middle ground. There's nobody in the world who is partly justified, or on the way to being

justified. You're either justified or you're not. Once God takes away your sins and once Jesus Christ's righteousness has been put to your account, you can't be unjustified. Because God won't go back on what He has done. The bible says so: (Romans 8:28-30)

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

So you are 'right with God'. There's no more anger that will fall on you. No condemnation that will remain yours. You are justified. That's in Scripture:

In the opening verses of Paul's letter to Titus, he takes the opportunity in his greeting to state yet again the gospel and its future benefits.

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – ² in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour,

That 'certain hope' is the 'good news' to fallen sinners, otherwise facing an eternity of hell!

That's THE gospel of the Son of God.

2. **But you're not justified until you repent and believe:**

Hasn't God planned to save certain people, from all eternity?

YES!

Didn't Jesus Christ die to take away the sins of those actual people? YES!

Didn't the Holy Spirit cover them to bring those actual people to faith? YES!

But until the Holy Spirit calls you by the gospel and brings you to faith, in Christ. Until that moment, you are as lost as anyone else.

Reading Galatians 2:16:

¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because you're not justified (made 'right with God') until you believe. If you're not believing at present, you're not justified, But the MOMENT you believe you will be!

That's why Paul often says to believing Christians: (Col 1:21,22)

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation -

This is how we all begin, but by God's grace as we come to Christ Jesus, we pass from spiritual death to eternal life. We are completely saved the moment we are drawn to believe, by the Spirit. Nothing but the gospel promises that!

People go on long pilgrimages, hoping to be saved; people get tied up with all sorts of cults, hoping to be saved; many pay penance and light candles, hoping to be saved. While all the time the gospel is saying: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you WILL be saved.” The very moment you believe!

3. **No law keeping is necessary.**

Nobody is saved by keeping the 10 commandments, because nobody has ever kept them, except our Lord, Jesus Christ Himself – which is why only He can be THE Saviour. Nobody is saved by law keeping. We are justified through faith alone. Your performance doesn't come into it, because it is Jesus Christ's perfection that saves you. Keep on looking to Him!

BUT! But this God given grace of faith alone that justifies is never ALONE. That is, true God-given faith is ALWAYS accompanied by good works. Always! Alleged faith without the evidence of good works – of noticeably changed lives – is DEAD. Not faith at all. A counterfeit!

If anyone claims to have true faith, but they don't have a life that matches their faith, their so called faith is a false one. Those good works; that change in our life that takes place when we believe (perhaps slowly at first) while they can never commend us to God must follow justification. They will never be good enough for Him – but he will accept them for Christ's sake!

Those 'good works' then are the 'fruit' of our Spirit-given faith: .. *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* (Galatians 5:22) and result in our possessing and spreading *joy*.

In the 'golden chain' (Rom 8:30 above) all who are justified are glorified – that is they inherit eternal life in the 'new heaven and the new earth', body, mind and soul. Between that instant of the declaration, by God, of justification and our glory, is the process of sanctification which develops throughout the remainder of our earthly existence.

Everyone who is 'put right with' God, has a changed heart (a new birth); changed character; changed life and is on a new road, actually becoming more like Jesus. Here is a quote from J C Ryle: (who died in 1900)

*Justification is the act of God, **about** us, and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God, **within** us, and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men.*

Justification is always accompanied by good works. There are no exceptions to that! Nobody who is a true Christian can live as they used to. That's why we use the term 'conversion'. And nobody who is a true Christian does live as they used to.

We finish this morning with a reflection on Galatians 2:16. The NT reading that we had before this sermon relates Paul's taking Peter to task. One great apostle to this other great apostle. Paul reminds Peter of a fact they both know to be true:

¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Note how many times the word 'justify' is used; how often does he say we are not justified by the works of the law. (That is keeping the 10 commandments – we should however keep them as obedient partners with the Spirit of Christ within us, as we experience the sanctification process through to our life's end. But this is not what justifies us. That comes at our 'rebirth' and is entirely God's gift of grace)

Well then! Are you justified? Am I? Do we know the gospel of which Paul was not ashamed? Do we know the power of that gospel. Do we have it in our experience? In our personal lives? By which we've been put right with God, whom we have offended. Put right for ever and ever, because of the life, death and (vindicating) resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1859]

“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”

Delivered Sunday 28 February 2016

***Back to Basics:
God's Word Written Down (Part 1)***

1. What is the Bible?

Earlier, principally the children, (and possibly you also) were reminded of the absolutely unique library of preserved writings, called the Scriptures, the Holy Bible. A divinely inspired revelation about God and what He requires of us, His creation.

Sixty-six books in two Testaments with nearly 40 human authors compiled over some 1600 years. Speaking of the world from before it began to after it will have ended. Collectively, truly, the 'Greatest Book ever written'. Well can it be described as an 'epic of Biblical proportions' with absolutely no chance of being eclipsed or requiring a sequel!

Look at the variety of human agents: kings (David & Solomon); fishermen (Peter & John) herdsman or gather of wild figs (Amos); royal priest (Ezekiel); tax collector (Matthew); doctor (Luke). All with differing backgrounds, God fashioned experiences, special abilities, styles of writing. And yet, all providing what God intends, both in the writing and then in the reading. Through the superintendence of the Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament: Originally written down in Hebrew and Aramaic.

Genesis, meaning the beginning of everything – except God. Creation of the world; entrance of sin to that perfect creation that on the sixth day was pronounced by God, Himself as 'very good'; growth of corrupted humankind up to the flood, leading through the 'line' of obedient Noah to the beginning of the rise of the descendants of Jacob, whose name being changed to Israel, fathers the Nation called the 'children of Israel'.

Exodus to Esther, books of history of this Nation up to 400 years before Christ.

Job to the Song of Solomon, wonderful poetry and wisdom.

Isaiah to Malachi, prophetic information about God from God: blessings and warnings, encouragement and consequences with stern prediction of outcomes. Prophets whose stature in the narrative vary like the range of peaks in a mountain range. From the highest peaks can be seen the furthest and the impact on those who seek is greatest blessed. Isaiah stands out even among the 5 major prophets.

The New Testament: Originally written in a then popular version of Greek (sometimes today called Biblical Greek – just as we are not readily familiar with *olde english*, modern Greek is virtually 'another' language from that of New Testament Greek.)

Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, presenting the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very little about the childhood of Jesus apart from a brief episode when He was 12, no detail at all between 12 and age 30. A biography is not the purpose – it is a 'gospel'. An announcement of good news. The inauguration of the merciful grace of the fearfully just God on the spoilers of His perfect creation through the incarnation of God the Son, to restore the chosen to renewed fellowship with God.

Most of the substance of the Gospels, details events leading to the Crucifixion; the Crucifixion itself; and the subsequent appearances of the risen and glorified Christ up to His ascension to the right hand of God in heaven. Together with teaching about the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth which was being established then and there.

Acts, relating to the infant church as the presence of the Kingdom with the works of Peter and then, most substantially, of Paul.

Romans to Jude, record letters to individuals and churches, by Paul and others: James, 2 by Peter (acknowledging that Mark's gospel is largely the eye-witness testimony of Peter given to Mark), 3 by John and then Jude (a second of the letters which has no chapter numbers. Why?)

The letters tell Christians what to believe and how to behave. That is about **Doctrine** and **Duty!**

Revelation, the history of the Christian Church in 7 parallel visions which show that in all sorts of persecution and other calamity God is still 'in charge'. ... *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* (Rom 8:28)

The wicked will be punished while the faithful will receive eternal life – with eternal communion with God.

The cycles (like the repetition of important points by an effective teacher) repeat the expectations for the wicked on the one hand and the redeemed on the other, during

the Christian era – the development of God's kingdom on earth – that period being from Christ's ascension to His Second Coming. Each cycle, while repeating the same principles, progressively advances further and further towards the final demonstration of God's glory. That glory shown 'once and for all' at the crucifixion but until the 'last day' only recognised by the church. All this changes at the last. All people who have ever lived, experience the inescapable realisation of that victory. All, the wicked and all the saved, experience the revelation of God's glory – His glory in His justice as He condemns the unregenerate and His glory in His grace as He welcomes His adopted, in and through the work of Christ – cataclysmically and inescapably revealed to all at the 'last day' with Christ's return.

The library of the Bible has 66 books. Yet one main subject – Christ! One great theme – God's glory. The manifestation of His justice and grace, His righteous wrath and His loving mercy – only through Christ.

The Old Testament looks forward – predictions and prophecies concerning Christ. As early as Genesis 3:15 a Saviour – bruised but triumphant – will come. We read about kings, but we hear that a King will come. We read about priests, but we hear that a Priest, who will never die, will come. We read about prophets, but we hear of a Prophet that will come. Prophet, Priest and King to come but so far no name is given.

The New Testament written through the Apostles – given special grace to interpret and remember their time with Christ – look back to His life on earth and to the fulfilled prophecies of the earlier Old Testament. And look forward to His second coming. When it will become, oh so obvious, to all that Christ's victory over sin and death was completed on the Cross.

2. How was the Bible written?

We now expand on the idea first mentioned earlier.

The Bible (printed as one book, but comprising a library of 66 books) is God's book. His special revelation of the things we need to know about Him and our salvation. But with the exception of the 10 Commandments was physically written by men/women. Each book in effect has two authors – the Holy Spirit and the human author. So the Bible is human as well as divine. *For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were **carried along** by the Holy Spirit.* (2 Peter 1:21) A process – different from plain dictation – which can be called **concurvive operation**.

While our preference is for the NIV (and the UK version in fact – with nearly correct Australian spelling) it is interesting to note that the KJV uses 'moved' instead of 'carried along'. Together these renditions of the Greek get us close to the process involved. There is but one occurrence of the Greek (*pheromenoi* – Strong's 5342). Ex-fishermen, like Peter spoke the Greek of the day but from a Hebrew background. And as a boat fisherman he would also be familiar with the way a boat is borne through the water once the wind blows past the sail and draws or carries the boat with it. In this

text the Spirit of God carries the human author along in God's truth. [Similarly a related greek word *epheronto* – also Strong's 5342 – has its only occurrence at Acts 27:17 where Paul on a ship in a storm is described as being driven along by the wind.]

The human side of the Bible is easy to see. There are different styles of writing that reflect the background of each human author.

Isaiah/Amos. Isaiah, from a king's court, has lofty, even majestic, flowing language that ventures into the abstract, while Amos the herder, uses picture language, in abrupt point by point bursts. (Like a comic book versus a classic novel.)

Luke/Mark. Luke, a doctor – an academic of the day – gives a fully researched, carefully scripted, account, while Mark is more lively, uses vivid imaginative pictures and frequently and enthusiastically moves from one account to another with words like *immediately* and concentrates on the actions of Jesus rather than His sayings.

As we read the first 4 verses of Luke's gospel we see the evidence of his purpose and the steps he was to take (research) to get things right.

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Some of the human authors had personal peculiarities:

Paul sometimes doesn't finish his sentences. Consider the scene, Paul is pacing the floor with his amanuensis (secretary) waiting on his every word. Paul is composing a letter of great importance. His concentration is intense. Then he has another thought (as you do). Without finishing the previous thought he dashes into the new one perhaps to come back to the previous one later. *¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.* (Rom 8:12-13)

Daniel didn't understand every thing he was moved to write. *⁸ I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, 'My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?'*

⁹ He replied, 'Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. (Daniel 12:8-9) [Notice how Daniel's prophecy was 'sealed' while John's towards the end of The Revelation is 'opened'. (Rev 22:10)]

Peter says, that some of Paul's writings are hard to understand. *¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.* (2 Peter 3:16)

Further the human-ness is shown in that the Bible records the sins and errors of some of the main, generally positive, characters:

King David, 'a man after God's heart', when challenged by the Prophet Nathan over

the affair with Bathsheba , David contritely, writes in Psalm 51.

¹ *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.*

² *Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*

³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.*

⁴ *Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.*

⁵ *Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

⁶ *Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

And Noah, saved from the flood, with his family, celebrates too well with wine and brings dishonour to some members of his family. (Gen 9:18-21)

¹⁸ *The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.)* ¹⁹ *These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.*

²⁰ *Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard.* ²¹ *When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent.* ²² *Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.* ²³ *But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backwards and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.*

Over and above all of this the Bible is the Word of God.

Paul writing to his young protege, Timothy says:

¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)*

And at the end of the final book in the Biblical library, Revelation we are instructed that the Bible is the only revelation which God has given us.

This is how the Apostle John is moved to conclude the last chapter of the last book of the Holy Scripture.

¹⁸ *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.* ¹⁹ *And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will*

take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll. (Rev 22:18-19)

You want to know what to believe: This book's good for **doctrine**. You want to know what God thinks about your sin. This book's good for **reproof**. You want to make your life right: This book's good for **correction**. You want to grow in pleasing God. This book's good for **instruction in righteousness**.

You want to be a man or woman of God, with nothing missing from your Christian life: you can become that man or woman of God, just by studying this book!

You want to do what's good in God's sight: You can learn how to do it from the Bible alone. That's what 2 Tim 3:16-17 is telling us AND God hasn't given any other written revelation.

[2396]

“May this be so for all the saints gathered here today”