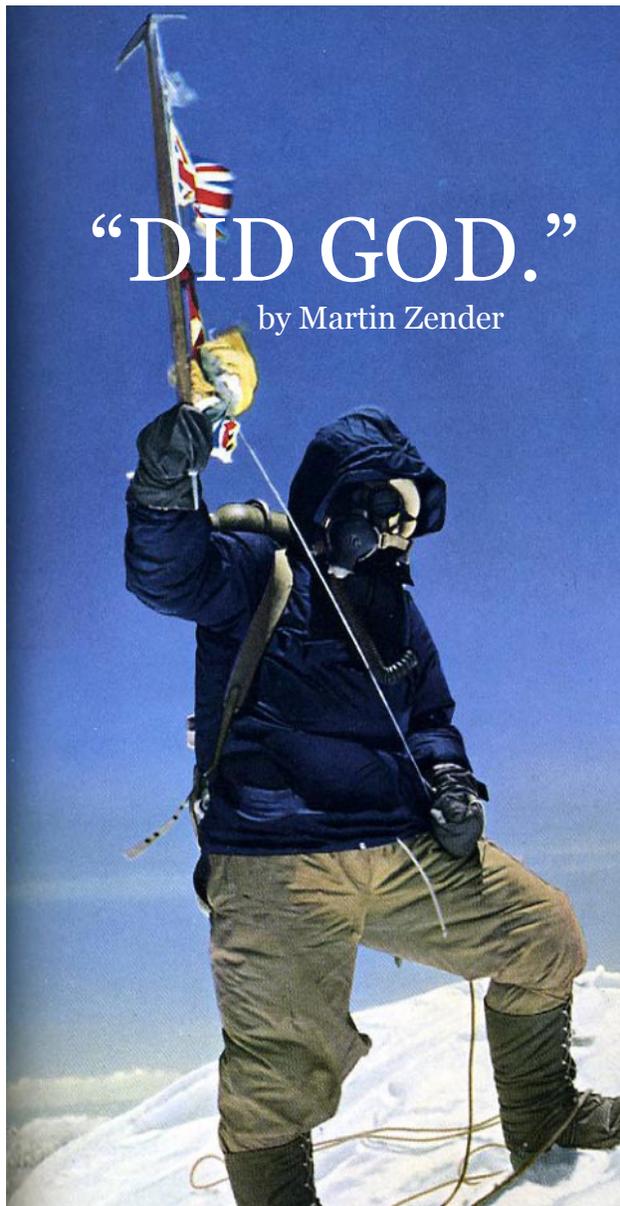


ROMANS Part 62

Chapter 8:3-9



For what was impossible to the law, in which it was infirm through the flesh, did God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sin's flesh and concerning sin, He condemns sin in the flesh, 4 that the just requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who are not walking in accord with flesh, but in accord with spirit. 5 For those who are in accord with flesh are disposed to that which is of the flesh, yet those who are in accord with spirit to that which is of the spirit. 6 For the disposition of the flesh is death, yet the disposition of the spirit is life and peace, 7 because the disposition of the flesh is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither is it able. 8 Now those who are in flesh are not able to please God. 9 Yet you are not in flesh, but in spirit, if so be that God's spirit is making its home in you. Now if anyone has not Christ's spirit, this one is not His.

I love the word "impossible" here. What an ingenious use of a word denoting insurmountable futility. God investigated this word seven times—turned it every which way—and said, "Yeah, this is a *great* word." It's the Greek word *adunaton* and the English elements are UN-ABLE. I don't know how this word escapes those who insist on posting the Ten Commandments in churches and on public buildings.

PASTOR: Do the Ten Commandments.

PERSON: But God says it's impossible. I'm *unable*.

PASTOR: *Try*.

"What was *impossible* to the law, in which it was infirm through the flesh, did God." What exactly was it that was impossible to the law? The taking away of Sin. Was there something wrong with the law? No, the law was and is holy, just and good (Romans 7:12). The law was infirm only through the flesh. We covered this

in Romans chapter seven. Flesh can't do law. Pinch your arm. The stuff that comes up between your fingers with hair on it—that's flesh. If stuff comes up between your fingers with hair on it, then you can't do law. The next time someone suggests to you that you ought to at least be attempting to obey the Ten Commandments, pinch your arm, show this person the bunched up stuff with hair on it, look the person in the eye and say, "Oops. Sorry." Say this in a very sad, very matter-of-fact way.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The problem is Sin. Flesh as presently constituted is helpless against Sin. This is why Christ's sacrifice *concerned* Sin and it is why Romans is *about* Sin. Look at verse 3. This thing that God did with His Son was "concerning sin." See? I am not making any of this up. The thing that God did with His Son wasn't directly concerning you, it was concerning Sin. Jesus didn't battle you and me on the cross, so stop feeling guilty, as though you put Him on the cross. You didn't. The priests always told me when I was a kid: "You put Jesus on the cross!" I said, "No, I didn't! I was playing in my sandbox!" You're not that mean, and neither am I, to put



Jesus on the cross. I can't even kill a roach. Sin put Him there. He battled not you, but the power that vexes you. Did you make yourself a sinner? You were born mortal, and thus you sin. Mortality wasn't your idea either so

stop feeling bad that you're weak. Mortal people are weak and there is no way around that until resurrection.

Sin means to miss the mark. Missing the mark is the opposite of hitting the mark. Hitting the mark is righteousness. The root word in "righteousness" is "right," and it means not being wrong, and wrong means not making a mistake. Making *any* kind of mistake, therefore, is unrighteousness, and thus Sin.

So stop making mistakes.
(That was a joke.)

MONA BOLOGNA



God presented the law to Israel as a way to become righteous. He knew all along that no Israelite nor anyone else could become righteous through law. All any intelligent person could do was to pinch their arms and bunch up stuff with hair on it and do what they could. But Israel had to learn through practical experience of the inability of pinched-up stuff with hair on it to subject itself to the law of God (verse 7). Israel still hasn't learned. The people who continue to put up the Ten Commandments haven't learned either. Israel had an excuse, but Christians don't. Is-

“Jesus battled not you, but the power that vexes you. You didn't put Jesus Christ on the cross; Sin did. Stop feeling bad.”

rael wasn't told, but Christians have been told in their own *Bibles* that they take with them to *Bible* studies. They have the spiritual I.Q. of Balaam's ass. (Wait. Balaam's ass was smart; that animal had an amazing Intelligence Quotient.)

If only the Ten Commandment People (I *wish* there were only ten of them) would put up the Ten Commandments in the spirit of the Mona Lisa. Then all would be fine: "Here's this impossibly great painting. It's a masterpiece. Look at it for as long as you want, then get the



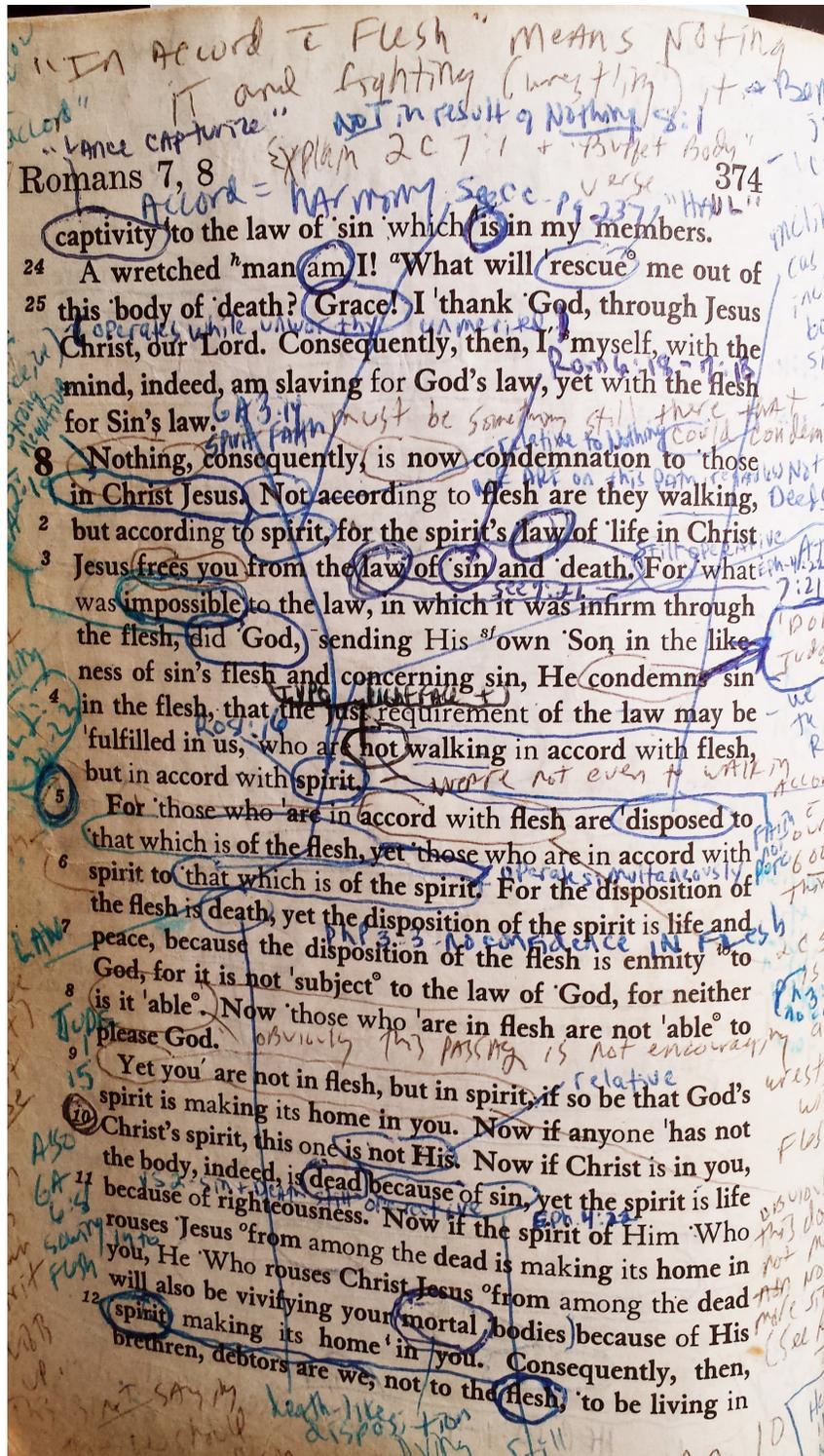
hell out of here. No, you can't take it home; no, you can't touch it; no, you can't even take a picture of it; no, we're not even going to let you get to within a foot of it; no, you can't even touch the glass that's in front of it and if any of you even try that, someone will pull a gun on you."

Instead, they want you to handle the Mona Lisa, roll it up, take it home, put it on your refrigerator, stick her up there next to your old Farrah Fawcett poster—whatever you want. Jump into the painting Mary-Poppins style and ask Lisa del Giocondo out for a date. Light her cigarette. Kiss her tobacco-tainted lips. She is meant to be used. Oh, no she's not. Get the hell away from her. She's meant to be admired. Be in awe of her, then slink away. She's too much woman for you. Step backward, never forward. We have guns, and we know how to use them.

"DID GOD"

For what was impossible to the law, in which it was infirm through the flesh, *did God*.

The words "did God" were some of the first words I circled in my *Concordant Literal New Testament*. This occurred sometime in 1986, when this Bible got shipped to me from California. These two words are two of the most important words in the entire Scripture, and certainly in Paul's letters. I don't know why I had never seen them before. They are merely two words of three letters each, but they change everything. Why had no one ever pointed them out to me? Why were the nuns and priests still bothering me about my Sin? Why did my mom keep insisting that we all go to Mass? The answer was, "Sin." But something had happened with Sin. Hadn't anyone read this? Someone named "God" *did* something about Sin. I left the Catholic religion at age 18, suspecting that something was up. I didn't read these words until age twenty-seven. From this time forward, I pointed them out to everyone else. I transposed them, though. I liked to say that "God did" something. I thought that this "did God" business was just another example of Paul writing awkwardly.



Maybe I've been wrong about this transposing. Maybe Paul was not dyslexic. Now I think that he meant, with clear vision, to lead with the verb. Good Lord, I see it now, live, as I write. I apologize to Paul. After thirty years, I see that we need a verb quickly here, and smack in the face. "God" doing this or that thing has become as commonplace to us as: "God created the heavens and

the earth." How could we possibly yawn at such a statement? Yet we do. Any time the name "God" comes before a verb, we go a little numb. Forget the predicate; God is doing something. Well of course. Why shouldn't He? He does everything. He's God. But now here comes Paul, putting what God *does* first. This is singular, startling, unexpected, inspired.

It's also the inspired order of the Greek: the verb comes first. The *Concordant Version* is faithful to this.

Leading up to the first of two three-letter words, we have the word "impossible" and the phrase "infirm through the flesh." Obviously people have been trying to do something to warrant such announcements. Human effort underlies this context, fueling it. The word "impossible" comes on the heels of centuries of human sweat. You hand someone an unsolvable puzzle and you watch them suffer for thirty minutes until you finally say, "Hey. Relax. It's impossible." Or someone tries to run a three-minute mile. Off they go, full of confidence. You stop them on the track after one sixty-second lap with a glass of lemonade and say, "Stop. Sit down. It can't be done." Same with "infirm through the flesh." It's an anthem for giving up. It's the "Star Spangled Banner" of throwing in the towel. Who isn't in flesh? There. You're doomed. You are allowed to point this out to anyone as the source of the problem. You're to give them the arm-pinch trick and the accompanying sorrowful statement ("Oops. Sorry"). The problem is trying and failing. But how does anyone get out of this?

On the heels of all this human trying and failing—involving, very intimately I might add, verbs—comes another verb: "did." What you are trying to *do*, Someone already *did*. Get the verb? Open the history books. Concentrate on the verb and the tense of the verb, which is "past." Allow me to review: 1) get the verb first, then 2) the tense of the verb, then 3) find out Who did what. Now you have a three-step process with which to combat law-bringers:

BRINGER: Do the law.

YOU (pinching your arm): Oops. Sorry.

BRINGER: I said do the law!

YOU: God already did it. Concentrate on the word “did.” Have you noticed the tense of that verb?

HOW GOD DID IT

“For what was impossible to the law, in which it was infirm through the flesh, did God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sin’s flesh and concerning sin, He condemns sin in the flesh, that the just requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who are not walking in accord with flesh, but in accord with spirit.”

I also like the verb “sending.” This is what God *did* with Christ. There are verbs all over the place in this context, attributed to God. (What are we doing in the meantime? Sinning. That’s *our* verb.) God sent His own Son to earth to take care of the problem of Sin.

What happens when your drain is hopelessly clogged? You call a plumbing operation and they send a plumber. Isn’t it great to know that someone is coming? You call the plumbing establishment and someone says, “We’re sending a man right over.” How great to hear these words. These words fill you with peace and joy. Your problems are over. What do you have to do now? Nothing. Just wait for the guy. You can forget totally about the clog. It’s not your problem any more. There’s nothing quite like this sense of release. Sex comes close, but no. If you’re like me, you’ve been battling the clog on your own because you want to save money. But no plunger works, and no chemicals work. No amount of cussing works. What you’ve got is a world class clog. It begins to obsess you. It’s just a stupid clog—or is it? It becomes a metaphor of life. Life is full of clogs, metaphoric and otherwise. You start to think of the clog as Satan, or the offspring of Satan. It’s probably your own stupid hair, but that only makes the whole business more insulting and humiliating. Now it’s you



against your own hair that has matted itself into a giant wet ball of old head covering. After hours of self-effort, it’s still you against the clog, but the odds shift in favor of the clog. It is possible that the hair has conspired with other foreign elements such as hard toothpaste.

Then you make that blessed telephone call. *To heck with the money*, you think. *This is a job for a professional*. Then you hear those hallowed words, “We’re sending a man right over.” The money no longer matters. Relief is on the way. You will give anything in exchange for the joy that this saying brings and the prospect of clog-free living it promises.

The guy comes over in a spiffy uniform. He says with genuine enthusiasm, “I’ll have that clog dissolved in no time!” You could cry for happiness. Ten minutes later, he’s finished. You want to touch the hem of his garment. You ask him what you owe and he says, “Nothing. We’re running a special today. It’s called ‘Grace.’ Have a nice rest of your life.”

JESUS IN FLESH

Jesus came in flesh to do the job against Sin because the problem was with Sin and Sin had attacked flesh. The plumber doesn’t come to mow the grass; the problem is with the plumbing. If Jesus had not come in flesh to meet us in the substance of our predicament, then this whole flesh thing would seem like a colossal waste of time and material. The miracle comes when God infuses our *flesh* with immortal spirit power. What revelation or education would there be if God radically changed us before He radically changed us? If we go from human to robot and *then* to celestial being, what was all the flesh for? If a man is lame, what good is it if Jesus heals his arm? There’s nothing wrong with the guy’s arm. Or what benefit turning the guy’s leg into a lamppost before healing it? Heal the *leg*, for God’s sake. Thus, Jesus Christ comes to rescue us as we are, in the substance of that of which we are composed. If Jesus Christ fights Sin by becoming a light brighter than the noonday sun—again, flesh seems superfluous. We should have been born as light. Since He came concerning Sin, He comes in the likeness of Sin’s

flesh. (Paul used the word “likeness” here because Jesus Christ’s flesh wasn’t sin-infused. Other than this, His flesh was identical to ours.) Jesus Christ showed us that the problem was not with flesh, but with *Sin’s* flesh. To prove that, He fought Sin *in* flesh. See? There’s nothing wrong with flesh because in the end, flesh beat flesh, albeit spirit-*infused* flesh. This hasn’t been a waste of time after all. You’re not “way off.” You’re in the ballpark, just being you. Sin is the problem, not flesh. Sin-*infused* flesh is the problem. It kind of makes us feel a little better for spending all these years in flesh. It doesn’t seem like such a stupid idea, or giant waste. The miracle of our change will be glory come to *flesh*, and the memory will be, “Oh my gosh, this was my *flesh*.”

Always, it’s all about the contrast, and years of it.

Jesus Christ, sent by God, came here to rescue us in our current estate. The only difference was that He was without Sin. He went to a lot of trouble to take flesh, and I admire that. Flesh was not His native garb. What a bold move. Gutsy. Otherwise, I couldn’t have related to Him. I can’t relate to a spinning green electron. Without Him coming just as we are only without Sin, His work would have looked more like a trick. Who stands a chance against a light brighter than the noonday sun? We know, instead, that He took away Sin by unfathomable trial and suffering. This makes us love Him. It could only happen with Him in flesh.

He fought flesh with flesh, albeit spirit-infused flesh. I know I already said that. If I haven’t yet touched the profundity of it, it’s not because I haven’t tried.

HE CONDEMNS SIN IN THE FLESH

This is a strange saying. Does it mean that Jesus Christ condemned Sin while He was in the flesh, or that He condemns the Sin that abides in the flesh? It’s the latter. Sin only lives in the flesh as a figure of speech. But picture it literally, and it will help. It’s new-creation truth. Pinch your arm again, and now imagine that every freckle and age-spot and hair and blemish on your arm represents sin. Or picture microscopic parasites just below the surface of the skin. Now someone waves a strange light-wand with a color of light never before seen, over your arm, and suddenly all freckles, blemishes, hairs and age-spots disappear, and all parasites die. Now there is nothing but pure and beautiful flesh. That’s kind of like what this is. It’s kind of like what the new creation is.

Don’t take this too far. I’m not saying that this same literal material is now able to do the things of God. But

in another sense, I *am* saying that. I’m saying that *you* are now able to do the things of God because there is a new power source energizing your flesh: spirit. If you actively love someone, or if you are patient with someone, it’s still your body of skin moving around doing these things, but this body of skin is now energized, not by the old infirmity of fear, to obey or die, but by the grace brought into your head by spiritual revelation that translates *to* your flesh. So now when your flesh “does things for God,” it



“Jesus went to a lot of trouble to take flesh. It was not His native garb. Gutsy move. I couldn’t have related to a spinning green electron.”

operates in the spirit and not according to “the flesh.” So in a way, the literal flesh can operate both in the metaphorical way, against God, or in the spirit, depending on your realization of the operation of God and your grasp of the death of the old humanity.

The metaphorical flesh referred to here is that old religious desire to please God in the old way, that is, human attainment. That’s the sin and ugliness of flesh. The wand has removed that (the wand is the death of Christ and the death of the old humanity), and now you still have flesh, but its motivation is now spirit. The motivation is no longer a religious desire to perform for the Deity “or else,” but rather a result of an appreciation of grace and a realization of the full import of Christ’s death. Keep in mind that when Jesus was resurrected, He was still flesh, and He still had bones (Luke 24:39. It was blood that He lacked. Blood is the corrupting factor in humanity, not flesh. When flesh is finally and fully infused with spirit, we might still call it flesh, but it’s cleansed flesh. It has been treated, first by a revelation, then by an actual, *physical* change.

THE JUST REQUIREMENTS OF LAW, WITHOUT LAW

He condemns sin in the flesh, that the just requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who are not walking in accord with flesh, but in accord with spirit.

Now that the old humanity has been done away with (Romans 6:6) and we are walking in newness of life (Romans 6:4), we find ourselves doing stuff. We find ourselves enacting fruit of the spirit such as love, peace, kindness, patience, and the rest. *Oh, no! We're loving people! It means that we're doing law, because the law said, "Love your associate as yourself." How else could we be doing this except law?* Not so fast. Remember Romans 2:14. There, the nations are "by nature doing that which the law demands." They're not doing it because of law—they're not "obeying the Ten Commandments"—but simply because they are being left *alone* by the law (law, due to flesh, effects the opposite of what it purports to inspire). Human nature, left alone by law and thus free of micro-management, can and will do righteous things.

Human nature, like flesh, is not evil. It is debilitated by mortality. Remove mortality, and flesh and human nature will spring back to life like a sponge. This is not the teaching of orthodoxy, which ought to verify for you its veracity. How can human nature be evil if Paul says that the nations "by nature" do that which the law demands? If human nature were evil, it couldn't do anything right. When mortality finally does go away, you'll see what I mean in full. We are seeing a preview of this with the announcement of the death of the old humanity. The death of the old humanity is God saying, "Live as though mortality has gone away and has no hold on you." This is the equivalent of "present yourselves to God as if alive from among the dead, and your members as implements of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13). See? How in the world can your members—that is, your flesh—become implements of righteousness to God? By considering yourself after the spirit, not the flesh.

And so the just requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us who are not walking in accord with flesh, but in accord with spirit. Were we walking in accord with flesh, we would be *trying* to do the law. Romans 7 says that those who try to do the law will not only screw

up the law, but become inordinate sinners (Romans 7:5-8, 13). However, when we walk according to spirit, we do not try to do the Mosaic law, or any law. We flit about in happy freedom, like butterflies. The unexpected result of butterfly-like exuberance (grace) is that we fulfill the just requirements of the law, such as love. We don't do this through law, but apart from it. That's the shock. It's the shock that Israel can't and still has not accepted. It's hard enough for us to grasp and live it. We think that when we give up law and forget about trying, that the wheels of morality will come off and we'll crash into a ditch. Not so. It's the opposite. By walking in spirit, we end up doing what the law was "shooting for," but without its agency and ultimate interference. It's like being airdropped on top of Mount Everest. We're standing on top of the world without having climbed to the top of the world.

No wonder the Jews hate the very concept of grace. They're still eating yak meat with the Sherpas at Camp 1.

—MZ (*To be continued.*)

FROM THE MAIL

Volume 1, Issue 27

Thanks for another amazing installment of ZWTF. As I sat reading it this afternoon over a cup of coffee and a cigar while two of my cats snoozed nearby on the sofa, I had to pause several times to thank God for His grace and love and the rare and precious gift of belief. How glorious it is to have been called to know God, to be a part of the "club of fools" and the "convocation of nobodies" as you put it. Reading these expositions on Romans I am often dazzled by the depth of God's goodness and kindness to us by opening our minds to these wonderful, liberating truths, and I have to pause in reading just to thank Him. I thank Him, too, for you and the way He is using you to enlighten the body of Christ and those He is calling out of this age of darkness. Like King David, my spirit is dancing with delight before the Lord. I am thankful the music will never cease. —Roger O.

* * *

Thank you for this, I needed this badly. I know I have told you before but I will tell you again. Father has blessed you in such away as to bring out His love and truth for us. The insight Father has given you and the way you bring it out is earth-shattering, to say the least. And if I were the only one who was reading this, it would all be worth it, Martin. Thank-you again, and Father bless you ever so much! —Barb R.