

ROMANS

Salvation Part I

Romans 1:1-5:11

The major, or to be more exact, the only problem of mankind is the problem of sin. All other incongruities of human life are symptoms of this one monumental and inescapable problem. Adam and Eve were infected by it (**Genesis 3:1-24**) and have passed it on to all their progeny. It is a genetic flaw in our make-up that cannot be corrected. This terminal disease called sin produces sinful nature that produces sinful activity, which produces death, "And to dust you shall return" (**Genesis 3:19b**).

If this were the end of the story, the Holy Bible would be the shortest history book ever written, just three and a half pages long, a tragedy about humanity cast out of Paradise into a life of sorrow, pain, toil and sweat and then to die. But it is not the end of the story and the rest of the Holy Bible, from **Genesis, Chapter 4** through **Revelation, Chapter 22** is His-story. God stepped into humanity's fatal problem and solved it. God's solution is called "salvation." This divine problem solving was difficult and costly. Perhaps that is why it required sixty-six books to tell the whole story. Of all these books, Paul's letter to the Romans is the most detailed, almost microscopic, examination of God's wonderful plan of salvation.

In **Romans 1:1-5:11** we learn how God saved us from what we do. In this section we will look at the first aspect of salvation, the forgiveness of sins. In **5:12-8:39** we learn how God saved us from what we are.

In this first section we will see how God deals with our sins through the precious blood of the Lamb.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (**Romans 5:8-9**). This first section of Romans shows us what a marvelous cleansing it is!

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29b**)

Chapter I

Paul, The Man And His Message

Romans 1:1-7

Verse 1: Paul Introduces Himself

"Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, separated to the gospel of God."

Introductions are always necessary, but rarely read. Most readers skip over the introduction to get to the meat of the matter at hand. Paul overcame this tendency by starting his introduction with a word that should stop all readers in their tracks. He said he was a slave. Unfortunately, almost all English translations watered-down Paul's introduction by using the word *servant* in place of *slave*. But the Greek word *doulos* means slave and certainly this is the way a first century reader in a slave society would hear this word. Paul was in fact, preaching an entire sermon by making this his first statement about himself, a sermon that is erased by changing the meaning of the word.

Paul was not, nor had he ever been a slave. In fact, he was a Roman citizen and his Roman readers would certainly stop to wonder why a free man would include the word *slave* in his resume. A slave was someone who had been bought and paid for (redeemed). A slave was owned by another human being, to whom he owed its first allegiance. A slave was on call to its owner every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year of its life. The word *it* was used because the Romans called slaves "living tools."

This realistically describes our new life in Christ. James knew it (**James 1:1**); Peter knew it (**2 Peter 1:1**); Jude knew it (**Jude 1:1**) and Paul wanted his readers to know what it meant to be **"also the called of Jesus Christ" (verse 6)**. Paul's Roman readers would understand this more easily than today's readers. Slavery was an intrinsic part of their society. When Roman legions conquered a rebellious people, they literally compelled the entire population to walk under a yoke. This symbolized going into slavery. Jesus used this same imagery when He said, **"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30)**. Once we were slaves to sin and death, now we are slaves of Jesus Christ, who bought us with His blood. We are owned by Him. Slavery it may be, but in the service of our gentle loving Lord we find no loss of freedom. Rather, we experience what freedom really is. It is not the tiresome burden of endless duties and responsibilities, but a release from all our burdens and care. For Jesus also said, **"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28)**.

Paul continues his brief resume by stating that he was a called apostle. The word translated called *kletos* is an adjective that means "invited," and *apostle* means "messenger" or "one sent forth with orders." Once again Paul's readers can feel a kinship with him and his ministry. All believers have heard and accepted the invitation Jesus sent

to us when He said, **"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden."** We must also hear and accept His marching orders, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** (Matthew 28:19). We can feel the delicate balance Paul maintains between the humble station of a slave and the awesome grandeur of being an invited messenger of God. We also, as invited messengers, must keep that same delicate balance in our daily walk with Christ.

Paul now begins to change the emphasis from the man to the message. He says he is **"separated to the gospel of God."** Separated means appointed or set apart for some purpose, and gospel means good news. Just as Paul was appointed to spread the good news of what God did for us in Christ, so have we. Isn't it strange that so many Christians have little interest in sharing the gospel? Sharing good news is supposed to be joyful. If someone tells us a wonderful piece of good news and then says we can't tell anybody, they take much of the joy out of it. But Jesus didn't say, **"don't go and make disciples..."** He said, **"Go,"** and there should be real joy in the going. If a Christian thinks the message is old news, this person just doesn't know the message. This brings us quite naturally to the second emphasis of this section.

Verses 2 - 6: Paul Introduces His Message

"which He promised before through His prophets in Holy Writings, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who came of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son Of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, by whom we received grace and apostleship for obedience of the faith among all the nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ:"

Paul was very conscious of his Jewish readers, so throughout his letter to the Romans he used Old Testament references to support his teachings. In **verse 2** he said that the gospel he preached was promised by God through His prophets. Paul wishes to make it very clear that he was not about to present anything new. While the gospel is indeed good news, it is not new news. It is entirely consistent with all that had been declared before to the Jewish nation by their prophets. So Paul affirms that this message was promised by God through inspired men and that the Christian religion was built upon the foundation of Judaism.

The focal point of this message, the gospel of God, is Jesus Christ (**verse 3**). And Paul leaps into his good news without even beginning a new sentence. In fact, this first paragraph of Paul's letter (**verses 1-7**) is one long sentence using ninety-three words in the original text; so it is easy to get lost in this seeming forest of words and thoughts. But Paul knows that to lose sight of the focus is to lose the message so he presents, in sentence form, an outline of the facts we know about Jesus Christ. It helps to look at it in this way and meditate on each item separately rather than on the whole sentence.

1. Jesus is our Lord, the word *kurios* also means master and owner which

- brings us back to our position of *doulos* (**verse 3**),
2. Jesus is true man, a descendant of David (**verse 3**),
 3. Jesus was declared to be the Son of God. The verb *opisthenos* means decide, appoint or designate. So Paul is saying that He was proven to be the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit (**verse 4**),
 4. Jesus is resurrected from the dead (**verse 4**),
 5. Jesus is the power (grace) to do His will (**verse 5**).

When Paul uses "we" in verse 5 he refers to himself and the other disciples of apostolic office, but he lets us know in verse 6 that his readers are endowed with the same power. All believers are "sent ones" (apostleship) and all believers have the same curriculum (obedience to the faith).

Verse 7: Paul Introduces The Romans

"To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called (to be) saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul's letter to the Romans is the definitive doctrine of the Christian faith and is for all believers; but its format and theological depth was written because of the spiritual maturity of its primary recipients. So Paul introduces us to the Christians at Rome, called saints. The word *called* or *invited* is used three times, first for Paul **verse 1**, second for the church at large **verse 6**, and now for the Romans **verse 7**. It appears that Paul deeply desires his readers to not only understand the message, but to respond to its invitation. The importance of this is accentuated by concluding his opening paragraph with a prayer.

The Profile Of A Saint

Romans 1:8-17

Verse 8: Thankful for the ministry of others

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."

Paul knew a few of the Christians in Rome, as we learn in Chapter 16, but he had nothing to do with the founding of this great church in the greatest city in the world. Furthermore, the church in Rome was experiencing a growth and a popularity that surpassed many, if not all of Paul's mission churches. Human nature often tempts us to take some joy in others failures and dissatisfaction or envy with their success. We are a competitive species. However, a saint, empowered by the Spirit, reverses this embarrassing process, like the old adage that says, "a true friend doubles your joy and halves your sorrow." Paul shows genuine pleasure over the good things happening in the Roman church and thanks God for them. Paul's passion for the success of the gospel was such that he didn't care who did the work. He just thanked God that it was getting done. He says much the same thing to the Corinthian church (**1Corinthians 1:10-17**). Paul has no jealousy or personal rivalry, just a joyous gratitude for the grace of God working in and through others.

Verses 9-10: Prayerful For Others

"For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, imploring, if by any means, now at last I might find it possible by the will of God to come to you."

Prayer must be a dominant force in the life of all saints, and Paul gives us a powerful example of this. In **verse 7** he prays for the church in Rome. In **verse 8** he says that he gives a prayer of thanks for them all, and then he calls God as his witness as proof of his sincerity. Perhaps such a strong statement was just as necessary then as it would be today, for Paul goes on to say that he prays for them **"without ceasing."** Then, in case the readers might have missed it, he says, **"I mention you always in my prayers."**

In **verse 10** Paul shifts his prayer from the Romans to himself. He had a deep desire to visit the church he had been praying for, so he asked God to let him go there **"by any means."** When Paul said, **"by any means,"** he probably did not consider going to Rome in chains. But as we know from **Acts 27, 28, 29**, he did get to Rome but as a prisoner, and there God used him to further the gospel of Jesus Christ from a jail cell.

Verses 11-12: Hungry For Fellowship

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be strengthened, that is, that we might be encouraged together by the faith both of you and me."

Paul's desire to get to Rome was not based upon the idle curiosity of a sight-seer, but upon a deep hunger for Roman fellowship. Their faith was spoken of throughout the entire Christian community, and Paul wanted to taste it and feel it. Paul was also fully confident in the gifts that God had equipped him with, to do the work God had given him to do. So he lets them know that when he gets there, he will be a blessing to them. This is ministry not vanity. Paul knew that God would bless the church in Rome through him because God had blessed people through him wherever he went.

Equally important is the fact that Paul expected to be just as blessed by them as they would be by him. A minister must expect to have his faith strengthened by his parishioners as well as the other way around. If a minister expects only to be a blessing and not to be blessed, neither will happen. Paul says the same thing, more clearly, to the Galatian church. **"Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches" Galatians 5:6.** Unfortunately many churches and clergymen interpret this to mean pay your minister well. I think money was at the bottom of Paul's list of "good things."

Verses 13-15: Conscious Of Both Gifts And Debts

"But I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, that I planned to come to you many times, and was hindered until now, that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other nations (gentiles). I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to ignorant. So, as much as in me, (I am) ready to preach the gospel to you who (are) in Rome also."

There is no way for us to know how long or how many times Paul planned to go to Rome, but it was known to others. Luke writes about it in **Acts 19:21**, and Paul gives almost the identical itinerary as Luke's in **Romans 15:23-24**. Paul's eagerness to arrive in Rome again focuses on just one thing, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, which produces fruit. He is confident in his gifts and has experienced the fruit of them among the other gentiles. Paul also displays the remarkable duality in the ministry of the saints. Combined with the extravagant gifts of God there is also an enormous debt to mankind. Paul understands his debt, he explains it in **Romans 13:8**. God's saints are being continually filled by the flow of love from God to them. It is imperative to find outlets to discharge this debt of love. If this does not occur, only bad things happen. Paul expresses this feeling of debt in **1Corinthians 9:16**, **"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"** Like Paul, we are all debtors to our fellow man to **"the Greeks** (the educated), **"the barbarians"** (the uneducated), **" to the wise"** (the intelligent), the **"ignorant "** (the slow learner).

Verses 16-17: Lives By Faith

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of the Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it has been written, "The just shall live by faith."

It is both interesting and alarming that too many Christians seem to be embarrassed about their faith, since they never talk about it. It takes only a few minutes of conversation to discover what people focus their lives around, because they talk about what they are most interested in. They also avoid with a passion anything they are ashamed of. Paul, aware of these human frailties, feels the need to tell us, not only that he was not ashamed of the gospel, but also why. Paul was not ashamed because the gospel of Christ was:

1. Good news, not bad news **verse 16a**,
2. a power, not a weakness **verse 16b**,
3. for salvation, not damnation **verse 16c**,
4. for everyone, not just the spiritual elite **verse 16d**,
5. the righteousness of God not man **verse 17a**,
6. about faith, not works **verse 17b**.

The phrase **"The just shall live by faith"** in **verse 17c** is one of the key thoughts in all of scripture. It is found in both Old and New Testament (**Habakkuk 2:4**; **Galatians 3:11**; **Hebrews 10:38**). This is one of those brief statements in God's word

that has such magnitude and majesty that it must be viewed on all sides, like a hologram. It takes on different meaning, depending upon which part of the sentence you emphasize.

The **just** shall live by faith.
 The just shall **live** by faith.
 The just shall live by **faith**.

The Wrath Of God

Romans 1:18-32

Verse 18: Reasons For The Wrath Of God.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"

Just as the gospel reveals the righteousness of God, so God also reveals His wrath when His obvious reality is rejected by sinful man. When we get angry, it is too often for the wrong reasons, our emotions are distorted by our sin. We must understand that the wrath of God is a natural and just response to ungodliness and unrighteousness. These two words summarize all the things that provoke the wrath of God. Ungodliness or impiety are the same thing, a sin against God. Unrighteousness or wickedness is a sin against one's fellow human beings. Paul also says that people who are guilty of these things are also guilty of suppressing the truth. Pilate's question, "What is truth?" is wonderfully answered in the next verse. Truth is what we may know about God.

Verses 19-20: Ignorance Is No Excuse

"Because that which may be known of God is made evident among them, for God has shown (it) to them. For from the creation of the world the invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, both His eternal power and divine nature, so that they are without excuse,"

Paul implies that there are no agnostics, only suppressionists of the truth of God. By the creation and continual operation of the universe, God has given proof of His reality. In **Psalm 8:3-4a**, David writes, **"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?"** In verse 2 of this Psalm, David states that even little children recognize and proclaim this truth.

Verses 21-25: Examples Of Ungodliness And Unrighteousness

"Because, having known God, they did not glorify (Him) as God, nor were they thankful, but became vain in their reasonings, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

Civilized man seems to have been duped by the majesty of God's creation. He is so lulled by the inexorable changing of seasons, the rising and setting of the sun and the passing of time that he begins to ignore the creator and mover behind all of this glorious machinery. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, **"...for He (God) makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."** (Matthew 5:45). If only Christians had good weather, everyone would go to church. But God demands to be accepted by faith alone, and these five verses show us the moral and spiritual disintegration of a society that rejects the truth of God. In **verse 21** we see the beginning of a gloomy spiral descent from foolishness to depravity. Ungodliness begins when sinful man continually receives blessings from God without ever acknowledging Him by either glorifying or thanking Him. All reality stems from a knowledge of God and when a society rejects that truth, their hearts are darkened and they begin calling foolishness wisdom, **verse 22**. Mankind has developed countless and often bizarre attempts to find answers to eternal question (e.g. astrology, mysticism, cults, even Satanism and philosophies like Nihilism and Nietzscheanism which produced Nazi Germany). David said it best, **"The fool says in his heart, there is no God."** Psalm 14:1.

Ungodliness continues its separation from the spiritual to the material by replacing God with idols, **verse 23**. In **Genesis 1:26** God said, **"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."** Here Paul shows us how man has reversed this divine order, how man, who was created in the image of God, has consistently tried to reduce God by creating God in the image of His own creation; creatures that man himself was ordained to rule over.

In **verse 24**, unrighteousness rears its ugly head. The unbelievers downward path from being ungrateful to ignorant to stupid to idolatrous, now leads to immorality. In this verse it is extremely important to notice who is now separating from whom. Up until now, man has been separating himself from God; now the role has been reversed. There is a point when God withdraws the power of His grace from a society and allows men to act out all their most sinful desires. This is important because our schools are aggressively teaching that unbelief is healthier than belief and that it is an innocent and harmless system. But Paul points out quite the opposite in the rest of this chapter. He traces the corruption of a society which has rejected God, and where acceptable practices result in the most gross and shameless acts of immorality.

At this point in Paul's letter, gentle and kindhearted readers can legitimately stop and say "How could this happen? Unbelieving people can be as kind and loving as believers." And they would be right. So Paul leads us to the next step down, **verse 25**. Human beings can be basically kind and good even without God, but they can be deceived by Satan and begin to prefer lies to the truth. In his second letter to the

Thessalonians, Paul talks about the last days. He wrote that most of mankind, **"...did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie," 2 Thessalonians 2:10b-11.** It not only can happen, it has happened. The most dreadful example of man's inhumanity to man ever perpetrated is now being performed daily and otherwise kind and caring people think it an acceptable practice. They have believed the lie and call it pro-choice, because a fetus is not a human being, even though both science and common sense call it a lie. How has this happened? Paul tells us that to live with the lie, man must shift his attention from God to man (homocentric rather than theocentric). Humanism is the dominant philosophy in all secular teaching in the western world and teaching the true word of God is illegal in America. This is how it has happened, and God has given us up.

Verses 26-32: The Consequences of Ungodliness And Unrighteousness

"For this reason God gave them up to passions of disgrace. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is contrary to nature. Likewise also the males leaving the natural use of the female, were inflamed in their lust for one another, males with males committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And just as they did not approve of having God in (their) knowledge, God gave them up to a corrupted mind, to do things that are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, whisperers, slanderers, haters of God, people of insulting behavior, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, lacking normal human affection, irreconcilable, unmerciful; who having known the righteous judgment of God, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only practice the same but also approve of those who do them."

Most people need a physical outlet for their anger. They yell, kick, scream, strike out or slam doors. It is a natural response to a powerful emotion. It is also a common, though mistaken idea, that God reacts in the same way. When we think of the wrath of God, we are tempted to think of Him raining down fire and brimstone upon deserving sinners. James and John thought the same thing when Samaritan villages rejected Jesus, **Luke 9:51-56.** Paul's triple use of the phrase, **"God gave them up"** in **verses 24, 26 and 28,** teaches us that the wrath of God is expressed in a much more subtle and terrifying way than fire and brimstone. God's response to a society that has rejected Him is to leave them alone. He allows them to act out their choices in perfect freedom. When God's restraining hand is removed from a society, moral decay is inevitable. When spiritual values cease, physical experiences become all the more important. As you look back over **verses 21-28** you see a logical digression that leads a society from not glorifying and thanking God to homosexuality and lesbianism in eight short verses. Again a caring and moral reader could say, "But what is the logic in that? How do you relate rejecting God to homosexuality?" We must understand that to reject God is also to reject His regulations. Then we can make our own rules and do anything that seems right

to us. In such a society, mindless pursuit of pleasure and sexual experimentation becomes a normal and correct activity, even in our children. This conduct soon produces boredom rather than fulfillment (a common complaint, even in marriages). Boredom and desire for sexual gratification will produce all manner of aberrant sexual behavior, culminating in a society which calls homosexual behavior normal or even worse, "gay."

The consequence of ungodliness in a society is unrighteousness or wickedness in the individual, or as Paul says, "**...a corrupted mind**" **verse 28**. There follows in **verses 29-31** a litany of evil that numbs the mind. Christians cannot dismiss these twenty-two examples of mental depravity simply as characteristics of a sick society. We see too many of our sins in this list. We as the children of God need to know how we differ from those described in **verse 32**. Only if we recognize our sins, can we begin to see the salutary effect of repentance and the comfort and relief of forgiveness. The society that Paul has described is not only unrepentant, but has developed a fatal approval of both sins and sinners, and they are under the wrath of God.

Chapter Two

The Judgment Of God

Romans 2:1-16

Verses 1-3: Judgment Is God's Business

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, every one who judges, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge do the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth upon those who do such things. And do you think this, O man, who judge those that do such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Having discerned that we, the children of God, are indeed different from the people described in **verse 32**, we are ready to lay back and thank God that we are not like other people -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or thieves. But now we no longer sound like the children of God, but like the Pharisee in **Luke 18:9-14**. Aware of this heretical tendency in God's people, Paul begins Chapter Two with a startling statement about judging. We need to understand the difference between judging and labeling sin as sin. Many Christians do not and as a result make mistakes in one of two directions.

When someone points out a sin in our life there is a great temptation to say, "Who are you to judge me? The Bible says '**Judge not.**'" This may be an effective way to silence a critic, but it is not Biblical. Judgment (go to hell or welcome to heaven) is God's business. The Bible tells us to recognize sin in the lives of the brothers and the sisters and to build one another up in love. **"Brothers, if a man is caught in any sin, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness considering yourself lest you also be tempted," Galatians 6:1.**

The other direction Christians are tempted to go is toward self-righteousness. When we see a sinner in action, we love to get indignant. We take great pleasure in comparing how good we are to how bad the sinner is. How easily we violate the spirit of **Galatians 6:1** when we build ourselves up by tearing others down. This is why Paul says **"considering yourself"** (watch out for yourself). If we are going to identify sin in the lives of others, as the Bible instructs, we must be aware of it in our own lives. The Pharisee and the Publican, the saint and the sinner all must come to God through the same path, forgiven by the blood of the Lamb. Calling a sin a sin and building up a person being overcome by it are loving acts. To ignore or overlook another's sin or to be judgmental about the sinner is unloving.

In reality, Paul's real concern in **Romans Chapter Two** was primarily for his Jewish readers. He realizes that the Jews will be nodding their heads in vigorous agreement with his description of a corrupt Gentile society. Paul wishes to expose hypocrisy without offending the reader, so he begins with a tactful **"every one who judges", verse 1**. However his accusation is clearly directed at the Jewish nation (**verses 9-10**). They condemn and despise the Gentiles while they are equally guilty of breaking the laws of God. And Christians today must realize how easily we can become as

legalistic as the Jews Paul was writing about. There is a strong tendency in us all to rationalize our own sins while being very judgmental about the sins of others.

God is the ultimate and only judge of the human heart, and we gladly leave it to Him. This leaves us free to dwell on the other aspects of judgment Paul mentions. **Verse 2** says that **"...the judgment of God is according to truth..."**. This is frightening to a hypocrite whose religion is all on the outside; but for repentant sinners this is good news, cleansed as we are by the blood of the Lamb. We already stand acquitted. There is nothing to fear. We are too aware of the many examples of human justice gone awry. The media regularly run stories of confessed criminals being released by the courts on legal technicalities or of the innocent unjustly imprisoned. Witnesses can make mistakes, juries can be fooled, clever lawyers can find loopholes, and judges can be corrupted. All in all, human justice is often miscarried. It is a comfort to know that some day God will set wrong things right, and that He will judge based on truth.

Paul ends this section about judging with a question in **verse 3, "and do you think...that you will escape the judgment of God?"** This is obviously a rhetorical question. If Paul's readers truly believed that by judging others they would be condemning themselves, they would have stopped it at once. Playing God is a deadly form of idolatry. Unfortunately the Jews were classic examples of antinomians (people who deny the validity of moral laws). They were taught in the Mishna (commentary on the Old Testament) that being obedient to the ceremonial laws was far more important than keeping the moral law. Consequently they carefully dressed, ate and went to church according to the ceremonial law while believing that they could break the moral laws with impunity because they were the children of Abraham. Far too many churches today labor under the same infatuation with their traditions at the cost of God's truth.

Verses 4-5: Misunderstood Blessings

"Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But according to the hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Paul begins his next thought the same way he ended his last one, with a question. **"Or do you despise the riches of His kindness..."**, **verse 4**. The Greek verb *"kataphroneo,"* translated despise, means to view or hold in contempt; and from God's point of view that is exactly what the Jews were doing. From the Jewish point of view they misunderstood their blessings. They believed the continual blessings of their God was His tacit approval of their sinful lifestyle.

The Jewish nation was also misinterpreting God's tolerance and patience with them. They were making the tragic mistake of using their days of grace to produce more sin when God was granting this for more acts of repentance. The people of God today must have a clear understanding of what God is waiting for and preach the message of repentance among themselves and to the world. **"The Lord is not slack concerning His**

promise, as some count slackness, but is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance," 2 Peter 3:9.

In **verse 5** Paul exposes the Jewish state of mind as "**hardened and impenitent.**" Like stones they are insensitive to the touch of God's grace, and they feel no sorrow for their sins. Mistaking God's blessings and patience, they are storing up unrepented sins for some future day of wrath. This spiritual blindness is what Jesus wept over as He drew near to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, **Luke 19:41-44.**

Verses 6-11: We Are Judged By What, Not Whom, We Are

"who 'will render to each one according to his works': eternal life to those who with patient endurance in good work are seeking glory and honor and immortality. But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness -- indignation and wrath, tribulation and calamity on every soul of man who works out evil, both of the Jew first, and to the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works out good, both to the Jew first, and to the Greek. For there is no favoritism with God."

The Jews believed that being right with God (justification) was not a matter of faith, but of birth. If one was born a Hebrew, you were a child of God and nothing, not even unbelief, could change that. Christians are sometimes found guilty of the same faulty thinking. If they are born again, they are a member of God's family and easily develop a false sense of security. They seem to think that they can live their lives just like the pagans, but it is all right because they are Christians. Paul, on the other hand, teaches that true children of God grow up to resemble their father. They are clearly discernible by their actions.

In our eagerness to avoid synergism (work righteousness) we in the church too often play down the importance of sanctification in the lives of Christians. Paul has no such problem. He has not forgotten that "**The just shall live by faith**"; but he is pointing out to people who mistakenly believe they are right with God, that justification will produce "**...fruits worthy of repentance,**" **Luke 3:8.** He has already made it clear that we are not justified by works, but by faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The blood is for God; He is satisfied. God said, "**And when I see the blood I will pass over you,**" **Exodus 12:13.** God has provided the sacrifice; God has done all the work. That is justification.

The problem is we cannot see the blood. Our neighbors cannot see the blood. Works are the only way our faith can be made visible. On Tuesday of Passion week, Jesus told the parable of the sheep and the goats, **Matthew 25:31-46.** As you read through the parable you notice that the only difference between the sheep and the goats is what they did and did not do. This does sound like the sheep were saved by their works, but we know they were on the right hand of God because they had faith (justification). We need to understand the difference between justification and sanctification. Faith is not an abstract idea, but it is a living thing, born by the power of the Holy Spirit and able

to die if not cared for. It needs good food (God's word), fresh air (prayer) and exercise (good works). Right living (sanctification) is a natural outgrowth of being right with God (justification). The good works that God's children do are simply faith strengthened and made visible (sanctification). We are saved by our faith; our faith is saved by our works.

Verses 12-15: Judged By Obedience Not Knowledge

"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in law shall be judged by law. For not the hearers of the law (are) just with God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when nations, which do not have the law, by nature do the things of the law, these, not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and between themselves their thoughts either accusing or excusing;"

The integrity of God's judgment is evident in the way he deals with people. His judgment is based upon how they respond to what they could know of His will. For the Jew it was the written word. For the Gentile it was the natural knowledge of God written in their hearts (conscience). As you read through these four verses, you notice the two different forms of law being used -- one for the Jew and another for the Gentile. These laws are generally referred to as natural law and revealed law.

Paul's aim is still at the self-righteous bias of the Jews and **verse 12** explains why there is no favoritism with God. If salvation is available through the law, then the Gentiles will be judged in the same manner as the Jews based upon their natural law. Paul continues his argument in **verse 14** and attacks a common belief among the Jews that all who became hearers of the law and listened to it (went to church) would be saved. This verse is synonymous with **Leviticus 18:5 "You shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord."** To be saved by the law requires total and continual obedience to it; any failure produces condemnation, revealed law for the Jew, natural law for the Gentile. The Jews desperately needed to understand the vast difference between the privilege of possessing the truth and the responsibility of living it. Twentieth century Christians need to have the same insight into the privilege of living in Christ (**James 1:22, Luke 6:47**).

Verse 16: Judged By Christ

"in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my good news."

There is a certain finality about judgment day that makes us a little uncomfortable. It is a very easy thought to repress because it seems like such an unpleasant idea. For the same reason we find it hard to picture Jesus as a judge. We see Him as a baby in the manger, the loving teacher, the crucified Savior, but not as a judge. Yet, it is clearly taught in scripture, Jesus Himself said, **"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" John 5:22.**

Verse 16 teaches two things: Judgment day will come, and Jesus will judge the secrets of men's hearts. The last one seems to be the more disturbing of the two. Who wants their dark secrets made public? But neither of these need to be threatening. In fact, a believer can find a world of comfort in them. We need to hear the joy of the gospel rather than the threat of the law. Jesus, the judge, is also Jesus, the brother (**Hebrews 2:11**) who understands what it is to be human; **"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" Hebrews 11:18.** Jesus came to us as a baby, He hurt, He wept, He was tempted in the same way we are, He overcame the tempter, He died, He rose, and He did all of this for us. Who better to be our judge?

The last phrase of **verse 16** is said more clearly in **1 Timothy 1:11**, **"according to the glorious good news of the blessed God which was committed to my trust."**

The People Of God

Romans 2:17-3:8

Verses 17-20: The Privileges And Responsibilities Of The People Of God

"Look, you are called a Jew, and rest upon the law and make your boast in God, and know (His) will and approve the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and are convinced that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law."

Verses 17-18: The Privileges

Paul begins this section about privileges with the idea of considering what being called a Jew implied to them. Today we can change the word *Jew* to *Christian* and consider the same idea. What does it mean to be called a Christian? Many believers have a low self-image of themselves. They know they are saved by the blood of Jesus and are sincerely grateful for it, but along with that privilege come so many heavy responsibilities. Privileges like blessings must be counted or we lose sight of them, so Paul enumerates them for his readers.

1. They have the written word of God **verse 17a.**
2. They have the right to call the one true God their God (**Hosea 2:23, Romans 9:25-26**) **verse 17b.**
3. Because they had the word, they had the capacity to know the will of God **verse 18a.**
4. Because they knew the will of God, they could make more valid decisions based upon revealed knowledge **verse 18b.**

Verses 19-20: The Responsibilities

It is a reality of life that with every privilege comes a corresponding responsibility; so Paul brings them to mind immediately, lest we forget.

1. To share the word with the sinner who is blind because of a lack of revealed knowledge **verse 19a.**
2. To share the light of the one true God with those who in spiritual darkness are worshiping any old thing **verse 19b.**
3. To share God's will with the ignorant **verse 20a.**
4. To share true wisdom with children who will find it nowhere else **verse 20b.**

As we expand our view of ourselves through Paul's concise listing of privileges and responsibilities, we begin to see what a Christian represents from God's point of view. We are, "**...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but now are the people of God**" **1 Peter 2:9-10a.** What a marvelous picture of our purpose in this world, and what a privilege it is to be trusted with responsibility.

Verses 21-29: The Dangers Of The People Of God

"You therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you commit sacrilege? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God through the breaking of the law? For 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,' as it is written. For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who with (both) letter and circumcision (are) a breaker of the law? For he is not a Jew who is (one) outwardly, nor is that circumcision (which) is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is (one) inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

Verses 21-24: Hypocrisy And Offense

Being told that we need to be more responsible is a very difficult charge to accept gracefully. It usually means that we are not thought to be dependable nor can we act reliably without supervision. Almost no one can accept this kind of criticism objectively. In **verse 21-23** Paul is accusing the Jews of not fulfilling their responsibilities as the people of God. He first lists all their responsibilities and then points out their failure to live up to them. The natural reaction of the Jewish reader is to object. Paul anticipates their objections and proceeds to show how dangerous it can be to accept the privileges without fulfilling the responsibilities of the children of God. If Christians take in all the blessings of God and refuse to share them, they become a negative witness, an offense to man and an embarrassment to God. This is Paul's evaluation of the Jews.

Because of their abuse of privilege, Paul gives three examples of character flaws typical of the Jewish nation at this point in their history. The first flaw in **verses 21-23** is hypocrisy. Jesus talks more about the sin of hypocrisy than any other sin. Its great danger is that it is the only sin I can think of that hides the sin from the sinner. A hypocrite is someone who thinks he is something he is not. A hypocrite is destructive both to himself and to those whom he offends.

The second flaw which appears in **verse 24** is offense. The sin of offense is doing damage to someone's spiritual well-being by your words or deeds. Jesus warns of the danger of this sin in **Matthew 18:6-7a**: **"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses!"**

Verses 25-29: Ritual And Reality

The third character flaw of the Jewish people was their orthodoxy. They were infatuated with the rituals and traditions of Judaism. In and of themselves these things are not flaws, but when rituals and traditions become an end in themselves, the reality behind them get lost and suddenly what is called worship is just going through the motions.

Circumcision was the heart of Judaism, and Paul goes directly to this rite to expose the danger it had become to the Jews. He said that the rite of circumcision was of no value if it was not accompanied by a yielding to the will of God. His statement about the **"circumcision of the heart"** **verse 29** should direct the minds of his Jewish readers to **Jeremiah 4:4**. **"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."**

Chapter Three

Verses 1-8: Objections Of The People Of God

"What advantage then has the Jew, or what (is) the gain of circumcision? Much in every way! First because to them were entrusted the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God of no effect? Certainly not! Rather, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: *'That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged!'* But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? (Is) God unjust who inflicts wrath? I speak as a man. Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And (why) not (say), 'Let us do evil that good may come?' -- as we are slanderously reported and as some report that we say. Their condemnation is just."

Paul has touched upon a very controversial subject. To the Jews, circumcision was as sacramental as baptism is to Christians. It was the symbol of Jewishness. So when Paul says that a true Jew was one who has a circumcision of the heart and not just of the body, he expects a vehement argument from His Hebrew readers.

Whenever controversial issues are broached, matters can easily get out of hand. Immediately issues like abortion, or civil rights, or equal rights or even prayer in public places, come to mind. When people try to discuss such matters, it seems that emotion takes the place of reason, and the whole argument becomes an exercise in futility. Paul expects his remarks about the value of circumcision to produce such emotion charged objections from the Jewish readers. Consequently Paul creates an imaginary dialogue between himself and a Hebrew. He wishes to demonstrate how quickly an unobjective objector can get from a legitimate question, "**What advantage then has the Jew?**" to out and out sacrilege.

It is helpful for readers to look at **verses 1-8** as a debate and to paraphrase the questions and answers in a way that applies to Christianity today, such as:

Question 1: "If God has such high expectation of us, then what good does it do to be the people of God? It seems to be more trouble than it is worth," **verse 1.**

Answer: "There are more advantages than you can count. Don't forget about all the privileges you have," **verse 2.**

Question 2: "So what if some of us don't live up to God's expectation? He has made a deal with us and as a loving God, He has to live up to it even if we don't," **verse 3.**

Answer: "That's so ridiculous that I won't even try to argue with you. Just read what King David said in **Psalm 51:4,**" **verse 4.**

Question 3: "If our lousy conduct makes God look good by comparison, then where's the beef? What is He upset about? He shouldn't punish us for that," **verse 5.**

Answer: "You are really confused. If God overlooked your sin, how could He judge a place like Sodom and Gomorrah?" **verse 6.**

Question 4: "If I'm a liar and my lies make God's truthfulness more evident, then in my own way I'm really giving glory to God, aren't I?" **verse 7.**

Answer: "This sounds too much like the false teaching some accuse me of, and it is foolishly sacrilegious. All I'm going to say is anyone who thinks that way deserves what is going to happen to them," **verse 8.**

We Are All Guilty

Romans 3:9-20

"What then? Are we better? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: *'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understand; there is none that seek after God. They have all gone out of the way; together they have become unprofitable; there is none who does kindness, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery (are) in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.'* Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be answerable to the judgment of God. Therefore by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before Him; for through the law (is) the knowledge of sin.

The Latin word *persona* means mask. In Greek and Roman drama the actors wore larger than life masks. These masks were designed to show different emotions that could easily be discerned from the back row of the amphitheater. If an actor's role demanded a shift from tears to laughter, the mask would have to be changed. The theater preserves this ancient practice in its logo, the tragicomedy masks.

How revealing it is, that the English word *personality* comes from the Latin word *persona*. Our personality is our mask. We develop our personality to project an image of ourselves that is, in reality, a masquerade. Little children are quite transparent. When they lie, they are obvious. When they try to be devious, they fool no one except another child. However, as children mature, they become better and better at wearing the right mask for the right occasion. In varying degrees we are all guilty of this sort of play acting. Shakespeare was right when he wrote, All the world's a stage."

What are we hiding? Paul's answer for that is a corrupt character. We need to wear masks to hide a nature that has been corrupted by sin. We have a genetic disorder, a

terminal illness passed on from one generation to another for which no human remedy has been found. No matter how well we control our behavior, it is only a cosmetic camouflage over a nature that has been spoiled by sin.

Verses 9-18: We Are All Under Sin

Paul proposes one last question for a lengthy argument that he began back in **Chapter 1:18** with this thought ... no one can become righteous in God's eyes by keeping the law. Considering the privileges and responsibilities of the Jews, the people of God, are they any better off than the Gentiles? Paul says, no! They have failed to keep the law, they are sinners, they must be justified in the same manner as the Gentiles, **verse 9**.

Paul said he has already demonstrated the guilt of all in the preceding sections of his letter. He proved the guilt of the Gentiles in **Chapter 1:18-32** and of the Jews in **Chapters 2:1-3:20**. Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles, but he had a great concern for the spiritual recovery of the Jews (**Romans 9:1-5**), so he carefully builds his case against them, not out of spite, but out of love.

In **verse 9**, we find the singular use of the word *sin* for the first time. In this first unit of Paul's letter (**Romans 1:1-5:11**), the singular occurs only three times -- **Chapters 3:9; 3:20; 4:8**. In the second unit (**Romans 5:12-8:39**), it is used thirty-nine times. There is a fundamental difference between *sin* and *sins*. In the first unit Paul shows us how God provides a forgiveness for our *sins*. In the second unit he shows us how God delivers us from our *sin*. It is important that we do not confuse our bad behavior (*sins*) with the cause of our behavior (original or indwelling *sin*).

In **Romans 1:18-3:9**, Paul has proven by logic and human reason that all men are guilty before God. In **verses 10-18** he turns to an even surer method of clinching his argument with his Jewish readers. He quotes from the Old Testament to prove his point, and he uses a method of debate he learned in rabbinical school. It was very familiar to the Jews, and the Pharisees called it *stringing pearls*. They would take a number of selected verses from a variety of sacred writings and develop their argument from them. The power of their argument rested upon the unchanging power of the Word of God. The skill of making a string of pearls was in the selection and orderly presentation of the verses. It is necessary for the readers to look up the verses to see how cleverly Paul has strung his text together. Portions of verses, whole verses, multiple verses are all joined together to form one cohesive and powerful conclusion: "**They (we) are all under sin,**" **3:9b**.

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| a. Psalm 14:1-3 | (Romans 3:10-12) |
| b. Psalm 5:9b | (Romans 3:13a) |
| c. Psalm 140:3b | (Romans 3:13b) |
| d. Psalm 10:7a | (Romans 3:14) |
| e. Isaiah 59:7-8 | (Romans 3:15-17) |
| f. Psalm 36:1b | (Romans 3:18) |

The accusation in **verse 10**, "**There is none righteous**," now clearly comes not from Paul, but from a Holy God looking down upon an entire planet full of unholy beings. God sees a world in which He finds no one free of an evil dynamic called *sin*, a domination that so distorts the mind of man, that no one understands God, **verse 11**, and no one by their own reason or senses can seek or come to God, **verse 12**.

Humanity tends to have a highly inflated value of its intrinsic worth (Humanism), but God's evaluation, the only one that counts, has found the human race totally worthless, **verse 12**. This corruption of human character manifests itself in conduct. Paul has chosen verses to illustrate humanities' violent aggressive tendencies in word, **verses 13-14**, and in deed, **verses 15-16**.

When one has no peace with God, peace will also be lacking in all other areas of life. People who are not or will not be reconciled with God have no peace of mind, nor will they have peace with man, **verse 17**. When the principle of *sin* dominates a person's life, there can be no regard for the will of God or fear of His authority, **verse 18**. The fear of God is a necessary ingredient for survival. Solomon said in **Proverbs 1:7**, "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.**" The thief on the cross asked his partner in crime, "**Do you not even fear God,**" (**Luke 23:40b**). No answer from the thief has been recorded, nor do we need one. He was where he was, acting the way he was because he did not fear God. Jesus, however, did give a reply, "**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise,**" (**Luke 23:43b**). One thief feared God and survived; the other did not and died.

Verses 19-20: We Are All Under The Law

Paul has too much experience in debating with wily Jewish churchmen to let them off the hook now. He reminds them of an obvious fact: What the law says was intended primarily for those to whom it was given (the Jews). Paul has produced proof from their own laws. He quotes Scriptures given expressly to the Jewish Nation, that they together with the whole world stand guilty before the throne of God, **verse 19**.

The argument moves to its inexorable conclusion, that no one can get right with God by keeping the law, **verse 20**. This produces one final question: What good then is the law? Paul answered this unspoken question with the first use of the law. The law exposes *sin* in our life. By the law, we can recognize our sinful nature (original sin). All this can sound very cheerless, and there are many who object to this gloomy view of human worth. They base their objection on the fact that they have personally not committed the sins listed in Paul's string of pearls. Like the rich young man who told Jesus that he kept all the laws from little on (**Mark 10:20**), they refuse to look inside themselves. They have come to believe their own masquerade. They must look into the mirror of their souls and examine their motives rather than their actions. It can be devastating to our self-image as we begin to see greed, lust, hatred, resentment, rebellion, jealousy and malice peeping through our carefully constructed facade. But they are

evidence of the principle of *sin* in our lives, even though we do not allow them to enter into an active stage. This the law calls *sin*, and we are all under the law.

Pardoned

Romans 3:21-31

Verses 21-26: The Righteousness From God

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and upon all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified without cost by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth, a mercy seat through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, in the tolerance of God through the passing over of the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate in the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

When I was a child growing up in Milwaukee, like children everywhere, I couldn't wait for school to end and summer vacation to begin. Unfortunately I spent more of my vacation time than I care to remember as a prisoner in my own home.

The reason for this confinement was not cruel parents or my antisocial behavior but a tiny virus, so small that it escaped detection for years. This tiny virus crippled and killed children. The disease it caused was called poliomyelitis, or polio for short. Its favorite time was summer, and polio epidemics reached their peak in July and August. There was no cure for polio, and since it was believed to be contagious, the only safety measure available was to keep children apart. So parks, pools and playgrounds were closed, and parents were told to keep their children confined to their yard or home.

It is difficult to explain to later generations what an impact that silent, invisible killer had upon the quality of our lives. It is equally difficult to communicate the relief felt around the world on April 12, 1954, when it was announced that Dr. Jonas E. Salk had developed a safe and effective vaccine for polio.

These childhood memories surface each time I read **Romans 3:21**. They help to bring a relevancy to God's remarkable remedy for sin that I too often take for granted. Polio was dreadful and frightening, but for the ultimate in bad news, nothing can compare to Paul's conclusion in **verse 20**, **"Therefore by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before Him"**. God gave us rules to live by; we cannot live up to them, and there is no way we can make up for our failure. The verdict is guilty, the penalty is death, **Romans 6:23a "...The wages of sin is death."**

The apostle has carefully brought us face to face with this grim reality so that when he gets to the good news, **verse 21**, we will hear it for exactly what is, a reprieve from heaven. Humanity can breathe a collective sigh of relief because God has provided

a way to be justified other than by keeping the law. This plan is stated in **verse 22**, **"Through faith in Jesus Christ to all and upon all who believe."**

"The righteousness of God" could be better translated "God's plan of making us righteous." The apostle now proceeds to detail the nature of the doctrine of **"justification by faith,"** the main theme of Romans. In **verse 21**, Paul tells his Jewish readers that this was not a new teaching but one clearly proclaimed in the Old Testament. In the following chapters Paul will offer proof of this from the law and the prophets. Wherever Paul went, he was careful to make his point in this fashion. Before King Agrippa he said, **"...to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come,"** (Acts 26:22).

Paul uses the word *all* in both **22 and 23**. Most of us use this word in a generic fashion such as, "I'm all worn out" or "I'm all ears." So we tend to skip over it. But when Paul uses it we must slow down and view it literally rather than generically. God's plan is available to every living soul -- young, old, brilliant, slow-witted, male, female. It has nothing to do with a person's value as society measures value.

Justification is not only for everyone, but it is also **"without cost,"** **verse 24**. It may be true that there is no such thing as a free lunch in this world of ours, but in God's world His grace is completely gratuitous. Grace is never a reward. God saves us without a just cause. This does not mean that God ignores sin, but rather that God has dealt with sin, **verse 25**. The word *redemption* means the price paid to buy back a hostage. Unfortunately, we live in an age where hostage taking is all too familiar; but it does bring a relevancy to the word that might be missed in less violent times. The hostage price God paid was **"...with precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot,"** (1 Peter 1:19). God remains a God of justice, **verse 26**. His freely given grace now has a foundation is historical fact -- the cross. His tolerance with sin in the pre-Christian world was with Good Friday in mind. The law is satisfied, God is just. He justifies all who have faith in Jesus Christ without the works of the law. God is love; He is both **just and justifier**.

Verses 27-31: Conclusion

"Where then (is) the boasting? It was excluded. By what law; of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (Is He) the God of the Jews only? ((Is He) not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since in deed (it is) one God who justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! But we establish the law."

Grace was costly, not to man, but to God. Redemption comes to man without effort on his part. What do we conclude from this? We have nothing to brag about, but pride in achievement is a very human, very natural emotion. From babyhood on we are in competition with one another to achieve, to have something to boast about. And, as

long as it does not turn to arrogance, pride in achievement can be very healthy for society. But when we insist upon bringing it into religion and our relationship with God, we lose all sense of God's sacrifice. God did all the work; we reap all the benefits. When we are given something valuable, free and clear, no strings attached, the only possible response is "thank you." Receiving something you neither earned nor deserved (justification) produces gratitude, not pride. With this in mind, Paul concludes **Chapter 3** with a clear and concise declaration of the doctrine of justification by faith.

Chapter Four

Faith And Works

Romans 4:1-5

Verses 1-3: What About Abraham?

"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has ground of boasting, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? '*Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness.*'"

God's dealing with His chosen people did not start with Moses and the law, but with Abraham and grace, four centuries before Sinai. So Paul anticipates an objection from his Jewish readers. He has just stated that salvation comes not by keeping the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So what about Abraham? **verse 1**. He didn't know about Christ; and yet, God called him **"My friend"** (Isaiah 41:8) and said **"...all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws,"** (Genesis 26:4b-5). This may sound like a strong argument for justification by works. And Paul agrees that if Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, **verse 2**; however, Paul adds **"...but not before God."** As convincing as the argument sounds, it will not work where it really counts -- **"before God."**

Paul turns to Scripture in **verse 3** to support his case of justification by faith. He quotes **Genesis 15:6**, it is the only time Abraham's righteousness is spoken of in the Old Testament, and it mentions his believing, not his doing. Abraham did not come to God. God came to Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia living in spiritual darkness (**Acts 7:2-3**). God acted, Abraham believed God and was counted righteous. In the same fashion, justification was reckoned to all pre-Christian believers. To believe the word of God is the equivalent of believing Jesus Christ. **"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,"** (John 1:1).

Verses 4-5: Works Do Not Produce Righteousness

"Now to him who works, the wages are not credited as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness,"

Work is an important part of life. Most of us understand the value of job occupation and wages. We admire people who have good work ethics. We approve of the law of production-consumption which, simply stated, says we contribute as much to the society in which we live as we take from it. These are the values of our pilgrim and pioneer forefathers, and they are good ones.

A problem arises, however, when we try to apply these same principles to religion, or, more specifically, to salvation. Our entire upbringing taught us that we will

get what we pay for, and we have an innate suspicion of anyone who offers something for nothing. So, when God offers the priceless gift of salvation, free and clear, He is met with skepticism more often than gratitude. In an ignorance born of pride, many view God's plan of salvation as a form of divine welfare and want no part of it. They are going to earn their own way to heaven, and they are not interested in receiving charity, even from God. Others are willing to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as partial payment, but they want to contribute something also. These base their salvation upon a combination of faith and works.

This seductive power of work righteousness is so strong and so appealing that we can't seem to rid ourselves of it, even in the church. The attraction lies in an appeal to our pride in ourselves. It allows us to think of ourselves as intrinsically good people who get out of line on occasion, rather than corrupt people pretending that we are not. So, it becomes imperative that believers learn to recognize it when it appears, and to know the difference between faith and works.

Faith is a dependency upon and trust in a valid object. Many people live by faith, but they have faith in an invalid object. There is only one valid object for our faith; that is Jesus Christ. Faith makes us totally dependent upon the grace of God to justify the ungodly.

Works are man's dependency upon his own merit to earn God's favor. It is born out of pride, and is sustained by the belief that with a good effort one can fulfill all the requirements, whatever they are. Many practice a combination of faith and works. God and man in a joint effort to effect salvation. This is futile because the two are naturally incompatible as a means of salvation. Faith depends upon God's grace; works depend upon man's effort.

The point has been made and will continue to be made that "**...him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness,**" verse 5. The phrase "**God justifies the ungodly**" implies two things: First, that all men are sinners; and, secondly, that God regards them this way when He justifies them. He does not justify them because He sees some merit or value in them. If we continue to see some merit in us that God does not see, we block the process of justification. This is not difficult to understand, but it does raise one last question. What value, if any, is there in good works? James has the perfect answer for this question, (**James 2:14-26**). If it seems that James and Paul are in complete disagreement, there are many who would agree, but both are correct. Paul makes no reference to sanctification in **verses 1-3**. His interest lies in proving that righteousness with God can be obtained only through faith (**Justification**). James, on the other hand, is defining sanctification. **Romans** contrasts faith with non-faith; **James** contrasts faith with phony faith. Paul's concern is saving faith; James' concern is working faith. Works are the natural product of faith. Works do not produce forgiveness, but forgiveness produces works. Our works make our faith visible (**James 2:22**).

Forgiveness

Romans 4:6-15

Verses 6-8: The Blessedness of Forgiveness

"Just as David also declares the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not count sins.'"

David was a man who understood forgiveness. Paul used David's **Psalm 32:1-2a** to prove that justification by faith apart from keeping the law was clearly taught in the Old Testament. As you look over all eleven verses of **Psalm 32**, David's deep expressions of guilt and his genuine appreciation of forgiveness is easily identified. In the verses Paul quoted, three things are mentioned that show how well David understood forgiveness.

1. **"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven," verse 7a.** The word *forgiven* here means *sent away*. God gave the Israelites a marvelous visual aid of what *sent away* really meant. **Leviticus 16:7-26** describes the symbolism of the scapegoat. The ritual took place after the evening sacrifice on the day of atonement. The high priest laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat, confessing over it all the sins and transgressions of the people during the previous year. The goat was then led away into the wilderness and set free to signify the carrying away of Israel's sins which God had forgiven. Believers today need to see the connection between the symbolism of the goat and the reality of the cross. **"For He made Him who knew no sin (to be) sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.," 2 Corinthians 5:21.**
2. **"whose sins are covered," verse 7b.** **Isaiah 44:22** and **Micah 7:19** are two more Old Testament verses that express the idea of sins covered or put out of sight. Today, if a co-worker asks us to cover for him or her, we know exactly what they mean. They are asking us to take their place and assume their responsibilities. Likewise, Jesus covers for us and assumes our responsibilities before the judgment seat of God.
3. **"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not count sins," verse 8.** David does not say that God does not count sins. He does, but He does not count it against the believing sinner. Christians must feel the same joy David expresses for his forgiveness, and deal with one another as God deals with us. Paul gives a perfect example of this in his letter to **Philemon**. He is sending his letter with a runaway slave named *Onesimus*, whom he is returning to his owner, Philemon. In the Roman Empire a fugitive slave must be punished as an example to other slaves. The penalty could be anything from an *F* branded on the forehead for *fugitivus* to death by crucifixion. Paul was appealing to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus the same way Jesus appeals to the Father on our behalf. **"But if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account" Philemon, verse 18.**

True appreciation of forgiveness involves understanding, as David did, what you have been forgiven from. Strange as it may seem, the forgiveness of God is the most difficult thing to give away in converting an unbeliever. Many subconsciously feel anger when they are told about God's forgiveness. They do not feel guilty of any serious wrong doing, so they feel no need for forgiveness. They are offended at the thought. Simon, the Pharisee, was like that. He invited Jesus to a dinner party at his home. Simon was offended by a woman, who came uninvited, and washed Jesus' feet with her tears, then wiped them dry with her hair. After telling Simon a story about debt and forgiveness, Jesus said, **"Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" Luke 7:47.** The woman knew what she had been forgiven from; Simon did not. The woman worshiped her Forgiver; Simon criticized Him.

Like Simon, we Christians have a tendency to think that because our actions are not visibly bad, we are not so bad. So far in **Romans**, God has taken great pains to show us that we are indeed wrong, fundamentally wrong, and only the blood of the Lamb can make amends for that wrong. One of the characteristics of a person who understands forgiveness, is a willingness to forgive. If you are aware of what you have been forgiven for, you will be ready and able to do what God has commanded us to do -- to forgive one another as He has forgiven us.

Verses 9-11: Who Should Be Blessed?

"(Is) this blessedness on the circumcision (only) or also on the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was credited to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those that believe though uncircumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them also,"

Paul turns again to Abraham to demonstrate God's method of dealing with the sins of mankind. Circumcision was a ritual that set the Jews apart from the rest of humanity. They came to regard circumcision as a form of justification, and were deeply offended by the thought that an uncircumcised Gentile could be treated to the same forgiveness as a circumcised Jew. This had become a painful problem in the church at Galatia. Christian Jews were insisting that the ceremonial law of Judaism was an essential part of God's plan of salvation. Paul called the Galatians foolish for putting up with this sort of false teaching, particularly circumcision. He wrote, **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love," Galatians 5:6.** It has always been a tendency of the people of God to rely too heavily upon ritual and tradition, often at the expense of faith. When it occurs, it must be addressed at once. Fellow believers need to be warned how foolish it is to trust the practice of religion rather than to trust God.

Paul points out in **verses 9 & 10** that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised; in fact, it happened fourteen years earlier, so he obviously was not justified because he was circumcised. Circumcision was a confirmation of the righteousness that God had given to Abraham, **verse 11**. It was an outward sign of an inward seal engrafted by faith.

Verses 12-15: Abraham, The Father Of All Believers

"and the father of circumcision not only to those who are of the circumcision, but also who also walk in the steps of faith which our father Abraham (had) while uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world (was) not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law (are) heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, for the law produces wrath; for where there is no law (there is) no disobedience."

Forgiveness endowed by God upon sinners who have done nothing to earn it produces profound joy in the lives of the redeemed. It is available to all who respond to God's word in the same way our spiritual father, Abraham, did, by believing Him. The law was given through Moses, 430 years after God justified Abraham through faith. Paul states categorically that it was not by the law, but by faith that Abraham and his offspring received the promise. It is clear that in this complex and often confusing world of human religious tradition and ritual, God is simply looking for humble believers in Him who justifies the ungodly.

The Faith Of Abraham

Romans 4:16-22

Verses 16-18: Abraham Believed God

"Therefore (it is) of faith that (it might be) according to grace so that the promise may be certain to all the seed, not only to those of the law, but also to those of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written '*I have made you a father of many nations*' in the presence of Him whom he believed, God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which are not as though they are; who more than hope, believed in hope, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been said, '*So shall your descendants be.*'"

Paul concludes, based on the previous passages, that God chose to make man righteous by faith alone, for two reasons, **verse 16**. One, He must give salvation by grace and grace alone. It must be seen as completely undeserved and unmerited. Secondly, salvation must be attainable for all humanity on an equal basis. If works were a criteria for salvation, no one could know for certain if they had worked enough to earn it. Salvation by works offers no security, only anxiety.

Abraham was the physical father of the Jewish nation, but he is also the spiritual father of all who are righteous because they believe God. Abraham set a standard of faith

in the Old Testament that is unparalleled. Paul has been talking about faith from the very beginning of his letter to the Romans. Since everything depends upon faith, it is quite logical for Paul to use Abraham as an example of what constitutes genuine faith. In **verses 17 and 18**, he presents three remarkable aspects of Abraham's faith. Abraham believed God who:

1. **"gives life to the dead," verse 17a.** God waited until it was physically impossible for Abraham and Sarah to be parents; then He gave them a son. Before the pregnancy, Sarah found the whole idea laughable, but Abraham believed, **Genesis 18:10-15**. This conviction that he had a God who could bring dead things to life was shown clearly in **Genesis 22** when Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. We all share this belief with Abraham as we trust God to resurrect us as He did His Son.
2. **"calls those things which are not as though they are," verse 17b.** Abraham heard God say, **"No longer shall your name be called Abram** (exalted father), **but your name shall be Abraham** (father of multitudes); **for I have made you a father of multitudes," Genesis 17:5.** God did not say *I will make you a father of multitudes*; in the mind of God it was already an accomplished fact. The fact that Sarah was not yet pregnant was irrelevant both to God, the doer, and to Abraham, the believer.
3. Required him to believe where there was no earthly reason to believe, **verse 18.** Abraham believed even when it was irrational and, from the human standpoint, foolish to believe.

Verse 19: Abraham Understood the Problem

"And not being weak in the faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead since he was about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb."

Abraham was not naive. He understood that what God had promised him twenty-five years earlier was no longer humanly possible. But Abraham's faith was not a product of naiveté. He was fully conversant with the problem, **Genesis 17:15-27**, and though he had no idea how God was going to do what He promised to do, he never doubted that it would be done. He did think it was humorous, **Genesis 17:17**, because he was impotent and Sarah was past menopause, but he did not doubt.

The brothers and sisters who live by the faith of Abraham are often called naive by the cynics of this world. They claim that we just don't understand the problems, and, if we did, we would not be so calm and trusting; we would be stressful and panicky just like reasonable people are supposed to be.

Verses 20-22: Abraham Was Strengthened By The Problems

"He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore *'it was credited to him for righteousness.'*"

Although Abraham had little information upon which to base his faith, he trusted God to do what was not physically possible. Abraham understood the problem and not only did he not lose confidence, but his faith actually grew stronger. He was able to give God glory based upon the promise alone. One of the characteristics of a faith that trusts God to do the impossible is growth. Abraham trusted God, and his faith was strengthened. He could praise God for doing what God was going to do before He did it. It is sad that many believers cannot pattern their lives after the faith of Abraham. They limit the power of God in their lives by having low expectations. They don't expect or give God room to work wonders in their lives.

The Faith Of Us

Romans 4:23-25

"But it was not written for his sake alone that it was credited to him, but also for us (and) to whom it is about to be credited, to those that believe on him who raised Jesus our Lord from among the dead, who was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification."

In these last three verses of chapter 4, the attention turns from Abraham to the reader. It is important that we apply these verses to ourselves. Abraham was a very special man, and it is not surprising in the least that God treated him with special favor (grace). But it does come as a surprise for many people that God is willing to deal with us, very unspecial people, in the same way He dealt with Abraham. In order for application to begin, we must understand that unwavering faith is based upon knowledge. Abraham trusted God because he knew God; and we, who are deemed righteous by the same standard of measurement as Abraham, know more about God than he did. Abraham believed before the fact; we believe after the fact.

The Christian church has always set a high priority on knowing what you believe. In the early church the problem was compounded by the scarcity of biblical text and a high rate of illiteracy. It was very difficult for an individual to discover biblical truth on their own. A solution for this was the development of easily memorized symbols. The oldest symbol we have, the Apostles' Creed, dates back to about 50 A.D. But symbols can easily become icons if our faith is based on memorized word rather than the knowledge of God's word. We in the modern church have the printed word of God available to all, something that Paul would have given his right arm to have. We are the most literate people the world has ever seen, and, yet, so many believers readily admit biblical illiteracy so they don't have to talk about it. We have the tendency to rely upon our symbols and liturgies so we can avoid the hard work of searching out the truth in scripture. We have become too much like the Jewish church of Jesus' day. Their faith was based upon their symbols, like the Passover, and even though they adored the

festival, they missed its meaning, so they didn't recognize their real Passover Lamb when He did come.

Abraham knew in what he believed. At this point in Romans it is healthy for the readers to contemplate what they believe. What do you have faith in? To simply say, "I have faith," says nothing for everyone has faith. An atheist has enormous faith that there is no God. A child's faith in the reality of Santa Claus puts the faith of many Christians to shame. From the moment you get up in the morning until you go back to bed at night, you exercise countless acts of faith. You have faith that the time on your clock radio is right and you can sleep for ten more minutes. You have faith that the lights will go on when you flip the switch. You have faith that the chair you sit on will hold your weight. As you step into a car, an elevator or an airplane you are expressing your faith in their safety. But at one time or another in your life, all these things can or will fail you. The atheist will die and discover that, indeed God exists, but too late. Santa Claus turns out to be a fat impostor with a phony beard. Clocks stop, electricity fails, furniture breaks, cars and planes crash, and elevators get stuck no matter how much faith you have in them. Faith is only as valid as its object. Your faith is not nearly as important as what you have faith in. What do you have faith in? Peter said, "**...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and respect,**" **1 Peter 3:15b**. For many believers, this is easier said than done. They are not sure of what they should believe, or why they should believe.

In **Romans 4:24-25**, Paul shares with us three basic things we must believe in:

1. God raised Jesus, our Lord from the dead, **verse 24b**. It was not just the death of Christ that provided the basis for our justification, but His resurrection proved Him to be the Son of God and all that He said was true.
2. Jesus was delivered over to death in order to make an expiation for our sins, **verse 25a**. If it had been possible for us to obtain righteousness in any other way, then the awful sacrifice of God would not have been necessary. Then when Jesus prayed in the garden, "**...Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me,**" **Matthew 26:39b**, it would have been. But God insisted upon the cross. Peter's wonderful sermon in **Acts 2:14-36** covers the same material as does Paul's letter to the **Galatians 3:1-25**.
3. Jesus was raised to life to complete the work of justification, **verse 25b**. His resurrection was proof that His work of atonement was acceptable to the Father.

Chapter 5

Rejoice

Romans 5:1-11

Verse 1: Rejoice In The Present

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Chapter 5 begins with, **"Therefore, since..."** Paul rests his case. He is satisfied that the principle has been proven beyond any shadow of a doubt. Now he turns to the implications of this doctrine and our response to it. The immediate advantage of our justification is **"peace with God."** We were God's enemies, **verse 10**. While we were controlled by our sinful minds, we were hostile toward God, **Romans 8:7**, but now we have peace with God. We can rejoice in the here and now because our war with God is over, won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. We are released from guilt, fear of retribution and hostility toward God.

Because we now possess this peace with God, other types of peace are available to us such as peace of mind and peace with our neighbor. Once the conflict between God and ourselves is resolved, we are able to turn inward and find peace with ourselves. God is working in us; He is in control. The maker is producing His product and we can be content with what He is doing. So, being content with ourselves and armed with the assurance of forgiveness, we are able to reach out to each other in genuine love. We can forgive and care for as we have been forgiven and cared for.

Verse 2: Rejoice In The Future

"through whom also access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

The concept of grace is difficult and perhaps one of the least understood of God's gifts. Undeserved favor seems such a weak expression for such a grand reality. Here Paul presents the very helpful picture of a believer standing in a pool of grace. The idea of being totally surrounded and protected by the approval of our God is a stunning picture of our security in the kingdom of God. Equipped with this picture of present security, we turn eyes upward and contemplate the joy of our future glory.

Because of God's grace working in us and as a consequence of our faith, we rejoice in the **"...hope of the glory of God."** Hope could be better translated as *confidence*. The Greek noun *elpis* is derived from the verb *elpo* which means to anticipate, usually with pleasure and confidence. We can have tremendous confidence in our future. God has unimaginable blessings in store for us, so wonderful that no matter how we may be hurting now, we can rejoice and wait in breathless anticipation for what our future glory will be like. As John said in his first letter, **"Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,"** 1 John 3:2. Being like Jesus is an exciting basis for joy.

Verses 3-5: Rejoice In Problems

"And not only (that) but we also rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patient endurance and endurance, character, and character, confidence. Now confidence does not shame (us), because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by The Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Finding a source of joy in our future is only the first level of rejoicing, the second is **"rejoicing in tribulations."** Many Christians seem to think that the first level of rejoicing is all the joy there is in this life. They practice a 'suffer now, enjoy later' religion. The trouble is they rarely, if ever, seem to be enjoying themselves, which makes a poor witness for Christian living. As a result, many people hold the opinion that Christians are masochists, people who enjoy being miserable. Even many believers seem to think that following Jesus means being thoroughly miserable in this life and God will make it up to you in the next life. Sometimes we contribute to this misconception by a gloomy approach to religion. Too often a Sunday morning service looks exactly like a funeral service.

Certainly Jesus did teach that we should expect to have problems. He told us that we would be treated no better than He was, that the world would hate us and persecute us. But He never said that we should be miserable. In fact, He said just the opposite, **"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full," John 15:11.** Jesus was speaking of a joy in this life, a joy we have access to, even in the most difficult of times. A sure sign of spiritual maturity is the ability to **"Rejoice in tribulation."** It is a dominant theme in the New Testament. James told the first-century Christians, who were suffering persecution to, **"...count it all joy when you fall into many trials," James 1:2.** Peter writing to the same Christians said, **"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if need be, you have been distressed by many trials," 1 Peter 1:6.**

Rejoicing in tribulation seems to be a contradiction in terms. We are happy when things are going well; we are depressed when they are not going well and we are in trouble. Who in their right mind is going to rejoice in troubles? Christians can and often do. Paul explains how and why in the first five verses of Chapter 5. In the first four chapters, the apostle has exposed the horrible helplessness of the human condition and the divine response to that condition in Christ through whom we have obtained justification and reconciliation by faith. It is fitting and proper for Paul to conclude this first portion of his letter with how and why we can rejoice, even in the midst of very difficult circumstances.

Paul presents us with a formula for joyful living that works in **verses 3-5.** They work even when we are having all sorts of the difficulties and indignities of daily living. He says we also rejoice in our sufferings because of what we know. So the power to find joy in this life, even when under great pressure, depends upon knowledge and experience. Now any fool can learn from experience, but a wise person learns from the experience of others. Unfortunately, most of us must learn the hard way, so difficulties and suffering become a normal part of Christian living. God must apply to us the same principles that

coaches use with their athletes. They push them as hard as possible in practice so they can perform at their best during the game. We can think of our tribulations as a form of spiritual isometrics, like lifting weights. Muscles don't just grow; first you break down the tissues of the old muscle and then build new and larger ones. This is a painful process, 'no pain, no gain.'

Paul gives us four progressive stages of development in this spiritual muscle growth that enables us to **"rejoice in tribulations."**

1. **"...tribulation produces patient endurance, "verse 3b.** God has made it very clear that our well being depends upon giving over total control of our lives to Him. We must walk after the Spirit, not after the flesh. Total dependency upon God in a world that praises independence and admires the rugged individualist is very difficult to achieve. Consequently, our loving Parent gives us what we need to reach that happy state. In most cases, that means sufferings (tribulations). There are times when God will allow us to get into difficulties so severe that there is no possible way out, except to trust God and remember, in our pain, what He promised us, **"...all things work together for good to those who love God..." Romans 8:28.** As we wait upon the Lord we learn patient endurance. Impatience is our natural state of mind; patience is not natural. We have to learn it, and God does whatever needs to be done to teach us.
2. **"and endurance (produces) character," verse 4a.** So endure, trusting God, and He will provide as He always does, but only on His time schedule, not ours. This in turn produces character. As we experience the power of God to deal with human difficulties, we find it easier and easier to expect Him to do it again. A trusting believer who has had this experience doesn't have to find a psychologist for counseling the next time a problem arrives. Rather now the believer will be counseling others both by example and word. This is character.
3. **"and character, (produces) confidence," verse 4b.** As we progress along this path of experiential expectation, we develop outrageous confidence. Nothing is too big for our God. These words are no longer just good in theory, they have been proven in practice.
4. **"Now confidence does not shame (us)", verse 5a.** Paul uses the negative *not shame* rather than the positive he used for the first three terms. We can only guess why. Perhaps he wanted to avoid the word *pride* which might be misunderstood. When this Greek verb was used in military terms, it mean *put to flight* like an army being defeated, and I like to think this was what was on Paul's mind. We are in a spiritual battle of colossal proportions. Souls are at stake, and we need courage **"...to stand against the wiles of the devil," Ephesians 6:11b,** rather than to flee in disgrace. So the end product of this exercise is courage. We can look Satan and a hostile world square in the eye

and say, "Do your worst! I will continue to rejoice in the greatness of my God and His power."

Paul ends his formula with the words **"because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts....,"** verse 5b. One's first thought might be "what does love have to do with the process of rejoicing in our sufferings?" We must always remember that our God is a loving parent. Loving parents do what they must to see that their children grow up healthy and well-balanced. Everything they do is out of love. Whether it is encouraging their children to eat vegetables or disciplining them for playing in the road, it is done out of love. God is the perfect parent. In His training we can see and feel His love.

Verses 6-11: Rejoicing In The Past

"For when we were still without strength, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a just man will anyone die; yet perhaps for a good man someone might even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only (that), but also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Paul saves the best kind of rejoicing for last. We rejoice in confidence, we can rejoice in tribulations, but, most of all, we **"rejoice in God,"** verse 11. We rejoice in what God has done, in what He is and in what He will do. Christianity is an historical religion. We believe in a God who became historical fact. We can rejoice in the present and the future because of what Jesus did in the past.

The final thought of the last paragraph, **verse 5**, was about God's love being the cause of all that occurs in the lives of His children. If there is still any doubt in the minds of his readers about the love of God, Paul records the one example of God's love that stands supreme, **verses 6-8**. The death of Christ on behalf of sinful mankind has made it possible for us to be **"justified by His blood,"** verse 9. This deals with what we have done. We are saved from the penalty of sin. That Christ died is certain, but that Christ also lives is too often overlooked. Paul show us that there is much more to our salvation than just being saved from what we have done. **"We shall be saved by His life,"** verse 10, refers to the fact that Christ is the answer to what we are. The continuing life of Christ, as administered through the power of the Holy Spirit, delivers us from the power of sin, just as His death delivered us from the penalty of sin.

In **verses 10 & 11** the word *reconcile* is used three times. It is the perfect word to explain clearly what the Lord Jesus has done for us. Paul gives a full description of reconciliation in **2 Corinthians 5:18-21**. Reconciliation is the process of reuniting two parties who once loved and cared for each other and now are at odds. Husbands and wives who are contemplating divorce need to be reconciled. Children who have grown

defiant and critical of parents and feel little of the love they once had need to be reconciled. Our relationship with God was torn apart by Adam's sin. The only attitude towards God we were capable of was hostility. God brought about reconciliation with Himself through Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. This is why Jesus calls the children of God "**peacemakers**" in **Matthew 5:9**.

We are told to "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**" **Philippians 4:4**. Paul has given us the rationale for this command in **Romans 5:1-11**. We rejoice in our future glory, we rejoice in our present problems, we rejoice in our theological foundations. Surrounded by all of this divine activity, we recognize problems for what they really are -- a manifestation of God's love, a love that is vitally interested in our spiritual well-being and uses any and every means to keep us healthy.

Romans

Salvation Part II

Romans 5:12-8:39

Humanity has a twofold problem, so divinity has produced a twofold solution.

Romans 1-8 contains the two part story of salvation. In part one we saw how God dealt with the problem of our sins. **"...and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin," 1 John 1:7b.** The emphasis in the first part was upon the justifying power of the blood of the Lamb to deal with the sins of man.

Part two concentrates on how God deals with the principle of sin through the cross. In **Romans 5:12-8:39** the word *sins* never appears. Instead, we will see the word *sin* in the singular used 39 times. Salvation, Part I, explains about the forgiveness of our sins; Salvation, Part II explains our deliverance from sin. Part I takes care of what we do; Part II takes care of what we are. The blood deals with the sins, but the cross must deal with the sinner.

Reign

Romans 5:12-21

Verses 12-21

12. "For this reason, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." 13. "For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not counted when there is no law." 14. "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come." 15. "But the free gift (is) not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense the many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to the many." 16. "And the gift (is) not like (that which came) through the one who sinned. For the judgment from one (was) to condemnation, but the free gift of many offenses (is) to justification." 17. "For if by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who received the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." 18. "Therefore, as through one man's offense (judgment) came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act (the free gift came) to all men, resulting in justification of life." 19. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." 20. "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more," 21. "so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Reign can be defined as sovereign power to direct. In the last ten verses of **Romans 5**, Paul describes the forces that have power to direct our lives. We discover in this paragraph that there is a royal power in our lives that exercises control over us. The only question is, who or what is in control. This is a question that must be answered. Atheists and agnostics reject witnessing because they don't understand the question. They understand that to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord would give Him power to direct their lives. This is offensive to them. They wish to be in control of their own lives. They wish to be free. They must be convinced that no human being is ever free. We are always controlled by forces other than ourselves.

Paul has developed two major themes or teachings thus far in this letter. The condemnation and guilt of the human race that has come through the fall of Adam and the justification and righteousness that is available to all through Jesus Christ. In the concluding verses of **Romans 5**, the apostle weaves together an intricate variation of these two themes. He contrasts the work of two persons, Adam and Christ, and explains the consequences of their work as a reign or a controlling royal power in the lives of all men. One represents the reign of sin and death. The other represents the reign of grace and righteousness.

A quick reading of **verses 12-21** generally leaves the reader more confused than enlightened. If that is your feeling also, take comfort in the fact that they have been

confusing better theological minds than most of ours for centuries. Even Peter said "**...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in some, things hard to understand,**" **2 Peter 3:15b-16a**. Even so, if we fix our minds on the main issues, man's problem, *sin* and *death*, and God's solution *grace* and *righteousness*, we will find wonderful evidence of God's love for His children. It is necessary to dissect this section in the same way a student would dissect a specimen in a biology class. We must take it apart and examine it piece by piece to better understand the whole.

Paul gets to the problem immediately in **verse 12** and through the next nine verses shows us that sin and death had three stages of development. Each stage is represented by a key word or idea. The same is true for grace and righteousness. The easiest way to dissect this is to use an outline approach to it.

A. Sin and Death

1. **Entered vv. 12, 18,**
2. **Spread or abounded vv. 12, 20,**
3. **Reigned vv. 14, 17, 21.**

B. Grace and Righteousness

1. **Entered vv. 15, 16, 18, 19,**
2. **Abounded vv. 15, 17, 20,**
3. **Reigned vv. 17, 21.**

As we examine these piece by piece, we begin to feel the whole impact of Paul's two major themes and how they both are, or could be our monarchs. Adam sinned, and sin became a genetic characteristic of mankind. It is a fatal disease that increases with the birth of every child. Humanity became a helpless subject to the power of sin. This snowball effect of sin is reproduced in death, the inevitable consequence of sin. When Adam rebelled against the will of God, he suffered spiritual death. When God said, "**...in the day you eat of it you shall surely die,**" **Genesis 2:17b**, He meant it, and Adam died. And every descendant of Adam, for all time, would be born spiritually dead, divorced from fellowship with God and doomed to eternal separation from Him.

In contrast to this grim reality stands the gift of God, a Savior, a second Adam, **verse 14**, who by His sacrifice brings life and light back to mankind through the reign of grace and righteousness. God's antidote for sin and death.

As we read through these verses, it is easy to begin to wonder why Adam is getting all the blame. In the account of man's fall from grace in **Genesis 3**, it reads more like the fall of woman. The only reference to Adam is in **verse 6b**, "**She also gave it to her husband with her, and he ate.**" Nevertheless, Paul stresses, "**...by one man's sin...**" six times in **Romans 5:12, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19**. Adam's sin was a conscious decision to disobey the command of God and to take the consequences for his act of free will. Eve was misled and deceived by the most diabolical mind in creation. Adam walked right into transgression with his eyes wide open. The enormity of this one man's

act shattered the very make-up of creation and introduced into humanity something previously unknown. Through Adam's sin all mankind became subject to the tyranny of sin and death. When Adam disobeyed God, "**...many were made sinners," verse 19a.** Through Christ's obedience to God, "**many will be made righteous," verse 19b.**

The theological term for the consequences of Adam's sin is in the doctrine of original sin. It teaches that all born since the fall of Adam are conceived and born in sin, that by nature all are sinful and unclean. Many people, even Christians, are uncomfortable with this idea of hereditary sin and reject it as unjust and unfair. In **verses 13-14**, Paul proves the reality of this doctrine. He has begun to use the singular form of *sin*, instead of the plural *sins* and expects his reader to know the difference. Sins or sinning is an activity; sin is a condition. Even in the absence of the law between the time of Adam and Moses, when sins could not be labeled as such, people still died. Paul argues that since death is the consequence of sin, the reality of death is the proof of sin even without the written law.

Chapter Six

What Do You Know?

Romans 6:1-14

Verses 1-2: Know The Question

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

Paul begins by saying, **"What shall we say then?"** To understand this question, Paul wishes us to look at his two previous sentences. He said **"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,"** verse 20. The phrase, *abounded much more*, in Greek is one word. The same verb used in verse 15 for abounded is used here with the prefix *hyper*, so it means to hyper abound or super abound. Paul is saying that one result of the increase of sin in people is to make grace hyperactive. It is possible to draw a dangerously wrong conclusion from that truth, so Paul begins by asking the wrong question, **"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"** Paul assumes that we will agree with him, that the question is ludicrous. In case we had difficulty dissecting the last ten verses, Paul is stating here that there has been a change of ownership in our lives. Jesus has purchased us by His death and resurrection. A new control is present in our lives, and it would be a perversion of grace to continue to live as if sin were still our master.

Verses 3-5: Know Your Spiritual Condition

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be of (His) resurrection,"

Paul again begins his teaching with a question, this time a very important one **"Or do you not know...?"** Paul will use the word *know* three times in verses 1-14. He maintains that the more we understand about our spiritual condition, the less control sin will have in our lives. If we know that we have been crucified, buried and resurrected with Jesus, we can deal with the problem of sin through the cross rather than through the flesh, and sin shall no longer have dominion over us.

It is amazing how what we know or do not know affects how we perform. An occasion which happened many years ago flashes across my mind every time I read this section of Paul's letter. I was coaching a junior varsity football team of fairly talented athletes. It was obvious from the start of the season that they would win more games than they lost, but they were not quite championship material. On this particular Saturday, however, we were playing a team that everyone agreed would go undefeated; and if we could just not get beat up too badly, we would be doing well. The first half

went as expected. We were being beaten by three touchdowns, but we were making them work so the boys were not too ashamed of their performance. That is, until one of their fathers came into the locker room at half time and told us we were playing against their third and fourth stringers. He had talked with some parents from the other team, and they told him their coach had arranged a scrimmage for his first and second strings with another school because he didn't think we could give his boys enough competition.

Needless-to-say, this changed my team's attitude. They were no longer satisfied with their losing effort. Now they were eager to get back out on the field and wipe out this insult to their athletic ability. They did play well in the second half. We held them scoreless and scored two touchdowns of our own, but they still lost. In the locker room after the game, every team member understood that they had lost because of what they didn't know.

As I think again of the sad faces of these fine young men, I also think of the many Christians who live their lives the same way my football team played that game. Too many believers are leading defeated lives because of what they don't know.

Many Christians are ignorant of their spiritual condition. They know all about the reign of sin in their lives, and they understand that the blood of Christ cleanses them from all sin. However, they do not know that the domination of sin has been defeated in their lives, and they no longer need to be helplessly enslaved to a lifestyle they are ashamed of. Paul has established that by the blood of Christ God declares us righteous, and we are saved from the penalty of sin. But now another question arises. How can we be delivered from the power of sin? How does the righteousness endowed by God become evident in the way we live? Here Paul tells us that what we know is the basis for righteous living.

With the change of ownership in our lives comes a change in operation also. We need to understand what happened in baptism and how we became dead to the domination of sin. Through baptism we:

1. **died with Jesus. v. 3**
2. **were buried with Jesus. v. 4**
3. **rose with Jesus. vv. 4-5**

When we became a member of the body of Christ we did more than join a church, we literally became one with Him. In **John 15:5** this reality is illustrated. Jesus said, "**I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**" Our roots no longer go back to Adam and the reign of sin and death. Our roots now go back to Christ and the cross. We become one with Him. Without Him we can do nothing, we must deal with the power of sin only through the cross and our oneness with Jesus on the cross.

Verses 6-14: Know What This Means

"Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with (Him), that the body of sin might be rendered ineffective, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death has no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died to sin once for all; but in that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also count yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not yield your members as weapons of unrighteousness to sin, but yield yourselves to God as being alive from among the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

The thief on the cross was crucified along side the Lord Jesus, but **verse 6** says that we were crucified with Him, that is on the same cross with Him. This union we have with Christ on the cross has set us free from the slavery of sin, **verse 7**, and produced a power source for righteous living. This union has broken the hold sin had on our lives, and we do not have to serve sin ever again because we are under new management.

Verses 8-11 gives us more historical facts about our spiritual condition. If we died with Christ, we also live with Him. This monumental truth can change our whole attitude regarding our frustrating struggle with sin in our life. Our opponent is not an unbeatable foe, it is a defeated one. We now have access to a new life and a new power for living under the control of grace rather than sin. **Verse 11** tells us to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to Christ. The Greek verb translated *count* means exactly that, to calculate. It is a math term which gives this phrase great importance, and the cliché '*numbers don't lie*' is very true. Numbers always add up the same way. They are not subjective, and neither is the truth of our being dead to sin. You can count on it; we are **"...alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord," verse 11b.**

All Christians realize that as long as we are in our present bodies, we are going to sin. The issue in **verses 12-14** deals with control. If sin is in control, it is because we have allowed it to be, **verse 12**. We don't have to do that. Paul teaches us that Christians have been freed from the slavery of sin and do not need to be controlled by their old master again. We should understand that the words *know* and *no* are intimately related. We need to know that we can say *no* to sin. In **verses 13-14**, the apostle gives us the two steps necessary for righteous living, stop submitting to sin and start presenting our members to God as weapons of righteousness. We have little control over what we think, and our original sin makes itself very obvious there. But we can control our members. How we speak and what we do to our brothers and sisters provide an easy method of determining if we are following Paul's instructions. We can stop bruising one another with our words and deeds. We can start blessing and building up one another. It is simply a matter of obedience.

Slavery

Romans 6:15-23

Verse 15: To Sin Or Not To Sin

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!"

Many of Paul's Jewish readers who held the law in high regard were nervous about Paul's insistence upon justification by faith alone. They equated free grace with cheap grace. They believed that it would encourage believers to disregard the law completely and live their lives any way they wanted, a pro-choice sort of Christianity. This is still a concern. I once had a Buddhist in one of my classes, who really would have liked to be a Christian. She had even attended a few Christian churches, but, in her own mind, all she heard about was forgiveness. She genuinely believed that if church goers had to worry a little more about forgiveness, their behavior would be better. There is some truth to her concerns. Unfortunately, too often the bad behavior of Christians offend unbelievers and interfere with the work of the Gospel.

Paul's question is really very easy, "**Shall we sin...?**" The answer is obviously no, we should not. But it raises another question in our minds. If we should not, then why do we? The most comforting answer is because we can't help ourselves. Comforting as that may be, it is also hellishly dangerous, and how often is it true?. If we have a pro-choice lifestyle, even when we can help it, we go right ahead and sin anyhow. So the question remains; why do we do it? Are we guilty of thinking that it doesn't make any difference because God will forgive us no matter what we do? If this is our attitude, we are guilty of abusing the grace of God. So one last question arises, so what? What difference does it make as long as we believe? And at this point Satan has us back, we are again a slave to sin.

Every Christian must understand the difference between justification and sanctification. Too many believers are uncomfortable with theological terms. They love the Lord, so why bother with all the multi-syllabic words. That is much like students who think that grammar and spelling are not important for a term paper because they had the subject matter right. Faith saves us; that's justification. Works save our faith; that's sanctification. God does all the work in our justification. We participate with the Holy Spirit in our sanctification, which may be why sanctification is ignored so often. We must be concerned about our behavior. Paul says that we are living letters in **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**. Sometimes the sermon we preach with our behavior can be very disheartening. We need to know more about slavery which is the point of Paul's question.

One last thought about behavior before going into the last eight verses. There are two major aberrations from the biblical teaching on justification. They are legalism and moralism, which are still dominant in the church today. Legalism we understand because we saw how hard Jesus had to struggle with it in the Jewish Church. Moralism is a tendency to use the teachings of Jesus as a method of correcting life styles without

adequate emphasis upon Jesus Himself as the source of all help and power. **Romans, Chapter 6** lends itself all too easily to a moralistic approach.

Verses 16-23

"Do you not know that to whom you give yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness. But God be thanked that (though) you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were entrusted. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak humanly because of the weakness of your flesh. For as you gave your members into slavery to uncleanness and wickedness unto wickedness, so now give your members into slavery to righteousness unto sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of these things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul now turns from the root of sin to the fruit of sin. Jesus said, **"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?" Matthew 7:16.** The apostle equates obedience to slavery. We make a conscious choice to be obedient to sin, even though Christ has broken that bondage in our lives, or we choose to be obedient to the power of the Spirit in our lives. Our choice is made evident by our works. In **verse 16**, Paul tells us a harsh reality of life. Nobody is free! If we are not a slave of Jesus Christ, then we are a slave to sin and death. There is no other option. When you reduce the choices to the minimum, making a choice is easier. We need to remember that not to decide is to decide. The only freedom we do have is to decide who our master is. If we choose to be slaves to righteousness rather than to remain in bondage to sin, Paul gives us two things that will occur in **verse 17**. We become healthy in spirit with an obedient heart and sound of mind with good teaching. Then we are, **"...set free from sin..." verse 18a.** Jesus said, **"...if you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," John 8:31b-32.** What Jesus did not say then, Paul tells us now. We are free from sin, and now are **"slaves of righteousness," verse 18b.**

The mind and spirit are cleansed by our choice of a master, but the body continues to be a problem. Now Paul turns to that part of us in **verses 19-21**. Readers of the word know that it is impossible to stamp out sin in our lives. We have a sin infected body that insists upon making its presence known even though we choose to be slaves to righteousness. What we need to be concerned about is consistency. If we consistently give in to the influence that sin still has over our bodies, then we are still slaves of sin. If, on the other hand, when we come to those frequent forks in the road labeled *right* or *wrong*, and are consistently obedient to God's will, then we are slaves of righteousness. If we try to be obedient to both, the only thing we are consistent in, is tearing ourselves apart.

In **verse 22** Paul refers to us now as having *fruit* that produces *sanctification*. Sanctification is synonymous with spiritual maturity. Spiritual babies, just like physical babies, all look and act pretty much alike. However, as we mature, our spiritual genes take over and we begin to resemble our Father. The good food of the word will produce a healthy adult who has the power to be obedient to the Father. This is sanctification, and sanctification guarantees eternal life, **verse 23**.

Chapter Seven

Marriage

Romans 7:1-6

Verses 1-3: Married To The Law

"Are you ignorant, brothers -- I am speaking to those who know the law -- that the law rules over a man as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound to her husband by law for as long as he lives. But if the husband should die, she is released from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband is alive, she takes another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if the husband should die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man."

Paul is still speaking to his Jewish readers who have been indoctrinated into righteousness through the law as opposed to faith. Paul taught in **Romans 6:14** **"that sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."** For the Jews, as well as many Christians today, however, how to be delivered from the dominion of the law remains a mystery. The law demands much, but offers no assistance in fulfilling these demands. In **Chapter Six** Paul taught us how to be freed from the slavery of sin and to become slaves of righteousness. Here he uses an illustration of marriage to show us another change necessary in the lives of God's people.

Paul asks us to think about the disaster of a marriage where the husband is perfect. He never makes a mistake, and demands the same level of perfection from his marriage partner. The wife, on the other hand, is far from perfect, and the husband gives her no help, only criticism. No matter how hard she tries, she can never get through a day without a mistake. The poor woman cooks, sews, cleans, and washes, but if she missed one little spot of dirt, the husband points it out and gives her no credit for all the good things she has done. The man to whom she is married is a good man, no one can find any fault with him, but he and the woman are totally unsuited to one another. He cannot bring himself to accept anything short of absolute perfection, and she, despite her best effort, cannot live up to his standards.

This marriage has not been made in heaven. It is not working. The woman knows that marriage is life long, **1 Corinthians 7:10**, so she is stuck with her first husband until he dies. Then she would be free to marry another man. Imagine her horror and despair when she discovers that her perfect husband has no intention of every dying or changing his standards. She is stuck with him. While it may sound like a soap opera, it is the picture Paul presents to us in the first three verses of **Chapter 7**. The apostle is setting the stage for us to learn that being delivered from the slavery of sin is not enough. We also need to recognize our deliverance from the dominion of the law.

Paul often used marriage as an example of our spiritual relationships. Marriage is a commitment. When I strive to do something for God in preference to allowing God to do the work, I have chosen to marry the law. When I choose to operate under the law,

two insurmountable problems become inevitable. First and foremost, it is impossible to do; and secondly, I am cursed for just one mistake, the same as if I had broken every law of God, **"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of law, to do them," Galatians 3:10b;** or **"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all," James 2:10.**

Verses 4-6: Married To Christ

"Therefore, my brothers, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, Who was raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the desires of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

It is very clear to God that we are corrupt with sin and too weak to do anything about our spiritual condition. The problem more often than not seems to be that we do not know this, or at least we live as though we don't. We continue to delude ourselves with the idea that as long as we try to keep the law, we are not such miserable sinners as others we could name. Paul's illustration of marriage should drive home this rather startling truth. God did not give us the law to keep; He gave us the law to break! You will search the New Testament in vain to find one man of faith who was asked to keep the law. We are told, however, that the law was given so that there should be sin, **Romans 5:20.** A marriage to the law can only lead to frustration and defeat.

Regarding the law of God, Jesus said, **"For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one smallest letter or one smallest stroke will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled," Matthew 5:18.** How can I be united with Christ if my first husband, the law, will not die so that I can legally marry another? Paul answers that if the husband won't die, then the wife must. The key point in this section is the transition from **verse 3** to **verse 4**. The woman dies, the law does not pass away, I do, and by death I am freed from the old marriage to Mr. Law. The most obvious question is, "how do I die?" Paul's answer is found in **verse 4**. He says that on the hill of Calvary it was all done for us. God took us and placed us in the body of Christ, made us one with Him. His experience became our experience. He died; we died. He rose; we rose to a new life as His bride, **Romans 6:4.**

Verses 5-6 tell us that our union with Christ has freed us from the negatives which we too often feel chained to for life. We are freed from the control that sin has over our sinful nature, **verse 4a.** We are freed from the control of the law which only made our sinning worse, **verse 4b.** We are freed from the condemnation that must be pronounced upon all who bear the fruit of death, **verses 4c-5a.**

We are indeed the *Bride of Christ*. Although it is not always true in this age of the emancipated female, but a bride generally takes the name of her husband when she

marries. She changes her name to his. Along with his name, the wife also becomes co-owner of all her husband possesses. In the same way, we become remarkably enriched when we take the name of Christ. Everything He has is at our disposal; all of His vast resources are ours to draw upon. We no longer have to worry about working to please God. Now we bear fruit to God. The offspring of our marriage to Christ are the natural products of our intimacy with Him. This is called serving **"...in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter,"** verse 6b. One of these natural products of our marriage with Christ is something the church today never talks about, and I have no idea why. We get smarter. Paul explains this to the baby Christians in Corinth. He told them, **"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus who was made to us wisdom..."**, 1 **Corinthians 1:30a**. Paul goes on to explain to them in greater detail the mystery of this wisdom of God which the Holy Spirit teaches in **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**. In the last verse of this paragraph Paul says, **"But we have the mind of Christ,"** verse 16b. This indeed is a marriage made in heaven. An intimacy, a oneness so complete that our minds are one.

The Purpose Of The Law

Romans 7:7-25

Verses 7-13: The Law Exposes Sin

"What shall we say then; (is) the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except for the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me every (sort of) longing. For apart from the law sin (was) dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment which was to (bring) life to me, was found to (bring) death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me and by it killed (me). With the result that the law (is) holy and the commandment holy and good. Has then that which is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through that which is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."

Human nature takes a dim view of laws. We call it human nature, but God calls it what it is, sinful nature. Speed laws make sinners of us all. If the speed limit is 25 miles per hour, I am not comfortable unless I am going 30 at least. I even get impatient with those ahead of me who are keeping the law. If I see a sign that says *'wet paint, do not touch,'* I get a compulsion to touch it. I would never have thought of such a thing if there had been no sign. When we give rules to our children, should we be so surprised when they bend them? Paul shows us in this section that the law exposes sin in much the same way speed limits expose my cavalier attitude towards obeying them. By our very nature we are sinners. If God had given us no rules, we could seem to be fairly decent people. But God, as a loving parent, has given us rules, and we continue to bend them. Our sin becomes painfully obvious. The law is God's way of showing us what we are.

The problem we have with the law is that it spotlights our shortcomings. Paul suggests in **verse 7a** that some might infer from his teaching that the law is bad. The

apostle's response to that mistaken idea is "**certainly not!**" Paul goes on to explain in the following verses that the law is not only holy and just, but it also serves some beneficial functions. Paul lists two ways in which the law serves us well.

First it defines sin. The law may seem like an unpleasant taskmaster. But Paul wishes to go on record as saying that without the law he would never have known the extent to which sin permeated his life. Without the law he might have lived his whole life thinking that it was possible to please God by doing something. The law clearly defines what is right and wrong. There are many areas of human experiences that are not covered in man's law. There is no law against hatred. There is no law against selfishness. There is no law against lusting after the opposite sex or even the same sex. In Paul's case it was the tenth commandment, "**You shall not covet...**" **Exodus 20:17a**. Hidden away inside this upright young Pharisee was an unhealthy appetite to possess, an appetite that might have been dismissed as a normal human stirring if the law had not defined and condemned it, **verse 7b**.

Once the law defines sin, its second function is to expose sin by provoking it, **verses 8-9**. The law does not cause anyone to disobey God, nor cause spiritual death, **verse 10**. The law says, "**You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord,**" **Leviticus 18:5**. But sin using the law does kill us, **verse 11**. Through the pure and good law of God, sin is brought out into the open, **verse 12**. Paul found that not only was he unable to do what the law required, but the law was exposing in him how utterly sinful sin was, **verse 13**.

Verses 14-24: The Problem Of Sin

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I do, I do not understand. For what I desire, I do not do; but what I hate, that I do. For if I do what I do not wish to do, I agree with the law that (it is) good. Now then (it is) no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells nothing good; for to want is present with me, but to do what is good I do not find. For the good that I desire, I do not do; but the evil I do not desire, that I do. Now if I do what I desire not, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells in me. Then I find a law, that evil is present with me, the one who desires to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive to the law of sin which is in my members."

We Christians usually do not think of the men who recorded scripture as ordinary human beings like ourselves. We often have difficulty admitting that we are at constant war with our sinful flesh. It is too easy to form unrealistic ideas about spiritual living and begin to think that we must be perfect to please God. Paul's candid admission of his own struggle with indwelling sin can be greatly encouraging to all who live with this idealistic approach to Christian thinking.

Many readers have been puzzled by this section of **Chapter 7** and have been greatly disturbed by it. The previous chapter has announced the wonderful news that we have been set free from sin and have a new life in Christ. This chapter seems to be denying this release from the power of sin. Paul's admission that he also personally struggled with his sinful nature was never intended to be an admission of defeat. Not even a great evangelist and preacher like Paul experienced a life free from difficulty with sin. What he says in these verses has great relevancy to us in our daily battle with disobedience. They are a realistic portrayal of the conflict all Christians experience in their struggle to walk after the spirit and not after the flesh.

Paul knew that the law was spiritual, **verse 14**, and that it was not responsible for his sensual, earthy, corrupt nature. He further recognized that he was unspiritual. In short, Paul realized that the law was good and he was bad. That is what Paul knows. **Verse 15a** tells us what he doesn't know. He said that he did not understand why he did what he did. Then he categorizes his imperfections in **verses 15b-19**. No matter how yielded he became to the will of God, no matter how committed he was to the cause of Jesus Christ, sin still was able to make him do what he didn't want to do. Christians must understand that the greater we strive to serve our God, the more conscious we become of sin at work in our lives. This is normal; it is not defeat. The final victory is in sight, but while we live in these bodies, we must accept our inadequacies.

Paul now does in **verses 20-23**, what all Christians need to do when they are appalled at the power of indwelling sin. He makes a mental check list of what he just wrote and concludes that there is a civil war going on within him. Although he is a new creation in Christ, possessing a genuine desire to be obedient to God, he is still a carnal man and shall be as long as he has his earthly body. He further understands that this civil war is not really his war. It is between his spirit, born again as a new creation, and his X-rated adult body. He is a conscientious objector; he calls this third part of him the *inward man* which watches the other two natures constantly battle with one another. Although the war was won on the cross, the battles still rage daily. With his mind he serves God, while sin makes captive of his body.

Verse 24-25: Victory Over Sin

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

With the convicting power of the law, Paul was brought to the uncomfortable point of seeing how utterly helpless he was and how totally dependent he was upon God to provide a way out. **Verse 24** does not ask what, but **"Who will deliver me..."** no longer does he look to self-effort, but all his expectation rests upon another. There seems to be nothing more pleasing in the ears of the Lord than the cries of people who have realized they can do nothing. Paul's answer to his own question is as powerful as it is brief, **"...thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** Paul does not elaborate on this dramatic statement because he will deal with it more fully in the next chapter. Paul

tempers his cry of relief with the reminder that the struggle will continue. We have assurance of certain victory, but without the intervention of the living Lord Jesus it would be strictly *'no contest.'*

Chapter Eight

Spiritual Laws

Romans 8:1-13

Verses 1-4: Spiritual Lifestyle

"(There is) Therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless (to do) in that it was weak through the flesh, God (did) by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and because of sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

In scripture as in secular life, law has different meanings. The law of gravity and the law of the land represent two different uses. One is a scientific principle, and the other is a legal requirement. Paul is getting ready to introduce us to a new use of the word *law*, when he makes the triumphant statement, **"...now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."** verse 1. The reason for this reprieve, he explains is **"...the law of the Spirit of life..."** verse 2. Until now in Romans, the law has been a divine requirement; in **Chapter 8** Paul uses the law as a spiritual principle. In **Chapter 7** we saw the heartbreak of living by human effort alone and existing under the threat of divine law. In **Chapter 8** he introduces a promise of divine help that gives God's people the resources they need to become free spirits even in the midst of conflict. We discover that because we are **"in Christ,"** we are set free by **"The law of the Spirit of life."** We will always feel the pulse of the battle in our life, but we can experience both peace and consistency of living through the workings of God's Holy Spirit.

It helps a bit to understand this if we think of it as flying. We are no more capable of keeping God's law than we are able to flap our arms and fly away; but, if we sit down in an airplane and allow the jet engines to do the work, we can defy the law of gravity. Through no effort of our own we are flying. If, on the other hand, we get carried away with the experience and decide to step outside the airplane to try it on our own, the law of gravity immediately reasserts itself. Likewise, as long as we are in Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death. If we step out of Him and try to go it alone, we are again subject to the law of sin and death.

Paul includes in these four verses a wonderfully compact version of the Gospel. What the law was unable to do because of our weakness, God accomplished by sending **"His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,"** verse 3. I believe that Paul's precise turn of phrase was no accident. Paul seems to be concerned about two early misconceptions of Christ's incarnation. One of them, called *docetism*, taught that Jesus only appeared to come in human form. If Paul had said *in the likeness of flesh*, they would have some scriptural basis for their belief. If he had said, *in sinful flesh*, he would have given Christ a sinful nature like ours -- a good man, but only a man. The apostle very carefully said, **"in the likeness of sinful flesh,"** and in so doing made an enormously important point.

Jesus was unique; He was both human and divine. He lived within human flesh and with a human nature without ever succumbing to the temptations which go along with it. He was God and man. He accomplished what the law was powerless to do. He was a sinless sin offering.

In **verse 4** Paul seems to be putting a condition on our salvation by saying, "**...in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**" He also seems to be a little brief in his explanation, or lack of it, for what *walking in the Spirit* is all about. It is possible that he expects his readers to be aware of his teachings of this in an earlier letter to the Galatians. For whatever reason, it is very helpful to examine **Galatians 5:13-26**. In these verses we get a very clear picture of what *living by the Spirit* constitutes. Here Paul develops a list of things that he leaves out in **Romans 8**. We are taught that *living by the Spirit* involves producing the fruit of the Spirit which is visible to all. If we choose to walk after the flesh, Paul says that this is also very evident, **Galatians 5:19**, and gives a list of eighteen appalling products of this lifestyle. If we are counting as we read, we will find that there are only nine products of "**...The fruit of the Spirit...**". Why does the "**...works of the flesh...**" have twice as many products as "**...the fruit of the Spirit...**," **Galatians 5:22**. The law seems to be responsible for this inequity. Paul has taught us that the purpose of the law was to make sin proliferate. "**...But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through that which is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful,**" **Romans 7:13b**." It is vital that Christians understand that *walking in the Spirit* occurs only after the justifying work of Jesus. Once we are in Christ, God has every right to expect to see evidence of the power of the indwelling Spirit of life in our sanctification.

Up until this point in **Romans**, the Holy Spirit has been mentioned only twice, probably because it was Paul's intent to show the hopelessness of trying to please God by one's own effort. But, in **Romans 8** the Holy Spirit is given His rightful place in the scheme of salvation. In the first eleven verses Paul refers to Him no less than ten times, and uses four different titles beyond the name *Spirit* in **verse 1**.

1. "**The Spirit of life,**" **verse 2** takes up residence in the life of believers and sets us free from the spiritual deadness that has been such a problem. Through His presence deadness gives way to life, and slavery to freedom.
2. "**The Spirit of God,**" **verse 9a** was introduced in the second verse of the Bible, and Paul would remind us that the very Spirit of creation indwells and empowers the believer.
3. "**The Spirit of Christ,**" **verse 9b** is presented as a prerequisite for belonging to Christ. In the being of every Christian is that very same Spirit that directed and filled the Lord Jesus in His triumphant victory over Satan and sin.
4. "**The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead,**" **verse 11** is the frosting on the cake. For the apostles there was no greater demonstration of power than the resurrection of Jesus, and this power is available to all who call on His name.

In these last few chapters we have seen the stark contrast between two spiritual laws. Paul's vivid description of the law of sin and death has set the stage for our understanding of the law of the Spirit of life. If the power of indwelling sin is intimidating, the power of the indwelling Spirit of life is all the more comforting.

Verses 5-11: Mind Set

"For they that live according to the flesh have their minds set on things of the flesh, but those who (live) according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh (is) death, but to be the mind of the Spirit (is) life and peace. Because the mind of the flesh (is) enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. But if Christ (is) in you, the body (is) dead because of sin, but the Spirit (is) life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who dwells in you."

Paul goes on to say that we will live as we have set our minds to live. It is very easy for Christians to relax in the knowledge that they are saved by the blood of Jesus and just go with the flow of the world. They lapse into a kind of spiritual neutrality that is, in reality, a catering to their sinful nature. The secular environment in which we live is dominated by selfish interest and is not conducive to holy living. It is clear that Paul regards setting your mind upon what the Spirit desires is an absolute necessity for life. He states that whoever **"...has their minds set on things of the flesh,"** verse 5, has a mind that is terminal, **verse 6.** Death is always an alarming concept, and when it leaps out of Scripture at us, we need to consider if we are infected with a carnal mind set. To help us Paul gives us three characteristics of a sinful mind:

1. hostility toward God, **verse 7a,**
2. disobedient to God's law, **verse 7b,**
3. and unable to please God, **verse 8.**

Paul then contrasts that lifestyle with that of a spiritually minded person. The mind of sinful man is death; but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, not just life the opposite of death, but quality life, life that brings the peace of God that passes all understanding. This mind set has three blessings associated with it which Paul lists for us in the next three verses:

1. The Spirit of God lives in us, **verse 9.**
2. we are spiritually alive, **verse 10,**
3. and we are assured of a bodily resurrection, **verse 11.**

Verses 12-13: Life Or Death

"Therefore, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

The battle for our spiritual well-being may seem like two heavyweights slugging it out for our souls, the Spirit of life and our sinful nature, while we sit at ringside as spectators. But, in reality, the role of each individual is very important. Both of the principles at war in us are more powerful than us, but neither can win without our cooperation. We are in Christ, that is justification. We can slide backward toward death, or we can grow up in Him through the Spirit, which is sanctification. The process of sanctification involves three activities:

1. A mind set on what the Spirit desires, **verse 5**,
2. a lifestyle controlled by the Spirit, **verse 9**,
3. the deeds of the body must be put to death through the Spirit, **verse 12**.

These three activities, simply put, mean that there must be some evidence in our lifestyle that we are growing up spiritually rather than growing cold. Paul does not make a list of what he considers living according to sinful nature and living in accordance with the Spirit, but it is obvious he considers this very important. Perhaps he felt that anyone getting this far into his letter should be able to figure it out for themselves.

It always seems strange to me that very few Christians know the date of their baptism which was the beginning of their life. But they all know their natural birth date which was really just the beginning of a death trip. I have never met anyone who didn't know how old they were. It's an easy question to answer if you are referring to chronological age, but if you ask for spiritual age, it suddenly becomes difficult. I think Christians are celebrating the wrong birth date. We should at least know about where we are on the spiritual growth chart. There is such a chart in scripture, and whenever I need to know where I am on the spiritual food chain, I turn to **James 4:1-10**. If we are growing cold, **verses 1-5** shows us a downsizing that starts with conflict in **verse 1**, and hits the bottom in **verses 4-5** by becoming an enemy of God. If we are growing in the Spirit, **verses 6-10** show us our steps of sanctification from humility, **verse 6**, to being lifted up by the Lord Himself, **verse 10**. Paul assumes that his readers understand how to live according to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, so he now introduces us to a new perspective of the Christian life.

The Children Of God

Romans 8:14-25

Verses 14-17: Living In The Family

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear. but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer together, that we may also be glorified together."

In the first part of **Chapter eight**, Paul described our intimate relationship with Christ through the indwelling power of the Spirit. Now he tells us that we are also led by this same Spirit into a family relationship with God, **verse 14**. Paul continues this section as he ended the last, by implying that we have a choice between two different kinds of life style after we are justified. The picture he uses in **verse 15a** would be very meaningful to his Roman readers. We can choose to be slaves, or we can choose to be children and heirs in a well-to-do family. We may choose to grow up guided by the Spirit or grow cold by living according to sinful nature; one is slavery, the other is family living.

Paul also continues his rich and varied vocabulary when revealing the Holy Spirit and His work. He expands his emphasis upon the different aspects of the Spirit's role by easily switching from **"Spirit of God,"** to the **"Spirit of adoption."** This is the same Spirit, but Paul is now introducing another facet of His ministry. How the adoption process works and just exactly what the Spirit does to bring about this remarkable change of fortune is a mystery; but there is no hiding the joy of this relationship. The joy, gratitude and relief of a believer who knows the reality of being a child of God can best be expressed in one word -- **"Abba,"** **verse 15b**.

When I was a young father, nothing my children said was more precious to me than *Daddy*. If one of the little ones had a bad dream or was frightened awake by a thunderstorm, the word *Daddy* would be heard in the darkness of the night. They only needed to hear me say "I'm here," and they would go back to sleep. As important as this was to me, it was perhaps even more significant to the children. In every case, *Daddy* was a recognition of a dependency and need that could only be met by their father. When Jesus said, **"Truly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven,"** **Matthew 18:3**, He was saying something that everyone could relate to. As children of God, we must recognize our total dependency upon our *Daddy*. In every language and tongue there is a word that says the same thing. In Jesus day it was **"Abba"**, an Aramaic word that was in common usage at that time. This was not a word the Jews used to address God, but when Jesus was in His private agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed **"Abba, Father,"** **Mark 14:36**. Paul uses the same expression in **verse 15**. That this word became common in the vocabulary of the Christian church is an indication that the early believers fully understood Paul's teaching that they were children of God in every sense and, as

such, they were co-heirs with Jesus, **verse 17**. By being in Christ, they were placed in a position of such intimacy with the Father, that to call the Creator, Sustainer of the universe *Daddy* was the most natural thing in the world.

In these four verses Paul reveals four manifestations of the Spirit controlled lifestyle we can expect to experience as the children of God.

1. **"Led by the Spirit of God," verse 14:** The Greek word used for *led* means to show the way or guide like a shepherd. As we make ourselves available to the Spirit by staying in the word, He takes control and acts as our guide through life. This is a very comfortable idea.
2. **"Received the Spirit of adoption," verse 15:** We are now intimate with God, not at enmity with God. He has not only saved us from sin, but He has brought us into the family. Our relationship with Him is such that we may approach Him in the same way Jesus does, **"Abba, Father."**
3. **"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our Spirit," verse 16:** This feeling of son/daughtership is not just academic. The Spirit impresses the reality of this relationship into the deepest recesses of our being. The Holy Spirit teaches our spirits just as Jesus promised He would, **"...when He, the Spirit of Truth has come, He will guide you into all truth;" John 16:13.**
4. **"joint heirs with Christ," verse 17:** Jesus once asked His disciples a very strange question. He said, **"Who is My mother, or My brothers?"** Nobody answered Him, so Jesus told them the same thing Paul is telling us here, **"...whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother," Mark 4:35.** We cannot now know exactly what we are going to be, but we know what we are -- co-heirs with Christ. Consequently we shall be like our brother Jesus and receive from the father all that He has given the Son.

Verses 18-22: Present Problems

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy (to be compared) with the glory which shall be revealed to us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but by reason of Him who subjected (it) in hope; because the creation itself also will be freed from the slavery of decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

Being children of God and co-heirs with Christ is heady stuff to rejoice about, but Paul introduces a sobering thought at the end of **verse 17**. He mentions suffering. As long as we are in this life, there will be problems. Jesus was always honest with His followers. He warned them **"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not**

greater than his master.' If they persecute Me, they will also persecute you," John 15:20a. We learned the purpose of problems in **Romans 5**, so Paul doesn't go into it again here. He simply states that whatever our problems are now, they are nothing compared to what God has in store for us. If we might think that Paul is a little too casual in dismissing our present problems so easily, we need to check out Paul's problems in **2 Corinthians 11:23-33**.

Occasionally we feel that nobody has the kind of problems we are experiencing and have difficulty understanding why God allows them to happen. We must realize that God, the Father, allowed what happened to His Son, in order to save us. It is reasonable to assume that He will allow whatever He must in order to keep us saved. The list of Paul's suffering helps us to get our problems in the proper perspective. I wince every time I read the words "**From the Jews five times I received forty (lashes) minus one," 2 Corinthians 11:24.** Under Roman law, forty lashes was considered a death penalty. Since the Jews did not have the legal right to impose a death penalty called *Jus gladii*, they gave Paul just thirty-nine lashes on five different occasions.

Verse 18 deals with personal problems. **Verse 19-22** deals with universal problems which are the awful side effects of Adam's fall into sin. The interpretation difficulties of this section of **Romans** has been voiced by theologians throughout the centuries. I personally have none of the problems that many have had; I simply take this section literally. When Adam sinned, in some dreadful way this deadly infection spread like the speed of light and corrupted all of the created universe. It is no wonder that the universe is expanding. It seems to be fleeing from our ugly terminal disease. Peter describes God's final resolution for the universal problem of sin in **2 Peter 3:7-13**.

Verses 23-25: Future Glory

"And not only (they), but even we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does anyone still hope for what he sees. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patient endurance."

Paul turns from the general suffering of creation back to the suffering of the individual. There has been a lot of groaning in this section, but there is even more glory. The first stage of our glory begins now, and the apostle calls it "**the firstfruits of the Spirit.**" At the beginning of Chapter 8 we looked at the fruit of the Spirit that Paul listed in **Galatians 5**. Here Paul calls them firstfruits, and they are just a foretaste of the wonderful inheritance God has in store for us. The final stage of Glory is the redemption of our bodies. We have a Spirit-induced confidence that God, in His own time, will give us full release from this prison of sinful flesh.

The Power And The Promise

Romans 8:26-30

Verses 26-27: The Power Of The Spirit

"Likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. But He who searches the hearts knows what (is) the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to God."

Paul is getting ready to conclude his revelation of God's incredibly costly and loving plan of salvation. He prepares for his dramatic conclusion with two promises of help from the Holy Spirit of God. He has worked the wonder of faith in our lives and now works to sustain and complete it. No matter how intense the spiritual battle becomes, the Lord never leaves us to our own resources. He has provided His Spirit, who will help us in our weaknesses and intercede for us when we don't even know what to pray for or how to pray for it. Some feel that both are referring to the same thing. They believe the role of the Holy Spirit which Paul describes here is helping us with our weakness in prayer. This may be true, but I find it too limiting. I like the idea that the Spirit is there for me in my weakness and in my ignorance of what and how to pray.

Verses 28-30: The Power Of The Father

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who according to purpose are called. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined (to be) conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified, these He also glorified."

Romans 8:28 sounds so good in theory, but when the painful realities of life pop up, many of us have difficulties making it relevant for ourselves or others we care about. Each time I come to this verse I think of a young man who was in one of my classes when I was sharing **Romans 8:28** with them. I remember telling them this was a verse every Christian should know and understand because it was one of the most comforting and cherished verses in the Bible. If they would just bring this verse to mind every time they had problems their lives would be more joyful. At this point the young man raised his hand. His question was brief and to the point. He asked me to explain what possible good there could be in his mother's death. I explained that neither I nor anyone else could answer his question. But I believed the truth of **Romans 8:28** with all my heart, and I believed that some day he would be able to answer his own question, if not on this side of glory, certainly he would know in heaven. Now this was not very comforting to a fifteen year old boy whose mother was in the final stages of a long battle with cancer; and, in fact, she died just one week later. He was angry and confused because he was discovering at too early an age that life is not fair. I still see the hurt, the anger, and the disbelief in his eyes.

As Paul nears the conclusion of the doctrinal section of **Romans**, he deals with the benevolent guidance of God. This, as I learned from the young man, cannot be taught. It must be experienced. It is between the individual and God. Generally people go through three stages of response when confronted with what scripture says about this subject. The first stage is rejection. This is where my young student was at, and there are no words to soothe the anger and fear behind such rejection. The next stage is toleration or acceptance. As we mature in our spiritual growth our own experiences teach us the truth of **Romans 8:28**. The final stage is serenity. We simply rest in God's perfect plan for our lives and cooperate with Him as He brings about His perfect results.

Romans 8:28-30 has been called the golden chain that ties together the acts of God. In **Verses 29-30** Paul prepares his readers for a full review of what he has taught them so far by giving us five terms, some of them for the first time. Sometimes they are referred to as the *plan of salvation*. They all fit together, and the end result is that "**all things work together for good to those who love God.**" This is God's formula for directing and formulating His children.

Paul begins his chain with **foreknowledge** in **verse 29** and God explains His omniscience in **Isaiah 46:9b -10a**, "**...I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning.**" Far too many Christians are fatalists at heart. They feel that if God knows everything ahead of time, it must mean that nothing can be changed. They rather like the idea that everything is predetermined because it relieves them of any responsibility for their own actions. God's gift of *free will* is ignored far too often. God chose to limit His power in our lives. He did not wish to be loved by puppets or robots, so He gave us the option of independent action. This privilege, of course, brings with it the corresponding responsibility of willing obedience to the Father. Because God knows what is going to happen does not mean that He makes it happen, or even wants it to happen. It is possible for us to be rebellious children and to break our Father's heart.

The next step in the chain is **predestined**, which means literally *to define in advance the limits*. Here it says that God had decided in advance that those who are redeemed shall experience salvation to the fullest degree in that they will be like Jesus. This is not predestined to faith but a predestination to glory as the ultimate response of God to a faith that endures. Paul uses the same verb in **Ephesians 1:5**, "**having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself,**" and in **verse 11** "**...also we having obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things...**".

Paul continues his chain in **verse 30** by connecting the *doctrine of predestination* to the Greek adjective *kletos*, meaning called or invited. He uses it in **verse 28** and twice here in **verse 30**, so its importance to Paul is obvious; however to his readers it can also become a mind boggling problem. Here the apostle says that God justified those whom He called. This seems to be a contradiction of Paul's argument in the first eight chapters of his letter for justification by faith and faith alone. How to discern Paul's meaning has become a major division among God's people. In the past I have backed off from this division by saying that in the final analysis this is

all a beautiful, wonderful mystery; and sometimes we do more harm than good by trying to unscrew the inscrutable. It sounded good to me at the time, but now it just sounds wrong. Mysteries are to be solved, and I think it must be done here.

The problem seems to be that Paul has left something out of God's plan of salvation. Paul always does what he does with a purpose. Here we must figure out what his purpose is in leaving out the *doctrine of election*. The term *elect* is another Greek adjective, *eklektos*, meaning *chosen* or *elect*. The words *called* and *chosen* are two different words with very different meanings. Jesus used both at the end of His parable of the wedding feast, **Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few are chosen."** Paul uses the word *elect* for the first time in **verse 33** of this chapter, **"Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?"** By the time the readers get to this verse they should know what *elect* means to God, and the best place to understand it is by putting it in where Paul left it out. Jesus makes it clear that *called* is a generic term. It is an invitation given to multitudes. But *chosen* is a specific word. It refers to those who, being called, continue to believe until the very end. These are recognized through the foreknowledge of God and predestined by the power of Him who declares **"...the end from the beginning."** So why did Paul leave it out? Perhaps it is because all five terms he gives to us in **verses 29-30 -- Foreknowledge, Predestined, Called, Justified and Glorified**, are exclusively found in God's domain; and God's works are always perfect. *Election* on the other hand is connected to sanctification which is in our domain and that is too often not done well. Which is why multitudes are invited but only a precious few are elected. Paul certainly knows how to make us think about things, doesn't he?

What Have We Learned?

Romans 8:31a

Verse 31a: Paul's Question

"What then shall we say to these things?"

As Paul draws to a conclusion of the doctrinal section, he asks a very significant question. It deserves an equally significant answer. The author demands a response from his readers based on what he has written so far. Paul is going to answer his own question with a series of four more questions in the final verses of this chapter, but first he asks us to do our own thinking. The apostle is changing his tactics. Until now he has been the learned professor leading us, the students, through a dazzling maze of logic, theology and doctrine. Sometimes difficult, always brilliant, he has led us along, challenging us to follow his train of thought, not asking for any response on our part. But now he asks for one. He says, **"What then shall we say to these things?"**

Our first thought should be, "response to what?" So we begin to look over the preceding verses to find out what Paul was asking us to react to. As we do so, we discover that Paul actually expects us to remember his teachings on the entire first half of his letter to the Romans. Paul is a good teacher, and he understands the importance of constant review. No matter how eloquent and insightful a teacher might be on a verse by verse basis, the students will not see the full picture being presented without review. So he asks us to step back with him and look at the full picture of God's great plan of salvation. There is a passage in **Isaiah** that describes what, I guess, Paul might have been thinking about when he wrote this. It refers to how God taught the people of Israel, who were very reluctant to learn anything. **"Whom will He teach knowledge? And whom will He make to understand the message? Those that are weaned from milk? Those that are drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." Isaiah 28:9-10.**

We have studied this epistle verse by verse. Like a jigsaw puzzle, we have tried to examine each piece individually, then carefully put it into its proper place. This can be a slow and difficult activity, but now Paul asks us to examine the whole picture and examine what we have been taught. As a teacher, I always struggle with the temptation to skip Paul's question and jump right into the last seven verses of **Romans 8**. They are so beautiful and majestic that when the truth of what Paul says hits you, it can take your breath away. Whenever I have done this, however, I have found that my audience generally doesn't respond with the same enthusiasm that these verses inspire in me. The reason for this, I discovered, is my approach. I spend so much time on the verse by verse study that my students lose sight of the larger view. It is necessary to stop when Paul says, **"What then shall we say to these things?"** and review what we have learned. I do not believe it possible to fully appreciate the power and the confidence of Paul's conclusions without this pause to reflect on what we have been taught; so I encourage my readers to go back over the first eight chapters. It may help the review by using the main thoughts of each session given. **Romans Chapter 1-8** deal basically with the four following topics:

1. The guilt of man, **1:16-3:20**

- a. which produces the wrath of God, **1:18-32**,
 - b. which in turn produces the judgment of God, **2:1-16**,
 - c. even the people of God are guilty under God's law, **2:17-3:8**,
 - d. all men, Jew and Gentile alike, are guilty, **3:9-20**.
2. The grace of God **3:21-5:11**
- a. is available to guilty mankind through faith, **3:21-4:5**,
 - b. is shown through the forgiveness of God who is just and the justifier of all believers, **4:6-25**,
 - c. produces great cause for joy in His people, **5:1-11**.
3. The greatness of Salvation is shown in **5:12-8:17**,
- a. how God dealt with the problem of sin and death, **5:12-6:12**,
 - b. God's use of the law to produce repentance and victory over sin, **6:13-7:25**,
 - c. the fruitful lives of God's children through the power of the Spirit, **8:1-17**.
4. The guarantee of Glory is, **8:18-30**
- a. demonstrated in the power of the Father, **8:18-22**,
 - b. and the power of the Spirit, **8:23-30**.

Super Conquerors

Romans 8:31b-39

Verses 8:31b-37: More Than Conquerors

"If God (is) for us, who (can be) against us? He who did not even spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also freely give us all things with Him. Who shall bring an accusation against God's elect? (It is) God who justifies. Who (is) he who condemns? (It is) Christ who died, but much more is also risen, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, or distress or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or swords? As it has been written: 'For Your sake we are put to death the whole day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

Paul ends this majestic portion of scripture with the words **"...we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."** This is a ringing confirmation of the faithfulness of God in dealing with His people. It is obvious that the apostle Paul wishes to do much more than to provide an academic insight into God's plan of salvation. The plan will work whether we understand it or not. Indeed, the literary and spiritual value of the passage before us is easily recognized. But Paul insists on more from his readers. It is important to note the almost defiant tone Paul uses as though he is challenging his readers to question the validity of his grand summary of the first half of Romans. To validate the validity of Paul's theology, it becomes necessary to relate it to the rest of what the word of God teaches. This requires work. Paul, a true workaholic, expects us to search the scriptures.

In **Psalms 119:11** David wrote **"I have hidden your word in my heart."** David, like Paul understood the importance of the word of God, not as casual reading material,

but as a power in his life. Christians today must understand that hiding the word in their hearts has to be a first person experience. They must do something more than just read it like a newspaper. Most churchgoers experience with the word of God has been done for them. The clergy is all too ready to tell listeners what to think. This is indoctrination, not education. Their job is to teach parishioners how to think, not what to think. Equally important to the student of the word is to be creative with the word. David didn't just hide God's word in his heart, he wrote a psalm about it. Our thinking must produce some activity. The simplest is to talk about it to anyone who will listen to us. If believers just read "**...we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us,**" it probably will not have the impact on them that Paul desires. If the same believers think about it and then stands in front of others and spells out how this truth has impacted his or her life, the Spirit does His wonderful work. Then they have seen the truth. They have thought about that truth, and they have spoken out about the truth. This is "**hiding the word of God in my (your) heart.**"

In the last session we reviewed what we have learned from Paul so far. It is important for us to be sure that we had all the information we need to draw the same conclusions Paul did when he asked "**What then shall we say to those things.**" Now the apostle answers his own question with a series of four more questions, and he concludes with the words "**...we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**" However, the apostle begins with the words:

1. "**If God is for us...**," verses 31b-32.

There is a world of difference between the beginning and the concluding statement. It is possible for Christians to live at either end of Paul's thought. Many church members live in uncertainty and fear. They live with the worry of "**if God is for us (me)...**" and stop right there. They don't know for sure if God is for them or not. They have little confidence in what will happen when they die, and they aren't sure they wish to find out. It is equally possible for believers to live out their lives as super conquerors, fully confident in the truth of Paul's conclusion of his first question, "**who can be against us?**" As people of God, we are not victims, or survivors, or poor souls who suffer through a dreary existence in vague hope of a better life to come. We are the children of God and "**who can be against us?**" What more proof do we need that God is on our side than the offering of His own Son. Since the father freely made the ultimate sacrifice, will He not also freely give whatever else is needed to see us through to the final victory? What could approach the cost of Calvary? This is the first and most important piece of evidence, that God is for us.

2. "**Who shall bring a charge against us?** verse 33

The elect referred to in this verse are those whom God has foreknown, predestined called and justified. Those of us who believe in Christ by faith alone have been declared righteous by the Lord God Himself. Who is going to cast the first stone?

3. "Who shall condemn us?" verse 34

Here we learn that not only is the judge on our side, but Jesus Himself is our lawyer. The Father has given all judgment into the hands of the Son. He alone is the one who may condemn us. All likelihood of that disappears when we realize that He is our advocate at court, interceding for us at the right hand of God. There is an amazing picture of this very activity in **Zechariah 3:1-10**. Satan is the prosecuting attorney, and Jesus is the defense attorney protecting us from the Devils accusation.

4. "Who shall separate us?" verses 35-37

The word *separate* is the same word Jesus used in His sweeping statement about the lifelong union of marriage in **Mark 10:9**, "**Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.**" Our union with Jesus is a bonding. The oneness of man and wife is only a pale imitation of the eternal intimacy we will have with our Lord Jesus. The bonding of husband and wife may only be a pale example, but it is the only one we have in this world, so, brother and sisters, we had better do it well. To speak of anything or anyone separating us from Jesus who loved us is unthinkable. Husbands and wives must live with the thought of separation as being unthinkable.

Verses 38-39: More Than Confident.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers nor powers, nor things present nor things to be, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul's main emphasis is on the importance of confidence in the life of every believer. It is necessary for Christians to be so familiar with the sacrifice and effort that God went through to save them that there can be no doubt about the Father's depth of love for His children. In the last two verses of **Chapter Eight**, Paul pulls out all the stops when he contemplates the last question, "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**" He covers ten different elements that might possibly get between the believer and the Savior. He ranges from the finite to the infinite, and concludes that there is nothing that can affect the eternal purpose of God. Having challenged the harsh realities of deprivation, disaster and danger to do their worst in **verses 35-36**, Paul now directs our attention to more abstract dangers. His message is the same, nothing can possibly affect Christ's sacrificial love for us. It is helpful to separate them into groups.

Death or Life, -- Paul has lived for years with the knowledge that "**...to live is Christ and to die is gain.**" **Philippians 1:21**. He and his first century Christian contemporaries had faced the stark realities of both life and death, and found nothing to fear.

Angels, rulers, powers, -- Paul stretches his confidence from the spiritual to the political forces which represent vast degrees of power and danger. He determines that they were powerless to do anything that would come between the Savior and His saved.

Things present and things to be, -- Paul's imagination expands to include time itself as a possible enemy of the redeemed. He found nothing in either the present age nor the age to come that could threaten our security in the Lord.

Height and depth, -- in Paul's mind these are more than just spatial measurements. In Greek thought they were used to represent other worldly concepts. Height was used in astrological terms in connection with man's fate or destiny in the stars. Similarly, depth referred to mystery and unknown powers to be feared, In any event, Paul concludes that no power, real or imagined, can touch our relationship to our Lord.

Any created thing, -- The scope of this is boundless. It is designed to include anything in creation, including aliens from outer space.

So, we arrive at the breathtaking end of Paul's systematic treatment of God's plan of salvation. It is important to note that he concludes with the words "**our Lord.**" The Lordship of Jesus Christ is the fundamental principle of salvation; even more than this, He is ours!!! This brings salvation down from the lofty heights of theological idiom into the lives of human beings, with all of Jesus' life-transforming power.

Romans

Salvation Rejected

Romans 9:1-11:36

In the first four chapters of **Romans** we learned how “...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” **1John 1:7b**. But sins are not just unpleasant baggage that can be cast aside and forgotten. They have a deadly contaminating effect upon the very nature of man; so **Chapters 5-8** describe how the Father has provided a deliverance from this polluting effect of sin in our lives. The main theme of **Romans** is quite clear. God is righteous, and so are we when we exercise faith in the redemptive work of God’s only Son, Jesus Christ.

The first eight chapters of **Romans** present the doctrinal foundation of the Christian church. In **Chapters 9-11** we enter an area of special concern to Paul, the rejection of the righteousness of God by the Jews, the chosen people of God. To anyone familiar with the book of **Romans**, **Chapter 12** would be the logical point to continue what Paul established in **Chapter 8**. The apostle, in dramatic fashion concluded that since God is providentially causing “...that all things work together for good to those who love God...” **Romans 8:28**, it would have been natural for Paul to have followed it immediately with **Chapter 12:1**, “I exhort you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, (which is) your reasonable service.” But Paul did not do this. In fact, his mood changed from exaltation to depression when he began **Chapter 9**. His heart was breaking over the Jewish rejection of the true Messiah. Why were the Jews of Paul’s day turning away from the Savior? From what is said in **Romans 9-11** we can see that the Jewish people were drawing wrong conclusions from the information available. So Paul takes three more chapters to further demonstrate the faithfulness of God and the tragedy of the Jewish rejection of the Christian Gospel.

Chapter Nine

The Tragedy Of The Jews

Romans 9:1-5

Verses 1-3: Paul's Attitude Toward The Jews

“Truth I speak in Christ, I lie not my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great grief and unceasing sorrow in my heart. For I desired that I myself to be cursed from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh,”

In the last week of His life, Jesus summarized the tragedy of the Jewish nation in one sentence: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who were sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Matthew 23:37.** The love and compassion of the Lord Jesus flows through these words like the living water Jesus talked about so often. Even though Israel as a nation was often guilty of rebellion and worse, the Lord longed to bring them the gift of salvation, but they were unwilling. Although Israel rejected Him, it had no impact upon His love for the people. The shortest verse in the Bible is **John 11:35, “Jesus wept.”** He wept because of the lost opportunities and wasted privileges that would bring about the destruction of the city and the people of God.

Paul feels the same compassion and love for the Jewish people that Jesus felt. His love for them is real. He had not, as some were accusing, turned against his own people in favor of the Gentiles. As we read through the first three verses of **Chapter Nine**, can there be any doubt about Paul's true feeling for his people? This love is truly remarkable in light of how Paul has been treated by the Jews. Wherever he traveled, preaching the gospel, the Jews were sure to follow and cause problems any way they could. One need only to look at **Acts 17:1-15** to get the idea of how committed the Jews were to thwarting Paul's ministry. Paul was reviled, beaten, whipped, stoned and hounded day and night by the very people he is now expressing an amazing concern for.

Paul felt great joy over the magnificent plan of salvation he has shared with us in the first eight chapters of **Romans**; but here you can almost see his mind abruptly shifting gears as he contemplates Israel's rejection of this plan. With few exceptions, his people, the Jewish nation, would never experience this same joy; and this serves to intensify his sorrow for them. It is equally possible for a reader to be somewhat skeptical about Paul's sincerity in all this. Skeptics can be a great blessing to Christians because they make us think about our beliefs, so let us examine Paul's sincerity here. Jesus said, **“...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Matthew 5:44.** This sounds so good in theory, and when it is preached on or studied about in a Bible class no one disagrees; but this is one of Jesus' teaching that, from an unbelievers point of view, Christians never do. Not only is it not practiced, but some seem a bit offended when it is suggested that it should be. It seems to be above and beyond the call of duty. Did Christians ever truly love their enemies? The answer is ‘yes’, and Paul is a wonderful example.

With striking intensity Paul impresses his readers how genuinely he feels about the spiritual darkness of his own people. So fiercely does he wish to be believed that he appeals to two-thirds of the Holy Trinity to support him. His opening statement **“Truth I speak in Christ...”** is a form of an oath calling Jesus as his witness. Paul then states that his own conscience which has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit also bears witness. Whatever anybody else might feel, there is no doubt in Paul’s own mind that his feelings are genuine. The reason for Paul’s grief and sorrow is inferred from **verse 3** to be Israel’s rejection of Christ which will result in their eternal separation from God. Here Paul appears to be saying that if it were possible, he would be willing to give up his own salvation if it would be efficacious for Israel. Some believe that Paul can’t really be saying that. He must mean he would give up his life if it would do any good; however, the language he uses certainly seems to imply the former interpretation. There is a precedent for such a feeling. Moses said much the same thing to God in **Exodus 32:32**. However, I must confess that I cannot conceive of a level of spiritual growth that would induce me to give up my salvation for anyone.

Verses 4-5: Paul’s Pride In His Heritage

“Who are Israelites, whose (is) the adoption and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service and the promises; whose (are) the Fathers; and from whom (is) the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

Although Paul was a Roman citizen and had been trained in Greek culture, it was his Jewish heritage of which he was most proud. At the end of **verse 3** the apostle Paul calls the Jews **“brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh,”**. To be a member of the people of God was, to him, an unparalleled privilege. Nothing in the human experience could be compared to the uniqueness of being an Israelite. The name itself was a reminder of God’s special intervention in the life of Jacob that led to the identification of his descendants as a unique people, **Genesis 32:22-32**. Much of Paul’s grief was prompted by the fact that his people had wasted the special privileges God had granted them. In **verses 4-5** he lists eight privileges that set the Hebrews apart from all nations. As we consider these two verses, we must realize how easily Christians today can be equally guilty of ignoring similar privileges.

1. “The adoption”: Paul described this as **“The spirit of adoption.”** **Romans 8:15**. To be Jewish was to be a part of the adoption, literally the *placing as sons* or the special invitation of Jehovah to be in His family. Hosea wrote **“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”** **Hosea 11:1**.

2. “The glory”: The Jews alone had seen the glory, or as the Rabbis called it, the *shekinah*, referring to God’s presence with them in the cloud and fire during their wandering in the wilderness. **Exodus 13:21-22**.

3. **“The covenants”**: Only with the Israelites had the Lord entered into covenants such as those that promised lands to Abraham and special considerations to Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

4. **“The giving of the law”**: To the Jews alone did God communicate His will in written form. They had the special privilege of knowing His law. This amounts to the same advantage a literate person would have over an illiterate.

5. **“The service”**: It was to the Israelites alone that the order of worship in both tabernacle and temple had been revealed. The temple service was regarded by the Jews as the pride of their nation.

6. **“The promises”**: Only to the Jews had promises for all mankind been made. Promises of the Messiah and of the spread of true religion from them as a nation.

7. **“The fathers”**: The Jewish nation quite justly prided themselves on the long line of *fathers* that stretched back through the remarkable history of Paul’s people. To call Abraham, Isaac and Jacob their ancestors was a unique privilege.

8. **“Christ”**: But of all the distinctions that went with being an Israelite, none was more illustrious than being part of the race that gave birth to the long expected Messiah, the hope of the world.

In the next section Paul is going to explain to his Gentile readers that being a descendant of Abraham is not a matter of the flesh, but of the promise. Christians are the Israelites of today with all the same privileges and responsibilities that go with the family name.

The Rights Of God

Romans 9:6-18

Verse 6: The True Jew

“But it is not that the word of God has failed for they (are) not all Israel who (are) of Israel,”

Chapters 9-11 are often referred to as *the Jewish problem*, and they present any number of interpretation problems to the reader. Some people solve this by simply skipping from **Chapter 8** to **Chapter 12**, thinking that Paul’s arguments are primarily for his Jewish readers. At this point in our study of **Romans**, you may think this sounds like a good idea; but I have found that as we meet these chapters head-on, God will bless our efforts with a deeper appreciation for the richness of our faith.

It is clear that Paul felt it necessary to speak to the problem of Israel’s rejection of Jesus, not only because of the love he felt for his own people, but also because the questions being raised were profoundly significant. In **verse 6** he anticipates the first question his angry advisories would ask him. “Has God reneged on His promise? Has the word of God failed?” As a result of their glorious heritage listed in **verses 4-5**, the Jews had fallen into

a grossly perverted view of who and what they were. They assumed that everyone who was a Jew by blood was automatically a member of God's everlasting family. So Paul attacks this prejudice by making a startling statement, **"...it is not that the word of God has failed,"** implying that it is the Jews who have failed, **"For they are not all Israel who are of Israel."** God never intended to lock Himself into a system of selection on the basis of blood lines. The doctrine of election or predestination does not draw its dynamics from man but **"...of Him who calls,"** verse 11b (In some translations it is verse 12a). Jesus encountered the same twisted thinking of the Jews in some of His own followers, **John 8:30-47**. Jesus attacked their bias with an alarming body of evidence that they were not true Jews; they were not Abraham's children. He points out that if they were Abraham's children, they would do what Abraham did. In **Genesis 15:6** **"And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."** Jesus told them that they are not Abraham's children **"because My word has no place in you,"** **John 8:37b**. Abraham believed in the word of God, the Father. The Jews had no place for the word of God, the Son.

This is not for the Jews alone. Modern Christians can be as guilty of the same faulty reasoning as the Jews. Far too many brothers and sisters derive a false sense of security out of a church membership or association with a denomination. They seem to believe that their personal relationship to God is simply just belonging to a church. They do not understand that religion is a relationship, or more accurately a marriage, between the Savior and the saved; anything less is hypocrisy. They, without exception, are appalled at the Lord's words **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven...then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me...,'"** **Matthew 7:21-23**. They are much like the Jews in **John 8:30-47** who, we are told, believed in Him. **"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" John 8:31**. But as you read through this debate, you see that the Jews' trust in their heritage prevented them from hearing and accepting the words of Jesus. It swiftly expands to Jesus telling them that they are Satan's children, not God's, and they call Him a demon-possessed Samaritan. It is a common human flaw for men to derive a false sense of security from their traditions rather than to trust the truth of Jesus.

Verses 7-13: Children Of The Flesh Versus Children Of The Promise

"Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called!' That is, these (are) children of the flesh, not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for seed. For this is the word of promise: 'at this time I will come, and there will be a son to Sarah.' And not only (this), but also when Rebecca had conceived by one man, our father Isaac, for (the children) not yet being born, not having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it has been written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ did more than provoke deep emotions of both grief and love in Paul. It stirs in him a fervid desire to meet their questions and misconceptions

with an outpouring of examples of God's method of operation from their own scriptures. He takes his readers on a tour through Biblical history, starting with God's call to Abraham. God decided of His own will to make Abraham the father of blessings. Abraham had more than one son; and, as his seed branched out through the following generations, God consistently chose the course that would produce His promised Messiah. God chose Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau, Judah over his brothers, and so on down the line until Christ was born. God chose, and it was God's perfect right to do the choosing. The word of God speaks powerfully about God's right to act as He chooses. This is clearly demonstrated in His dealings with the lineage of Christ through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God was choosing as He saw fit and not by what we call *human considerations*. The result of this was that there were two kinds of children sprung from Abraham -- children of the promise and children of the flesh.

Paul maintains that there had always been two Israels, and the distinction was not made by blood but by something entirely different. Paul does not expand on this here; he may expect his Roman readers to have full understanding of what he explained in fuller detail in his earlier letter to the **Galatians**. **“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you (are) Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise,” Galatians 3:26-29.** In all the rhetoric about election, predestination and the sovereignty of God, it is possible to lose sight of the one elemental truth of Paul's teaching. In **Galatians 3:26-29** this truth is summed up with a simple eloquence that is impossible to misunderstand. The children of God and the seed of Abraham are all those, and only those, who have faith in Christ Jesus.

In **verse 13** Paul quotes from **Malachi 1:2-3** **“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”** This language disturbs the casual reader. It seems to reduce God to an alarmingly human level in His decision making process; but, if you read the surrounding verses in **Malachi 1:1-5**, it becomes clear that the references are to the people of Esau, the Edomites. These descendants of Esau earned the wrath of God when they refused to come to the aid of Israel in a time of great need, **Numbers 20:14-21**. It is perfectly natural for a father to hold a strong aversion to anyone who causes hardship for his children.

Verses 14-16: The Mercy Of God

“What shall we say then? (Is there) unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will show mercy to whomever I show mercy, and I will feel compassion on whomever I feel compassion.’ So then (it is) not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”

Paul’s teaching, that in the process of election, God chose the Gentiles over the Jews, was totally unacceptable to the Hebrews. They genuinely believed that if this were true, God would be guilty of an unrighteous act. In their interpretation of God’s promises, He did not have the right to reject the Jews, regardless of their attitude toward Jesus. Paul, in his customary style, refutes their arguments by appealing to the Old Testament. He brings to their mind a touching dialogue between Moses and God, **Exodus 33:12-23**. Paul is offering clear evidence of God’s insistence that He is free to deal exactly as He sees fit, even with Moses. Moses was in need of some divine reassurance. All he wanted was some visible evidence that the Lord was really with him; so, he asks “show me Your glory.” God’s reply was, in effect, “though you have been a faithful servant you must realize that such a request is not granted on the basis of merit but on what I consider best.” Moses had to be content with a view from the rear.

Verses 17-18: The Will Of God

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this same purpose I have raised you up, so that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy to whom He wills, and He hardens whom He will.”

Paul moves quickly to another illustration from the Old Testament showing the sovereign choice of God in a negative sense. Here again it may seem that God is using Pharaoh as a pawn in a game he neither understands nor controls. It appears that Pharaoh was predestined to do what he did; but, our knowledge of God and His word will not support such an interpretation. To better understand the direction Paul is leading his readers, it helps to review **Exodus, Chapters 7-11**, paying particular attention to **Chapter 9**. The dramatic story of God’s dealings with Pharaoh is filled with references to *hardening*. The history of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart should be noted carefully. Over and over again Pharaoh is moved by the power and reality of God to yield to His will, only to revert, once the effect wears off, to arrogant resistance. He was acting as a free agent who repeatedly hardened his own heart against God until finally God finished the job.

God states that He raised up this man into a place of international visibility so that when his own hard-heartedness came into conflict with God’s purpose, he would become an international illustration of the futility of arrogantly opposing the will of God. If Pharaoh had been a slave instead of a monarch, his sin would have been neither lesser or greater. The man was free to be as arrogant and stubborn as he wished. God was free to place this arrogant man in a position where his pride would not only lead to his downfall,

but also produce a vivid demonstration of divine power. The freedom to do this is incontrovertibly Gods.

The Sovereignty Of God

Romans 9:19-33

Verses 19-24: Creature Versus Creator

“Then you will say to me, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to Him who formed (it), ‘Why have you made me like this.’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel to honor and another to dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.”

Paul’s teaching about the sovereignty of God might cause some readers to feel no responsibility for their own actions. Since man is an inefficient and flawed being and God is going to deal with individuals exactly as He pleases, then what is God upset about? Because we are only what God allows us to be and, if we don’t measure up, it is God’s fault, not ours. Many people reason in the same way as Paul’s Jewish readers. There is a certain comfort in rejecting any responsibility and placing it upon another, particularly God. Adam did, after the fall, when he pointed out to God that **“The woman whom you gave (to be) with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate,” Genesis 3:12.** It was Adam’s way of saying “You know, God, it’s really your own fault. I didn’t ask for her.” This kind of faulty reasoning must be corrected. It is impugning the integrity of God, and Paul answers with a marvelous defense of the perfect character of God with the illustration of the potter and the clay. The government of God is God’s business. It is both just and consistent. If mankind fails to comprehend God’s ways, it is man’s flaw, not God’s.

Paul anticipates the predictable objection of men in rebellion against God: If mankind has by nature a sinful condition, it is God’s fault, not mans. We are only what God has made us. The analogy Paul uses almost seems to support this contention. A pot has nothing to say about its creation or use, but it would be a mistake to apply all the qualities of clay to mankind in this context. For one thing, Paul speaks of clay that talks. He is not saying that humanity as a whole, or man as an individual is a powerless lump of clay that God can mold whichever way He pleases. The apostle has clearly proven in the earlier portion of his epistle that man is responsible. He is here stating the unquestionable sovereignty of God to take a rebellious Egyptian and make him live with the consequences of his own arrogance. The Lord used Pharaoh as a warning, not only to his contemporaries, but to all posterity. God made him Pharaoh, He did not make him arrogant and rebellious. In the analogy of the clay and the potter, Paul intends to conjure up Old Testament references in the minds of his Jewish readers. These passages, in turn, should meet the objections of anyone questioning the integrity of God. There are three passages that would occur to the Jews immediately:

1. **Isaiah 29:16** “**Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; for shall the thing made say of him who made it, ‘He did not make me?’ or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding?’**”: God is intently involved in the affairs of men on both the personal and national level. In this passage the references are to God’s personal involvement. An individual cannot hide his purpose from the Lord, nor does he have the wisdom to question his maker.

2. **Isaiah 45:9** “**Woe to him who strives with his maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the Earth. Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or shall your handiwork say, ‘He has no hands?’**”: It may be a bit depressing to put ourselves on the potter’s wheel as Paul seems to be suggesting, but it is spiritually very healthy to see ourselves as inanimate clay which God has formed into living stones, **1 Peter 2:5**. It is embarrassing to think of how often we have complained about the quality of God’s handiwork in our lives. We need to hear Paul’s warning about challenging the righteousness of God. It is wisdom to allow God to be God.

3. **Jeremiah 18:1-10**: The Lord is making a slightly different point in **Jeremiah** than in **Isaiah**. The first two passages about the potter and the clay are references to God’s personal involvement with individuals. **Jeremiah 18:1-10** refers to God as the shaper and breaker of nations.

Paul proceeds to illustrate his point in **verses 22-24** with a remarkable “**What if...?**” As we read over these verses, we must see Paul’s point to be as applicable for us today as it was to the Jews in the first century. If, as God has vividly demonstrated, He is prepared to tolerate the arrogance of the Pharaohs of this world so that they end up being fit for nothing but “**vessels of wrath**”, it is certainly well within His rights. And, if Israel behaves towards Jesus the same way Pharaoh behaved toward God, they must accept the fact that what was right for Pharaoh is right for them also. What was true for Pharaoh and for Israel is equally true for us today. As we see the growing Godlessness of our government and our society, we must feel a certain *deja vu* aspect in Paul’s warnings.

Verses 25-33: The Consistency Of God

“**As He says also in Hosea: ‘I will call them My people who were not My people; and beloved who was not beloved. And it shall happen in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There they will be called sons of the living God.’** Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘**Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the matter and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.**’ And as Isaiah said before: ‘**Unless the Lord of the Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah.**’”

“**What shall we say then? that Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained righteousness, even the righteousness that (is) by faith; but Israel,**

pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because (it was) not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at the stone of stumbling, as it is written: ‘Behold I place in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense:’ ‘and everyone who believes on Him shall not be ashamed.’”

Paul quotes at length from Hosea and Isaiah to demonstrate how God’s ancient commitments are being fulfilled and God’s consistency is being maintained. He said He would choose a people “...**who were not My people;**” **Hosea 2:23** and He said He would preserve only a remnant out of Israel. God has always been consistent in keeping His promises. The prophecies from Hosea and Isaiah vividly foretold the events of Paul’s day. God also has been consistent to His plan of salvation. He tells through the prophets on what basis both the new people and the remnant of the old would be saved. From conversion to glorification, salvation is by grace through faith alone.

Paul has taught that “**The just shall live by faith,**” **Romans 1:17**, and “**by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified...**” **Romans 3:20**. In **verses 30-33** the response of the Gentiles is contrasted to the response of the Jews. The Jewish nation chose the latter route, and the Gentiles chose the former. Israel has stumbled at the idea that they can only be justified by faith in Christ. But even this shows how consistent God has been. God warned Israel, through Isaiah, that He would send them a *stone of stumbling* that would cause them to fall. Jesus Christ is a stumbling stone to the Jews and a stepping stone to the Gentiles. For every living human being He is one or the other.

Chapter Ten

Truth And Error

Romans 10:1-13

The introduction to this chapter is found in the last few verses of **Chapter 9**. Paul concludes that Israel who tried to earn righteousness by keeping the Mosaic law failed to achieve it while the Gentiles who accepted God's righteousness by faith received it; but this fact did not stop Paul from praying for his fellow Jews. His greatest desire was for the salvation of the Jews, but because they refused to submit to God, they became victims of their own arrogance. So, with the tenderness of genuine love, Paul illustrates that the error of Israel is damning, despite their sincerity. He contrasts the impossibility of salvation through self-effort to the availability of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Verses 1-3: The Error Of Israel

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is for salvation. For I bear witness to them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

At the first Passover after His baptism, Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple in Jerusalem. His disciples were awed by the passion their teacher displayed, and a line of David came to their minds, **“Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up,” Psalm 69:9**. Zeal means an enthusiastic pursuit or support of something. In this case Jesus was enthusiastic in restoring His Father's house to its proper use. Jesus was often zealous. He understood better than anyone the urgency of His cause and the eternal consequences involved. Jesus' followers must be equally zealous about His cause. But religious zeal, when not based on knowledge, can be a very destructive force. It perverts an enthusiast to a zealot and a follower to a fanatic. From Jesus' day to the present, history abounds with zealots who are more interested in shedding blood than spreading the word, and fanatics are more interested in their cause than in Jesus' teachings. In the opening verses of this chapter Paul addresses the zeal of the Jews which is based upon error, and contrasts this to true evangelism in the last half of this chapter.

Pointing out error is a thankless task at best. Nobody likes to be told they are wrong. It is impressive to notice how gently Paul eases into the problem of Israel's error. Jesus taught His disciples over and over again how important love is to effective ministry. Even enemies must be loved in order to win them over. In **verse 1**, Paul demonstrates this gentle loving approach an evangelist must take when pointing out error. First, he is clearly and deeply concerned about the people themselves. He does not see them as statistics or evangelical scalps to prove his prowess as a missionary. He cares about them as individuals whose eternal salvation is in question. Second, though he has the truth and the Jews do not, there is no trace of superiority in his approach to them, only a humble reliance upon God to whom he prays. Third, he speaks about what he knows.

In **verse 2** Paul states that he has personal experience with their error. He has a deep understanding of the plight of the people to whom he is ministering. Paul had been where they are. He with the energy and misdirected zeal of a fanatic actually persecuted the people of God, and believed by doing so he was pleasing God. He told the Jews in **Acts 22:3-4**, **“I am indeed a Jew ... and was zealous toward God as you are all today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.”** He had been a living fulfillment of what Jesus predicted in **John 16:2**, **“... the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.”**

Israel, Paul says, is in error despite the fact they are enthusiastic. Contrary to popular belief both then and now, it doesn't matter how sincere you are or how fervently something is believed or even how deeply you are committed. If what you believe is fundamentally wrong, it can only end in tragedy. It is important for readers today to personalize this danger in religion of being deeply sincere but sincerely wrong. There are an appalling number of groups who are just as guilty of error today as were the Jews in Paul's day, and yet show remarkable enthusiasm for their cause.

In **verse 3** Paul lists two things that are common to people who have zeal without knowledge. Israel at the time of Paul's writing and many movements today are *ignorant of God's righteousness*. Anyone who endeavors to communicate the Gospel today should take note of the errors of Israel because they are common to most religious groups in one form or another. First, there is a basic ignorance of how God insists on imparting His righteousness; and, secondly, they establish their own alternative methods to justification by faith alone. Even though these alternative forms may vary dramatically from one to another, they all represent an arrogant independence from God.

Verses 4-13: The Truth Of The Gospel

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ But the righteousness of faith speaks this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascent to the heaven?’”; that is to bring Christ down. Or, ‘Who will descent into the abyss?’; that is, to bring Christ up from among the dead. But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart’; that is, the word of faith which we preach: that if you can confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone that believes on Him shall not be ashamed.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek for the same Lord of all (is) rich toward all that will call upon Him. For everyone, whoever may call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.”

In speaking to the Jews Paul quotes Moses more often than Jesus, the reason being that the Jews believed Moses and rejected everything Jesus said. However, in **verse 4**, Paul makes a guarded reference to Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:17**, **“Do not**

think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Paul says that Jesus **“is the end of the law...”**, meaning the fulfillment or the completion of the law. In **verse 5** he quotes Moses **“The man who does those things shall live by them.” Leviticus 18:5.** The apostle is trying to bring into focus the basic difference between the righteousness that comes from God and the alternative method the Jews have chosen to become righteous. Note the present tense of the verb *does* in Moses statement. By comparing the words of Jesus and Moses, he is carefully pointing out that the *doing* part of salvation is over, and righteousness is now available to all who believe. The Gospel is done, the law is doing. There may be more eloquent ways of expressing the difference between the Law and the Gospel, but Paul keeps it simple; it all boils down to *done* and *doing*.

The second quote from Moses is from his farewell speech of encouragement to Israel in **Deuteronomy 30:12-14.** Paul freely applies the words of Moses to remind his readers that we do not have to go to extremes of effort to find salvation. We do not have to climb the highest mountain or plumb the deepest ocean. The Gospel of salvation is conveniently near -- **verses 6-8**, it is easily preached -- **verses 9-10**, it is available to all -- **verses 11-13.** Paul has thoroughly established the principle of justification by faith alone. But, in **verses 9-10**, Paul is linking salvation to confession, which seems to be adding another element to the process. It is obvious that in the apostle’s mind it was impossible to separate salvation from confession. Theoretically it is possible to live an entire lifetime and never once mention the name of the Lord Jesus; but, practically speaking, if we believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised Him from the dead, we are no more able to keep quiet about it than we are to stop breathing. The Gospel means *good news*. Good news must be shared! The relationship between the hidden belief of the heart and open confession with the mouth is further developed in the following verses.

Evangelism

Romans 10:14-21

Verses 14-15: The Process

“How then shall they call on (Him) whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on (Him) of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without preaching. And how shall they preach unless they be sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful the feet of those bringing the good news of peace, and those preaching the good news of good things!’”

In the closing verses of the previous section, Paul was concerned about two points. He wished, once again, to show that the Old Testament consistently reiterated the principle of faith and the intention of Jehovah to make His salvation available on a universal basis. This he does by quoting the prophet Joel in **verse 13**, **“For everyone, whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”** Paul also wishes to demonstrate the relationship between the hidden belief of the heart and the open confession of the mouth. This latter theme he further develops in **verses 14-15.**

Being a convert to Christianity, I find myself getting emotionally involved with these verses every time I read them. As a young man I had never seen the inside of a church, never been baptized, and certainly knew nothing about **“The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”** One day a Christian got hold of me and didn’t let go until all three of these deficiencies had been remedied. Of all the blessings God has poured out into my life, none was more blessed than that moment in time when He caused the path of this searching soul and that willing worker to cross. As my mind again goes back through the mist of time, the one thing that sticks out most clearly is a negative. Nobody else, before or after that event, has ever asked me if I knew about Jesus. I can’t help but wonder what would have happened to me if that stranger had not struck up a conversation and then followed it up over the next month. Would I be a Christian today or not? It amazes me how many people I know who have been Christians all their lives and have never led a soul to Christ. Where would I be if my spiritual father had kept his mouth shut and minded his own business.

The last thing Jesus said before His ascension was **“... and you shall be witnesses to Me...” Acts 1:8.** This was not a request; it was an order. Witnessing is a responsibility we all share. Having established the universal relevance of the Christian gospel in **verse 13**, Paul now gives the five steps to the process of evangelism in **verses 14-15**. He uses two fascinating methods in his presentation. First, he uses the Socratic method of teaching by questions rather than by answers, and he puts the process in reverse order. Calling upon God (conversion) is the final product. Prior to that there are four progressive steps. First there must be a sent one (apostle), **verse 15**, who will preach (witness), who will be heard and will be believed, **verse 14**. This message is relevant and necessary for those of us who sit comfortably in our churches, untouched by the spiritual darkness that clouds our planet. There is a famine in our land that has been predicted by the prophet Amos, **“... not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” Amos 8:11.** How will these people call on the Lord if they don’t believe, and isn’t their believing dependent upon hearing? Hearing is related to telling, and telling is in the mouths of those who respond to the commission Jesus gave to His followers.

As Christians ponder the process of evangelism, if they have difficulty with any of the five steps, it will be with the first one. Sending does seem to be a problem, even for the church. We do not seem to have expressed clearly or loudly enough the link between *believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth*. Mission work is not the work of a few saintly souls who feel the call to witness in the uttermost parts of the earth; it is the call of everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ. The sending process is simply convincing all believers that articulating their faith is a necessity. Anyone who has worked in the mission field will tell you that every human being is either a mission field or a missionary. The church must stop treating their parishioners as mission fields and start ordering them, as Jesus did, to be missionaries. As we share, those within earshot have the responsibility of either believing or disbelieving. If they should believe, they then have the responsibility of sharing with others and starting the whole process off again. This constant motion of salvation, experienced and expressed, would produce an

environment in which the whole church would sense the privilege and joy of being sent to tell.

In **verse 15** Paul, thinking of his Jewish readers, quotes **Isaiah 53:7** to exalt the task of evangelism to a position of grandeur. To his own people who are angered by his ministry and scandalized by his message of God's grace to the Gentiles, Paul is saying, "come, join me in this exciting acceptance of salvation and the sharing of this gospel with those who have never heard it." In the next four verses he is going to lay the responsibility for the Jews' unbelief at their own doorsteps. Although they repeatedly hear the gospel message, they freely reject it.

Verses 16-19: The Problems

"But not all have obeyed the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So faith (comes) by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, did they not hear? Yes and much more: 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' But I say, Did Israel not know? First Moses says: 'I will provoke you to jealousy through those who are not a nation, I will anger you through a nation without understanding.'"

In witnessing there will always be difficulties. Paul mentions three of these problems in **verses 16-19**: belief in **verse 16**, hearing in **17-18**, and understanding in **19**. It is always wise to understand the problems you are likely to face. In evangelism the problem of acceptance seems uppermost. Many Christians are reluctant to share their faith because it seems nobody will listen to them. One reason for this rejection is explained by Paul in **I Corinthians 1:18-23**, **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, ... a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks."** The whole business seems simplistic and illogical from the world's point of view. Another reason for ignoring the gospel of Jesus is that Christianity is rather unattractive on the surface. Isaiah's portrayal of the Savior as a suffering servant in **Chapter 53**, **"... He has no form or comeliness ... He is despised and rejected ... a Man of sorrow and acquainted with grief ..."** Even the prophet understood the incongruities of the things God was saying through him; so he began his description of the Messiah by saying **"who has believed our report" 53:1**. It is not a pretty picture, and Jesus assures us that we should not expect to be received any better than He. Small wonder that rejection is a common response to witnessing. Without the power and influence of the Holy Spirit doing all the work, the entire process would be hopeless.

In **verses 18-19** Paul suggests, for the sake of argument, that perhaps Israel has not heard or understood what God was saying to them. The apostle immediately rejects both ideas with quotes from **Psalms 19:4** and **Deuteronomy 32:21**. He illustrates that the Lord of the universe will not be responsible for or limited by the unbelief of His own people.

Verses 20-21: The Paradox

“But Isaiah is very bold and says: ‘I was found by those not seeking Me; I became manifest to those not asking for Me.’ But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’”

A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory, but is, in fact, true. Paul quotes **Isaiah 65:1 & 2** which contains the paradox of a people (Gentiles) who are not looking for God and yet find Him, while a people (Jews) to whom God holds out His hands day and night lose Him. This chapter concludes with the argument that might lead some to believe that God has rejected His own people. Paul deals with this mistaken assumption in the next chapter and explains the reason for Israel’s not obtaining what it seeks.

Chapter 11

Cast Away Or Set Aside

Romans 11:1-15

Verses 1-10: God Always Preserves a Remnant

“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Don’t you know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ‘Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.’? But what does the divine answer say to him? ‘I have kept to Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ Thus then, also in the present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, (it is) no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if (it is) of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. When then? What Israel seeks for, this it did not obtain; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened. According as it has been written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this day.’ And David says: ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a repayment to them; let their eyes be darkened that they may not see and bow down their back continually.’”

There are many things in my home that are no longer useful or practical and should be cast out. The problem is that I have an affection for them, so I cling to them, even though they are more of a liability than a value. So they are set aside and saved. In some ways the relationship between God and the Jewish nation is similar to our relationship with our useless possessions. In **Romans 9** we found that God chose Israel to be the recipient of great blessings. In **Romans 10** we discovered that, since Israel had become a liability to God’s plan of salvation by their rejection of Jesus, God appeared to have rejected the Jews. Now in **Romans 11** we see that, in reality, God has set Israel aside; He has not yet finished with them, and He has not thrown them out.

Israel’s long history of rebellion against God and their abuse of His grace quite naturally leads to the thought that He may eventually say, “I’ve had it with these people!” and terminate His relationship with Israel. In this section of his epistle, Paul declares that there is not the slightest possibility of such a thing taking place. Even in times of great national or global apostasy, God always preserves for Himself a faithful remnant who accept God’s gift on the basis of grace, not works. The apostasy of Israel in Paul’s day was being used by God to spread His plan of salvation to the Gentiles. As we read through these ten verses we must remember Paul’s argument in **Romans 2** about the Jews’ mistaken idea that to be a Jew was the same as being saved. Here he lets us know that it is equally wrong to assume that to be a Jew was to be rejected by God.

Paul begins this chapter with the question, **“...has God cast away His people?”** It is clear in Paul’s own experience that God has not permanently rejected Israel as a

nation. In fact, he states in the end of this chapter that Israel has a magnificent future in store for itself. In the meantime, however, the people of God are experiencing the discipline of God. Paul gives three pieces of evidence to support his argument in **verses 1-6**. His first proof is in **verse 1**, using himself as an example that God has not cast off the entire nation of Israel. Paul was a Jew, and he had been converted to God's will, **Acts 9**. He was living proof that there can be no such thing as a rejection of Israel.

Paul's second piece of evidence is given in **verses 2-4**. He tells of Elijah's lonely struggle and the deep depression he felt, **I Kings 19:1-18**. Why did Elijah feel the way he did? What caused these verses to rise to the surface of Paul's mind. As a teacher of the word, I can only give my own experience and hope it relates to others who witness in any form. I can identify, as I think Paul did, with Elijah's depression. At times I get depressed and downright peevish, even with God. My complaints, both real and imagined, are generally variations on the same theme as Elijah's. "Lord, I've worked hard for your church. Lord, I'm all alone, Lord, nobody understands. Lord, I've had enough." At times like these I get the same response Elijah did, a still, small voice that says, "**What are you doing here?**" **I Kings 19:9 & 13**. And, as I really listen to God's question, I begin to understand it. When I get afraid or depressed, it's because I was so busy serving God that I forgot to let Him serve me. Then the still, small voice reminds me to stop, to listen and be strengthened; and, then, like Elijah, He sends me back to work.

The situation in Paul's day differed only slightly from the days of Elijah. While they were not many, there were nevertheless some Jews whose eyes and ears were open to God's truth. Likewise in Elijah's time, there were seven thousand faithful of whom Elijah was totally ignorant. This brings Paul to his third argument in **verses 5-6**. He makes it clear that God does not draw people to Him by nation or in large groups. There may be safety in numbers from a human point of view, but in the realm of the Spirit there is only a remnant that knows and keeps the truth. God always preserves a remnant, the people God claimed and reserved for Himself. Sometimes the remnant are highly visible, like Moses and Elijah. At other times they are practically lost from sight in the apostasy of a nation, like Anna and Simeon waiting in the temple to see the Messiah, **Luke 2:25-40**.

The only response a reader could have to Paul's last piece of evidence is "**What then...?**", **verses 7-10**. What happens to the rest? Paul tells us that they were made to be blind and stumbling and like Pharaoh, God was hardening their hearts. Paul quotes **Isaiah 29:10** and David's **Psalms 69:22-23** which predict this terrible conclusion. Jews who have resisted the Gospel of Jesus Christ have been *hardened* by God. The more they resisted the grace of God, the harder they got. The situation in Paul's day differed only in detail from the society in which we now live. Many people today are returning to the visible church. Without getting too religious themselves, they merge into a large group or denomination that is both politically correct and practices safe religion. They then assume they are saved; but any true remnant can tell you that the road to heaven can be very lonely, **Matthew 7:14**.

Verses 11-15: God's Purpose In Rejecting Israel

“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But by their wrongdoing salvation (has come) to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy. Now if their wrongdoing riches the world and their failure riches the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as an apostle to the Gentiles, I praise my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy my flesh (race) and save some of them. For if their being cast away (is) the reconciliation of the world, what (will be) their acceptance except life from the dead.”

At the time of Paul’s ministry, the nation of Israel was stumbling but had not completely fallen down. Paul’s explanation for why God was allowing Israel to openly reject His Messiah and to live in darkness is both striking and unexpected. Paul claims that God was trying to make Israel jealous by turning to the Gentiles to offer them what Israel had refused. It would seem that God sometimes has to deal with His children literally as children. All parents can remember a time when a child became very jealous over a toy given to another child to play with. Even if it was a toy they no longer used or seemed to like, suddenly, in the hands of another it becomes enormously desirable.

In **verse 15** Paul surprisingly introduces a thought of great significance without giving us any warning at all. He seems to be telling us that though Israel is down, it is not out, and will, in fact, rise again. Their failure will give way to fullness. Their rejection will be replaced by reception. There will, indeed, be a day when Israel will again be the people of God through faith.

Baking and Botany

Romans 11:16-25

Verses 16-17: Metaphors

“For if the first fruit (is) holy, the lump is also, and if the root (is) holy, also (are) the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and became a fellow-partaker of the root and of the richness of the olive tree,”

The preceding verses have informed us that the Jewish nation, though hardened, is not irretrievably lost. As a nation, they have been set aside so that the Gentiles might gain what the Jews have lost. But even in this there is the underlying thought of the recovery of the Jews. Paul refers to jealousy because it is easier to understand God’s method of dealing with His people by thinking of them as children. If there are two five year olds and one cookie, as parents, we would like to think that they would divide the cookie and share it, but that is highly unlikely. More likely the child holding the cookie will keep it and taunt the other.

Paul has run the risk of provoking the same kind of response in both Jew and Gentile. By stating that God has turned to the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous, Paul was sensitive to the possibility of both offending the Jews and giving the Gentiles cause for arrogance. In **verses 16-17** he heads off these improper responses by reminding the

Gentiles of their relatively inferior position and the Jews of their privileged position. Paul fully shares the longing of God for the Jews to repent of their unbelief and become recipients of the blessings that were originally theirs. Then he gather both Jew and Gentile together by the use of two familiar metaphors. Unfortunately, neither of God's five year olds seem to have paid much attention to them.

A metaphor is a word picture. Here Paul uses two word pictures to illustrate his point. The first relates to baking and is better understood with a little background information. Under Mosaic Law, a Jewish farmer must give the first fruit of his harvest to God as an offering. In this way the entire crop was then special in the eyes of the Lord, **Leviticus 23:9-14, Numbers 15:17-21**. The Jews followed a similar procedure when baking; the first lump of dough was given as a peace offering with the understanding that all after that would be baked to God's glory. If we had more Jewish Christians in our churches to help us understand these things, we would understand our faith far better. Too few Christians understand Paul's implications when he calls Jesus our firstfruit in **ICorinthians 15:20-23** because we have too few Jews to help us. For the Jewish people, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were their firstfruit. They received righteousness through faith, and the whole lump represents the nation of Israel, **verse 16**. If the first generation of Israel were set apart to God, then so is the entire nation.

In **verse 17** Israel is obviously the domesticated olive tree, and the Gentiles are the branches of a wild olive tree broken off and grafted in. This picture of mutual value and productivity is easily understood, but it's relevancy to our lives is not so easy. Since the Jews and the Gentiles have not merged into one ethnic body of believers, glowing in health through the richness of each other, we must look for another.

In Paul's day most Jews who at least looked into Christianity as a viable alternative to Judaism, were deeply troubled by Christianity's lack of tradition. Christians had no synagogues, they met in houses; they no priests, only elders; and they had no by-laws other than the truths of Jesus. Consequently, the Jews who were awed by the majesty of the temple and the traditions of the elders, found Christianity strange and distasteful. Jesus warned about it in **Luke 5:39**, "**And no one having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better'.**" In the modern church there is an interesting development called *grass roots* religion. There are believers who feel such a deep need to know the truth of God's word that they get together to share and learn, and they call that church. The traditional liturgical church is somewhat intimidated by this, but mostly it feels the same way the Jews felt about Christianity. This is unfortunate. Both are beautiful in their own way and should have mutual value to one another. The *grass root* churches are like Jesus' *new wine* or Paul's *wild olive branches*. We of the church must be patient and loving with one another or we will begin to harden as did the Jews. It is possible through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit to bring these two divergent groups together for the mutual good of both. The centuries of thought and wisdom behind the traditions of the church can be a steady flow of life from the liturgical body into the grass roots believers; and they, in turn, can bring the energy

and vitality that is so often lost in the sedate traditional church. When this sort of grafting takes place, both groups profit and God is honored.

Verses 18-25: The Warning

“Do not boast against the branches; but if you boast against (them), (remember) you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He might not spare you either. Consider then the kindness and severity of God: upon those who fell, severity; but upon you, kindness, if you continue in (His) kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these be grafted according to nature into their own olive tree. For I do not wish, brothers, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, that you may not be wise in yourselves, that hardness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

These verses are a warning to the Gentile Christians who are now enjoying what was originally reserved for the Jews. The fact that Gentiles are now reaping the privilege of being God’s children is no reason for smugness or pride. Paul cautions them not to be arrogant about their being chosen for a transplant but to recognize their dependency upon the root of Judaism. A great debt of gratitude is owed by the Gentiles to the Jewish people. There is great danger in not acknowledging this debt and becoming arrogant. The consequence is to suffer the same fate as the natural branches. God reserved the right to remove them, and He will not hesitate to do the same with the wild branches. The Gentile world has, for the most part, ignored this warning. I am still surprised, in this enlightened age of ours, how many brothers and sisters still defend their prejudicial attitude toward Jews because they are a people still in rebellion against God.

In **verses 22-24** Paul effectively demonstrates the power of God as He works according to His own righteous principles. In this powerful working is seen both the *kindness* and *severity* of God, and it is the behavior of the people that determines which aspect of His nature He manifests. If they continue in faith, the kindness of God will be showered upon them. If they persist in unbelief, severity in judgment is inevitable.

In **verse 25** Paul says he would not want his readers to be **“ignorant of this mystery.”** He has expanded on the metaphor of the olive trees to make his point very clear. However, to many modern readers, the grafting of branches to increase the quality and amount of the fruit is not a familiar concept. If Paul was writing this today, he would probably choose another metaphor. The first thought that comes to mind is organ transplants. A body without a liver or two kidneys cannot survive. Organs without bodies are no good at all. This we understand, and Paul would insist that we recognize the relevancy it has to the intimate relationship Judaism and Christianity must have. I

like the idea of a corneal transplant to illustrate the point. I use the healing of the blind man in **Mark 8:22-26**. He is a Jew who cannot see. Jesus came into his life and gave him sight. A corneal transplant is the gift of sight. The Jew is living in spiritual darkness; the Gentile has received His wonderful light. God's plan is for both Jew and Gentile to merge into one complete and healthy body.

Mercy And Majesty

Romans 11:26-36

Verses 26-32: All Israel Will Be Saved

“And so all Israel will be saved, as it has been written: ‘The Deliverer shall come out of Zion, and He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and this is from My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’ Regarding the Gospel (they are) indeed enemies on your account, but regarding the election (they are) beloved on account of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God (are) irrevocable. For as you also were once disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy through their disobedience, so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they might also obtain mercy. For God has shut all up together in disobedience that He might show mercy to all.”

Paul is making it quite clear that, while there is a temporary hardening of Israel and God is using this to bring His blessing and mercy to the Gentile world, and when He has done that **“...all Israel will be saved,”**. The exact timing of this predicted revival is not stipulated, neither is the exact meaning of **“all Israel”** universally agreed upon. But there is no doubt that something unusual can be expected in terms of Israel's future response to Jesus whom they rejected in Paul's day.

It is helpful to remember how Paul opened **Chapters 9 and 10**. He was deeply depressed about the spiritual condition of his people, the Jews. **“...I have great grief and unceasing sorrow in my heart”** the apostle exclaimed in **9:2**. He begins **Chapter 10** with **“Brothers, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is for salvation.”** Now, nearing the end of the Jewish section of his letter, Paul boldly says, **“...all Israel will be saved.”** If Paul knew in **Chapter 9:2** what he was going to write in **11:26**, why was he so depressed? If he was aware of God's plans to restore Israel, what was his concern all about? If we can find some plausible answers for these questions, we might also find some personal applications for our own lives.

It seems obvious that Paul's emotions were operating on two levels. In **verse 25** he says that Israel was experiencing a **“hardness in part.”** The apostle could rejoice that the hardening was neither total nor permanent. There were genuine believers among the Jews and at some future time **“all Israel will be saved.”** Unfortunately, on an individual level, souls were being lost every day. His people were, for the most part, languishing in spiritual darkness, and Paul could take no pleasure in that, even though they frequently made his ministry difficult by their oppression. With Paul as our example, we learn that our lives must have a bittersweet quality to them also. We rejoice in God's accomplished plan of salvation. The love of God has been shed abroad in the land, and

salvation is available to all through faith in Christ Jesus; and we wait with eager anticipation His promised return. But this joy must also be tinged with sadness for the countless souls being lost every day. Millions of our co-inhabitants on the planet earth, countrymen, friends, neighbors and relatives are living in sin darkened blindness. Jeremiah has expressed the anguish of the unsaved as well as anyone could, **“The harvest is past, the summer has ended and we are not saved.” Jeremiah 8:20.** We have work to do while it is day; the time grows shorter, and the urgency grows greater.

Paul uses **verse 25** as a launching pad for his next paragraph which we are examining now. He claims that all Israel will be saved when **“...the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** The Greek noun *pleroma*, meaning fullness or completeness, is also used in **verse 12** in respect to the Jews when, as a nation, they return to God on His terms. The fullness or full number of Gentiles refers to the spread of the Gospel beyond Israel to the Gentile world, and when the elect of the Gentiles is completed it will be time for the fullness of the Jews. To support this truth, in **verses 26-27**, Paul quotes from the Old Testament and speaking through the Holy Spirit, takes some liberties with the text that no ordinary commentator would dare to do. He collates **Psalm 14:7, Isaiah 27:9** and **59:20-21**; and, in so doing, he preserves the sense of these texts and proves his own.

Paul continues to pick and choose from the Old Testament in **verses 28-29**. First He refers to the words of Moses in **Deuteronomy 7:8** and **10:15**. The apostle to the Gentiles speaks to the Gentiles and tells them that God chose to use the rejection of Christ by His people as a means of reaching the Gentiles. This in no way affects His affection for the Jews which began with their forefathers and continues to this very day. He chose, or elected Abraham and his descendants, and He continues to regard them with interest and love, fully intending to restore them to His mercy. Next he condensed a portion of Balaam’s second prophesy in **Numbers 23:19**. God’s gifts and call remain in effect even though Israel now, for the most part, rejects God’s plan. God, unlike man, is truthful and reliable and does not change His mind.

In **verses 30-32** Paul maintains that the Jews and the Gentiles are the opposite sides of the same door. He first refers to the Gentiles by summing up their background in one short phrase, **“For as you also were once disobedient to God,”**. Paul gives a fuller account of the Gentiles’ spiritual condition in **Ephesians 2:1-2** and **11-13**. The apostle proceeds to explain that despite their history, they now receive mercy as a result of Jewish disobedience. Because of Israel’s rejection of Jesus and attempts to gain salvation through works, God has hardened them against the truth and temporarily set them aside. As a consequence He has made His entire plan of salvation, once offered only to the Jews, available to the Gentiles. But God has not abandoned His people. He has shown His mercy to the Gentiles so that through them the Jews **“...might also obtain mercy.”** **verse 31**. It is helpful to look back at **11:13-14** where Paul is expressing the same idea.

Paul concludes this paragraph with the idea that since the Gentiles have been disobedient and the Jews are disobedient, the only hope for either of them is the mercy of God, **verse 32**. This text is teaching the very elemental truth that all men are caught in the death trap of sin. God’s mercy is the only release from this trap, and He has

mercifully provided His only Son to free all men, Jew and Gentile alike, to bring them into His wonderful presence. The whole concept of the mercy of God and His wonderful plan to exercise it toward all men is so overwhelming for Paul that he proceeds with perhaps the greatest doxology ever written.

Verses 33-36: The Wisdom And Majesty Of God

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgment and untraceable His Ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him (are) all things, to Him (be) the glory through the ages. Amen.”

Paul began with a description of human failure and concludes with a shout of appreciation for the infinite mind of God and acknowledgment of the centrality of the Lord in all things. It has always seemed to me that Paul was prompted in part to utter this profound hymn of praise because he realized how difficult these three chapters would be to his readers. If they are not understood, it makes no difference at all in God’s resolution of the Jewish problem. God has not altered His plans violated His principles, besmirched His character, forsaken His people nor ignored the Gentiles. God is God, and that is more than enough to generate the praise of men. Paul begins his doxology with an exclamation that needs no proof: **“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”** He then continues with three questions that need no answer.

1. “Who has known the mind of the Lord.” Since He is infinite, no creature could ever begin to comprehend the mind of the Creator. The tragedy of many human beings is to disbelieve in God because they cannot understand God or His ways.

2. “Who has become His counselor?” God knows all things even before they happen, and God has boundless wisdom to apply His knowledge. It is unthinkable for anyone of His creatures to give advice to the Creator.

3. “Who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” God is indeed the first giver, and His children must never think of it in reverse. God is the Sustainer and Provider of all. No creature could ever put God in his debt and when we do give, God gives it back with 100% interest, **Mark 10:29-30** It is interesting how often we feel as though we are doing God a favor by our actions or contributions or church attendance. This is yet another dangerous form of work righteousness.

Paul concludes this portion of his letter with a statement about the majesty of God that is as profound as it is short. To grasp the full significance of **verse 36** I need to again divide and think about each thought individually.

1. “Of Him”: A reminder that He is the source of all things. God is the ultimate source. **James 1:16-18** says the same thing in a strikingly beautiful way.

2. **“Through Him”**: A reminder that He is the sustainer of all things and is able to cause **“...all things work together for good to those who love God.” Romans 8:28.**

3. **“To Him”** A reminder that He is the significance of all things. We recognize Him as the source of all life, the force that sustains life and because of Him we are constantly being drawn back to Him. He created the sun of our solar system which makes that light as artificial as a light bulb; yet we teach our children that the sun is the source of all life. What a lie. God is our light, and it is to Him that all glory rightly belongs. God grant it. Amen.

Romans

Salvation Applied

Romans 12:1-16:27

The first eleven chapters of Romans has firmly established the foundational truths of the Christian church -- sin, justification, sanctification, salvation, glorification and the sovereignty of God. Down through the centuries believers have turned to this portion of scripture more than any other when doctrinal clarification was necessary. In **Chapters 1-8** Paul presented the doctrinal foundation of his epistle to the Romans, here called salvation, part one and two. In **Romans 9-11** we are informed of an area of special importance to God -- the relationship of the gospel to His chosen people, the Jews. We discover that God's plan for Israel is consistent with His character. The focus in **Chapter 9** is the sovereignty of God, in **10** is the justice of God, and in **11** is the faithful news of God.

That is only the first eleven chapters. Now we arrive at **Chapter 12**, one of the greatest in all of scripture, and we begin to make the exciting transition from doctrinal into practice. Paul provides us with inspired guidelines for applying our faith in the Lord Jesus to our way of living. God has made it very clear that He desires to use our full potential. In the last five chapters of Romans we will learn how God develops that potential through our loving service.

Chapter 12

Mind And Body

Romans 12:1-2

“I beg you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, (which is) your logical service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what (is) that good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God.”

Paul presents a very personal plea to all Christians. He specifies two areas of dedication to God that are absolutely essential for productive Christian living. They are a consecration of the body and a transformation of the mind. Paul begins this practical section with **“I beg you therefore...”** We can immediately feel the close personal attachment the apostle has with us, his readers. It is both passionate and appealing, so much so that we can easily skip over the familiar word *therefore*. Whenever we see the term *therefore*, we should always ask “What is it there for?” It is one of the most underrated words in the English language, particularly when used in a Biblical context. In scripture it often joins together doctrinal principles and practical applications. It is always dangerous to work with the theory unrelated to practice and practice unrelated to theory. Paul’s use of the word in **Romans 12:1** is critical for bridging that important gap between teaching and application. Here, the apostle like a demanding teacher, fully expects his students to remember and understand all that he has taught so far in order to go on and accomplish his urgent request. Paul says all this in one word, **“therefore.”** Too often commentators like myself owe an apology to their readers for insulting their intelligence. We seem to enjoy writing volumes about a single word that the Holy Spirit can easily explain to a searching soul. Paul knows that the truths of Christianity requires a heartfelt response from every individual student. With this in mind he asks his readers to do some realistic evaluation regarding application of spiritual truth to their lives.

Therefore it is necessary to contemplate what God has done for us before we can intelligently consider the very personal request Paul makes to all Christians. Paul realizes this, so he writes, **“by the mercies of God.”** That is the mercy so skillfully outlined in the first eleven chapters of this letter. With this information we can now interpret the request we are given in the words **“to present your bodies a living sacrifice.”** Paul says his requests are reasonable, but too many of our brothers and sisters disagree. It is too easy to offer God our souls but insist on keeping our bodies for our own use. We need to remember just what God has done for us before we are able to let go and be prepared for what God intends to do through us.

The verb translated *present* is the technical expression for presenting a victim for sacrifice. These two words, *present* and *sacrifice*, clearly show that God expects believers to hand over their bodies to Him in the same way His Old Testament people presented their offerings to the altar. The major difference between the two was that Judaism required dead offerings, and Christianity asks for living sacrifices. As we hand over a live sacrifice, it expands our usefulness to God. It is true that as living sacrifices we sometimes try to wiggle off the altar. That is why this deliberate decision to place

ourselves at God's disposal must be made repeatedly. It is not just a one time act like regeneration or marriage.

Paul seems to anticipate our human tendency to circumvent God's requests with half-hearted offerings by saying it must be "**holy, (and) well pleasing to God.**" It is possible to engage in sacrificial acts which are unacceptable and displeasing to God; two striking examples are Cain, **Genesis 4:1-8**, and Saul, **I Samuel 15:10-23**. When we consecrate our bodies for the Lord's use, our genuine commitment must show in our life style. Our bodies then become holy and pleasing to the Lord. In earlier chapters we have seen the body as the agent of sin, but now it becomes an instrument of holiness which, of course, is totally pleasing and acceptable to God. The Lord is not interested in service rendered out of a sense of duty or obligation. Half-hearted sacrifice is worse than no sacrifice at all. But when the body is yielded as a response to the "**...mercies of God,**" it becomes a vital holy experience and wholly pleasing to God.

In **verse 2** Paul moves to the second area of dedication to God. He says "**And do not be conformed to this world.**" He is not referring to the physical or geographical location in which we live. The Greek noun *aion* has age as its first meaning, and secondly it means world. So it is the age we are living in that we are not to conform to. We are citizens of an age to come who must, for the time being, live in the present evil age. Jesus taught us that we are in the world, but not a part of it, **John 17:6-19**. Paul here asks us to recognize the same separation in our lives. However, human beings are incorrigible conformists. The temptation to fit in with those around us can be incredibly seductive, and yet conforming is a very superficial activity. The word means to assume an outward expression that does not come from within, and I have never met a person who genuinely desired to be transparently superficial; and, yet, most have willingly conformed to the thoughts of their age. The world's form of expression is anti-God, and it exerts great pressure upon God's people to conform to it and not to reflect our new life in Christ. When we do conform, we begin first to blend non-Christian values with Christian values, and finally to accept them altogether. Having done that, we have lost any value we might have had and actually become a liability to the body of Christ.

It is difficult to swim upstream, and not to conform is definitely going in a different direction that most everybody else. It is so easy to cave in under pressure to conform to a lifestyle that is mimicking the world's system rather than Christ's. We continually need to examine ourselves and to avoid the excuse that says if everyone is doing it, it must be all right. In God's economy the majority is always wrong; so Paul asks us to resist this temptation to conform and rather to "**be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**" The Greek word translated *transformed* in **verse 2** is *metamorphouthe*. It is quite easy to see the English word taken almost directly from the Greek word. Metamorphosis means to change bodily form. The most dramatic example of this is the caterpillar's mysterious change into a butterfly. I can think of no word that more aptly describes what develops in a Christian's life than metamorphosis. I am not referring to a bodily change, although that too will happen when we meet the Lord; but I refer to an internal change that Paul describes as a "**renewing of your mind.**" God has

provided through His grace more than assurance of a place in heaven. He has also given us a transforming dynamic in this life.

We live in a society regulated almost exclusively by laws. Laws are controls imposed upon us from the outside. God has produced a body of believers who are able to be changed and regulated from the inside without the need for rules. We are bound only by the law of love. This produces a wonderful freedom that only a child of God can experience. The best illustration for this is metamorphosis. The caterpillar is a very difficult creature to generate any love for. They are the creepy-crawlies of the world. Nine times out of ten, if a caterpillar is crawling on someone's arm, they would shudder in disgust, brush it off, and step on it. A butterfly, on the other hand, is loved by everyone. They represent beauty and freedom. They are the brightest and the best in an otherwise pesky insect world. Before the Lord Jesus came into our lives, we most resembled some earthbound insect with nothing but nuisance value. After His transforming power goes to work we are no longer condemned to crawl the earth as objects of revulsion. Now we are spiritual butterflies, examples to a sin-darkened world of the metamorphic power of the resurrection. As Jesus said, **“And you will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” John 8:32.**

Paul was probably not thinking of butterflies when he wrote this; but he must have thought about Jesus' description of His followers in **Matthew 5:13-16 “...salt of the earth...the light of the world...a city set on a hill...shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** With this thought in mind, Paul asks us to resist conforming and be translated instead. He then gives us a compelling reason for doing what he requested, **“...that you may prove what (is) that good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God.”** For many believers, the will of God is some mystical reality that they have little hope of ever understanding. Paul does not agree with this common misconception. He insists that, if we present our bodies and transform our minds, the result will be a lifestyle of fruitful activity that will provide evidence of what God's good and perfect will means in our lives. Those who genuinely do what God requires will find in their own experience the sweet reality of His will.

One matter raised in this session deserves a little more attention that I have given it -- mind renewal. This concerns not only the content of our thoughts, but also the manner in which we think. I don't believe anybody is more aware of the battle in progress for mind control than concerned parents of teenage children. These young people are under heavier pressure as we near the end of the twentieth century than at any other time in history. Some argue this issue and claim that people have always felt like that, but I disagree, and I offer just one quote of many as evidence. David Crosby of Crosby, Stills and Nash, a still popular soft rock group said “I figure the only thing to do was swipe their kids. I still think it is the only thing to do. By saying that, I'm not talking about kidnapping. I'm just talking about changing their value systems which removes them from their parents' world very effectively.”¹

¹ Rolling Stones Interviews, Vol. 1, Page 401.

I believe that there is a concentrated malevolent intent, not in just the music industry, but in all the media that is aimed directly at the 8 to 18 year olds; and that intent is to steal their minds. Next to the home, the church fellowship is the best place in the world to combat this influence. Paul's words in **II Corinthians 10:3-5** have never been more needed than they are now. **"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but might in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."** This is mind renewal, and I know of no other method to combat effectively the unhealthy influences our children are exposed to every day of their young lives. God grant it! Amen!

Evaluate And Activate

Romans 12:3-8

Verse 3: Think About Yourself

"For I say, through the grace which is given to me, to everyone that is among you, not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think sensibly, as God apportioned to each one a measure of faith."

The first thing Paul asks us to do with our renewed minds is to look within ourselves and discern the limits of our God-given abilities. An accurate evaluation of our capabilities must be made before we can function usefully. Trying to serve before we know what we have to offer may be more harmful than helpful. The apostle begins on a negative note, **"...not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think," verse 3b.** It is necessary for the reader to pause and reflect on Paul's advice; to focus on areas of your life where you might be tempted to think more highly of yourself than you ought. As a young man, most of my troubles came from a failure to do this. I had to learn my limits from painful experience rather than from simple introspection. Peter is a good biblical example of learning the hard way, **Mark 14:27-31.** I have found Peter's example very useful in understanding my own dependency upon the Lord. Peter was intelligent, brave, responsible and a natural leader of men; even Jesus nicknamed him *Rocky*. But all those talents were a liability to him as long as he trusted them more than the Lord. When Jesus told Peter that he would deny him, Peter said "I will not." You can't call Jesus "Lord," and then say that He is mistaken, but that is what Peter did because he thought **"too highly"** of his own abilities.

Peter was supremely self-confident. From the world's point of view this is a good characteristic, but in God's economy it can be a fatal flaw. Some readers will find this unacceptable because every therapist will tell you that high self-esteem is much better than low self-esteem. It is true that some believers look at themselves in such a negative manner that they do not see themselves capable of any contribution to the body. Paul reminds us that what we have been asked to examine has been gifts provided by God as He saw fit. Whether we have a tendency toward arrogance or to excuse ourselves with false humility, Paul insists that we are to correctly assess our assets by looking inside of ourselves.

If there is any difficulty with this, it is because the church doesn't spend enough time on the difference between talents and gifts, at least in a Christian's life. Talents are the abilities we are born with; they are genetically transmitted from parents to their children. Our intellect, musical ability, artistic skill and athletic coordination, or lack of them, are ours by right of birth. We can call them gifts of God, but they are things which are available to all mankind. Gifts, on the other hand, are special skills or abilities that God gives only to His children, for the express purpose of building up the body of Christ.

These terms are often used interchangeably, but to examine ourselves as Paul requests, it is important to recognize the difference between them. It is human nature to take most of the credit for our talents. This is why we exert so much time and effort to succeed, and are so competitive in everything from relationships to sports. We need to be the top of the class, king of the hill or just to be number one. It is unfortunate that when we are very talented, the gifts of God often go unrecognized. So it comes as no surprise that God often gives prodigious gifts to people with relatively little talent. **“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise...” I Corinthians 1:27a.** That way there can be no question about the source. Every gift has a giver, and the giver, in this case, God, should get the credit. Like Peter, many of us concentrate upon our talents and never discover our gifts, or we think too highly of our talents and too little of our gifts. Whenever this happens, the body of Christ suffers. She needs our gifts much more than we need our talents. Peter trusted himself and doubted God. This fatal flaw is the dominating doctrine of this evil age, and many believers are conforming to it.

Verses 4-5: Act For The Good Of The Church

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function; so the many are one body in Christ, and each one members of each other.”

Paul loved to use the human body as an analogy of the church and how it works. In **I Corinthians 12:12-31** he gives a fuller example of the analogy we have here in **verses 4-5**. As Paul compares the church with the human body, he conveys two essential truths about the body of Christ. First, the church is composed of many members, each one different, yet responsible for important functions. Secondly, the church's members are interrelated. No matter how humble a part of our body may be, if it doesn't do what it was designed for, the whole body suffers. The same holds true for the church.

Verses 6-8: Act In The Power Of The Gifts

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, if prophecy, (use it) according to the proportion of faith; or ministry (use it) in ministry; he that teaches (use it) in teaching; or he that encourages (use it) with encouragement; he who gives, (use it) with generosity; he that administrates (use it) with diligence; he who shows mercy, (use it) with cheerfulness.”

When believers properly exercise their spiritual gifts, the church matures and positively influences its environment. Paul makes three points that are vital to an accurate understanding of this fact. The first one is that all Christians have gifts. Furthermore, the gifts we have differ; and, finally, the gifts are to be used for the benefit of the church. Paul illustrates this point by referring to seven exemplary gifts. It is noteworthy that Paul does not describe the functions of the different gifts, but rather concentrates on the spirit in which the gifts are used. It is not wise to be too limiting in defining the gifts, but here are a few guidelines:

1. “Prophecy” heads the list, and the New Testament gift is essentially the same as the Old Testament office. It involves the people of God speaking the Word of God in a clear and exciting fashion. Jesus makes it quite clear in **Matthew 10:21** that the Spirit of the Father speaks through His messengers. In the book of **Acts**, the gift of Prophecy and teachers are often mentioned together, **Acts 13:1, 15:32, 21:10**.

2. “Ministry” means first to serve Jesus as Lord and to render service where it is needed within the body. People who have speaking gifts are often lacking in this area.

3. “Teaching” denotes those who instruct or communicate knowledge. This gift connected with prophecy combines to make an exciting and effective preacher.

4. “Encouraging” involves a supportive attitude for individual believers. This gift is most useful for building up fellow Christians and the encouragement of Christian living.

5. “Giving” obviously is a process that all Christians participate in, but some have a special capacity for sacrificial giving that serves as an example for us all. Barnabus in **Acts 4:36** is one of the better Biblical examples.

6. “Administrating” is a necessary gift for any position within the church that requires organization and coordinating.

7. “Mercy” is a gift with that special quality of God that tenderizes a human heart and equips the believer for compassionate care for the sick, the infirm and the depressed.

Paul is clearly implying that we may abuse our gifts by simply not using them. We have an unfortunate tendency in the church to underemphasize the use of the gifts by all believers and seem to expect an individual cleric to have and use them all. Consequently, most parishioners have little concept of what their gifts are or how to use them, and the church looks terminally ill because of this deprivation.

Let Your Love Be Genuine

Romans 12:9-13

“Love without hypocrisy; hating evil, clinging to good. (Be) kindly affectionate to one another in brotherly love, in honor lead the way (for) one another; not lazy in diligence; fervent in spirit; serving in the proper time, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”

Genuine or *agape* love is the love of the Lord available to all those who have been adopted into the family of God. This gift of God cannot flow horizontally to others until our vertical relationship with God has been firmly established, which is what the first three verses of **Chapter 12** are about. Once we consecrate our bodies and transform our minds we can then evaluate ourselves and become purposeful people contributing to the life of the church with our gifts. In **verses 4** through **8** Paul has related some of these gifts and their uses.

Now we come to the elemental truth that the apostle has placed directly in the center of this important chapter. Genuine love is a sacrificial involvement in the lives of others. Any profession of love that is marked by indifference or uninvolvedness is hypocritical. By the same token, I have known many Christians who are aware of their gifts and use them faithfully for the church, but find no pleasure in their service. They work out of a sense of duty or responsibility and resent the brothers and sisters who aren't doing their fair share. Like Martha who resented her sister, Mary, **Luke 10:40**, they complain about doing all the work. These Martha-types are more essential to the church than the lazy or the indifferent, for without them nothing would get done. But in the process their own spiritual well-being is being eroded, like Martha's, **Luke 10:41-42**, for God insists that we serve out of love.

The proper use of the gifts in the body of Christ cannot be attained without a loving attitude towards the brothers and sisters. Love is an attribute of God, and He insists upon seeing it in His children. It is a spiritual genetic characteristic. If you are His child, then you must bear His characteristics. Jesus said, **“By this will all know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,” John 13:25**. In other words, you can call yourself anything you wish, “Christian, Catholic, Protestant, clergyman or member of...” but if you don't show love for each other, nothing else really matters. You are not truly a disciple of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is why Paul follows his exhortation about serving through our gifts with some straight forward instructions about love and what it really means. He does this by giving us a surprising number of facets in his description of love.

It would be wonderful if the love Paul speaks of was more evident among us. God has given us all the resources we need to be consistently caring people, but too frequently we fail to act in love. Why is this? The most damning argument I get against Christianity is always from former Christians. They inevitably accuse us of hypocrisy, particularly about our lack of love. Why don't Christians act more loving toward one another? I can only think of two possible reasons: Either we choose not to, or we don't fully understand what *agape* love involves. These middle verses of **Romans 12** can enlarge our capacity to love one another if we grasp Paul's meaning. The grasping, however, is difficult because Paul has again barraged us with such a shower of descriptions that my mind cannot absorb them all. These five verses cannot be read through like a paragraph. Each of the ten descriptions of love is a paragraph in itself. Each one, like a fine wine, needs to be smelled, sipped, savored and swallowed separately from one another; only then does the intoxicating effect of *agape* love begin to impact our lives.

1. "Love without hypocrisy," The first characteristic of genuine love is in Greek *anupokritos*, which means literally without play-acting. The root word is the noun *hupokritis* from which we get hypocrite. I once read that the Greeks coined the word from an early actor of the same name. This may be apocryphal because I cannot find a source for it, but I choose to accept it as probably true. The Greeks invented the theater and the terminology surrounding it. They used the word *hupokritis* to signify the part taken by an actor. So, in my own mind, at least, the word comes from a tragic actor who was so effective at his craft of acting behind a stage mask that his name has evolved down through the centuries to become one of our deadliest sins, deadly because it is the only sin I know of that hides the sin from the sinner. Hypocrisy is professing to be what one is not. Good actors can easily get lost in the roles they are playing. Christians can become such good actors that they don't realize that they are play-acting; they become hypocrites without knowing it.

Paul places love without play-acting at the head of his list of attributes concerning love because it is the most difficult to deal with. God's love insists upon our loving the whole body. We must love all the brothers and sisters. Our flesh tells us that this is not possible. Loving the lovely is easy; loving those who do not respond to our love or who might even dislike us makes no sense at all. So, knowing God's command, we begin to pretend. It is much easier to profess love and concern for someone we inwardly resent or dislike than to overcome the sin. We are now engaging in a form of spiritual prostitution. We offer an imitation of love to gain some recompense from God or the church. Ugly isn't it. Yet it is more common within the church than genuine love.

Our problem stems from not understanding Paul's subject matter in **Chapter 12**. He is talking about the spiritual gifts God gives for the benefit of the church. In **verses 3-8** he tells us to use the gifts we have and not to try something we have no gift for. However, in **verse 9** he doesn't begin the way he did with the other gifts. He doesn't say, "if you have the gift of love, then love;" he just begins with love. Individually we do not have all the gifts Paul shared with us in **verses 6-8**, but we all do have the gift of genuine love. It is one of three gifts all Christians have, "**And now abide faith, hope, love, these**

three; but the greatest of these (is) love,” I Corinthians 13:13. Using Paul’s analogy of the human body, love would be the heart of all the gifts. Love is the greatest of the gifts because the whole body needs it to stay healthy. Love of the members brings fellowship and prayer to the whole church like the heart brings blood and oxygen to the whole body. We must love, and we can if we understand the mechanics of the gifts God has given us. The love that Christians share is an outward expression of a renewed mind which has grasped the essence of the genuine love of God.

2. “hate evil, cling to good.” Paul constantly reminds believers that love is the catalyst which makes sanctified living possible. What we cling to identifies very clearly whether we are living sanctified lives or not. Any Christian who has not undergone the molding process of the first eight verses in this chapter will find that too often they choose to do the exact opposite of what Paul states here. When you see a brother or sister morbidly attracted to what is blatantly evil but avoid like the plague what is spiritually healthy and obviously good for them, discuss their choices with them. They will resent this as an interference in their lifestyles, and now genuine love must also be tough love. Remind them that as God builds in them the capacity for *agape* love, they will find it easier to resist the many faces of evil and bond themselves to all that is good.

3. “Be kindly affectionate to one another in brotherly love,” The word translated kindly affectionate, *philostorgos*, was used exclusively by the Greeks for the affection family members had for one another. Brotherly love, *philadelphia*, was used for mankind in general. Using the two words together, Paul is showing us how Christians are to express the same loving qualities towards their spiritual family as one of their physical family.

4. “in honor lead the way for one another;” Most translators give the words *prefer* or *give preference* to others in honor, and this is surely what Paul means; but I have given a transliteration of the verb *proegeomai* because it helps me to understand how this is done. It is a combination of two words -- *pro* meaning in front of or before, and *hegeomai*, which means to lead with authority. Sometimes our humility in esteeming others more highly than ourselves is so passive that it becomes false humility. What Paul is choosing to give us is an active form of honoring one another. We are to set the example. If we need to be competitive with one another, do it in the right way. Struggle to elevate others, and demonstrate the hallmark of *agape* love which is to care more for the well-being of others than for our own.

5. “not lazy in diligence; fervent in spirit serving in the proper time;” Paul connects all these words together to tell us that *agape* love is never indolent in serving the body of Christ. Rather it is ardent in its efforts as we go about our Father’s business. A loving Christian is an enthusiastic Christian. I could find no translation that uses *proper time* in its version, yet the Greek noun *kairos* is there. It means time, not an extent of time, but as an occasion. It means appointed or proper time, season or age. I have no explanation why it is left out, so I put it down exactly as Paul said it. He uses three nouns in the dative case in **verse 11, in diligence, in spirit, in the proper time.**

Each one effects our service. We serve the Lord energetically, in the spirit not in the flesh and at the right time.

6. “rejoicing in hope,” Enthusiasm is often connected with joy. We take pleasure in what we are zealous about, although, as believers, our rejoicing is not bound to present circumstances. We can and do rejoice in the future glory God has in store for us. Our immediate circumstances may be depressing, difficult or even dangerous, but our joy is constant because our future is secure. No stretch of the imagination will enable an unbeliever to comprehend such a thing.

7. “patient in tribulation,” Of all the qualities needed for spiritual growth, patience in tribulation may be the hardest to come by. Paul described its purpose fully in **Chapter 5:1-11**. Here he completes the formula by telling us that genuine love provides the staying power we need.

8. “continuing in steadfast prayer;” Believers who genuinely love are devoted to prayer. There are times when no amount of loving attention is effective in our dealings with people we care about, but we can pray for them; and God assures us that loving prayer has a powerful effect.

9. “distributing to the needs of the saints,” Contributing to the needs of God’s people is an obvious and necessary exercise of our love. This includes giving assistance in spiritual, physical and emotion, as well as financial matters. Perhaps it is best said by John in his first letter, **Chapter 3:17-19**.

10. “practicing hospitality.” Christians are called on to express love to others by practicing hospitality not just to friends, but to anyone needing it. This is the easiest of the many facets of love, but it also must be practiced for the right reasons.

Overcome Evil With Good

Romans 12:14-21

Verses 14-18: By-Products Of Love

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and not curse. Rejoice with those rejoicing, and weep with those weeping. Be of one mind toward one another; not concentrating on high things but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in yourselves. Repay no one evil for evil, provide good before all men. If possible, as to yourselves, live peaceably with all men.”

As students, it is important to understand that Paul’s instructions in this passage are attainable, not idealistic. **Romans 12:1-2** teaches us an achievable consecration and transformation of ourselves for God and His kingdom. **Verses 3-8** direct us toward a harmonious use of the gifts, and **verses 9-13** command us to act lovingly toward one another. It is evident that God expects to see these things acted out in our life, and every child of God must understand what God expects to achieve in their lives through the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. But **verses 14-18** seem to produce an almost

automatic response of rebellion within us. Like Peter, we react and say, **“Not so, Lord?”**
Acts 10:14.

Some of our reflex actions are both normal and good. If we trip and fall forward, we instinctively stretch out our hands to cushion the fall and protect ourselves, or we blink when something comes near our eyes. These are called autonomic actions, which means they are involuntary. We also have other natural reactions which, although normal, are neither good nor involuntary. When we are hurt by word or deed it is only natural to want to hurt back; but Paul tells us to respond to evil with good. We cringe at this; the world we live in teaches us that retaliation is a justifiable activity. Governments do it, organizations do it, even family members do it. We have been taught to stick up for ourselves and not let people walk all over us; if we are hit, just hit back. The Bible condemns this advice as worldly.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to teach this to God’s children of any age. They have discovered from little on that retribution gives them much more satisfaction than sanctification. How can we overcome this powerful effect that an evil action can produce in us? We must call it what it is, manipulation. Nobody likes to be manipulated. We all like to believe that we are in control of our own lives. We do what we want to do, not what somebody else wants us to do. If this is true then we must consider how we respond to evil. If someone hits us or curses us, the evil is in them. If we retaliate and hit or curse back, the evil is now in us. We have been manipulated, evil has been reproduced and multiplied. Another being has caused us to do and be something we have no desire to do or be. We are allowing another to control our actions. If this sounds over dramatic to the reader, it is supposed to. We need to visualize this activity if we are to accept Paul’s instructions as reasonable as well as spiritual.

When someone curses us and makes unkind remarks about our ancestry, the Lord does not allow us to follow our natural instincts. Rather, He urges us to use our supernatural abilities, namely **“bless and not curse,”** **verse 14.** Paul is simply repeating the words of the Lord Jesus in **Luke 6:28,** and the command is quite simple. But how can we obey it without sounding like super-sanctimonious phonies? How do we bless without being hypocritical? The problem is our in-dwelling sin, inherited from Adam, which is lying there dormant like a seed waiting for fertilization so that it may spring forth and bloom. Evil is the food it longs for, and we need to stop feeding it. If I am insulted or abused, my first impulse is anger, which is a reaction not an action. This is involuntary. This is original sin rearing its ugly head; but there is also within me the Word of God which teaches me to consider my alternatives. I no longer am a slave to sin who has to react to evil. I can now, through the power of the Spirit, act. I can feel a genuine satisfaction in giving up the dubious pleasure of retaliation and be an obedient child of my Father.

In **verses 15-18** Paul gives five more examples of opportunities to do either good or evil. As I read through these verses, it is embarrassing to see how easy it is to do the opposite of what is commanded. **Verse 15** tells us to enjoy other’s good fortune and feel their sorrow when they are in pain. When a fellow Christian has an unexpected blessing

the seed of envy is also there. When someone fails at something there is a tug of satisfaction that it is them and not us. That is the flesh speaking. As members of the body of Christ we now can enjoy the blessing in the lives of others as if it were our own and empathize with the grief of others because it is our own.

The third opportunity we have is given in **verse 16a**. We are told to live in harmony with one another in the family of God. We fail at this on three different levels. The first is in the whole body of the Christian church. We have fragmented into many disputing factions about the truth of God. Disagreeing is, in itself, not evil, as long as we agree to disagree. That falls within the rules of harmony, but too often we find that Christian denominations have more enmity towards one another than they do for the real enemy. The second is within the individual parishes, and the third is in the family. Family harmony is the stepping stone for a loving relationship within the larger family of God. Dysfunction within our home lives bodes ill for the health of the whole body. Satan seems to understand that much better than we because he is attacking the family life of Christians more violently than anywhere else. We must see this and begin to place the blame where it belongs and stop accusing each other.

Verse 16b deals with our attitudes about others and ourselves. Paul is generic when he says **“not concentrating on high things.”** The general concession is that he is referring to people rather than things, which makes good sense; however, by this open-ended approach to it, Paul has expanded the horizons of our use of it. By our human nature we migrate towards those of power, importance and success, and tend to ignore the weak and unimportant. We often admire and care for the very people who need it the least, and ignore those who need it the most. Within the body of Christ we must learn to overcome this form of discrimination and love indiscriminately. To do this we need to have a more accurate view of ourselves. Paul emphasizes this thought with a condensed version of **Isaiah 5:21**, **“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!”**

Paul ties together these extraordinary anomalies much the same way he began it in **verse 14**. Here he gives us a general rule to cover all of the above, he says **“Repay no one evil for evil.”** The apostle seems to be giving us a helpful explanation for one of the most difficult precepts the Lord Jesus ever gave to His disciples. **“But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also,” Matthew 5:39.** The most common question about this is “Did Jesus say we cannot defend ourselves, our family or our country?” With the help of Paul in **Romans 12:17**, we can say “no.” We are not to react to evil with evil of our own; but if we are able to resist evil without anger or hatred, we are then providing a good example of Christianity to a watching world. This is not only acceptable, it is desirable. Paul goes on to say in **verse 18** that peace is always preferable to conflict. This is not always possible, but when it isn’t, we must examine ourselves to avoid the evil that is always the root cause of conflict. With all of these things being considered and accepted by his readers, Paul is now ready to conclude this magnificent chapter of Christian life-style.

Verses 19-21: Overcome Evil With Good

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’ says the Lord. ‘Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire upon his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The world says “Don’t get mad, get even.” God says **“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.”** Of the two statements, the first sounds more appealing. It seems almost cowardly not to fight back. Many victims do not retaliate out of fear or lack of power, but everyone agrees that King David was no coward. He set a marvelous example of this principle in **II Samuel 16:5-13**. David certainly had the power and means at his disposal to retaliate. Yet, he seems to have understood fully what Paul is teaching us here. He is more kingly in his gently reason than if he had cut down Shimei with his sword or cursed him in return. He chose to act rather than react and leave the matter in God’s hands.

In **verse 20** Paul slightly condenses King Solomon’s words in **Proverbs 25:21-22** to make his point about overcoming evil with good. The last part of the passage in question sounds a little vindictive because of the imagery used. Piling coals of fire on your enemies’ head is not a peaceful act, but that notion was rebuked in the previous verse. Solomon seems to be teaching that when we respond to unkindness with love, our acts of kindness will by contrast produce a burning sense of shame and guilt in our enemies. By returning good for evil we have a much better opportunity of turning enemies into friends than by doing the opposite. There is no guarantee that this will happen, but one thing is certain -- love is the only response that finds favor with God. All of God’s people should know this. Perhaps this is why Paul omitted the last part of **Proverbs 25:22**, **“and the Lord will reward you.”**

Chapter Thirteen

Citizenship

Romans 13:1-7

Verses 1-5: Obedience To Authority

“Let every soul be subject to high authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore he that opposes the authority resists the order of God, and those who resist will bring judgment to themselves. For the rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you wish not to be afraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from it. For it is a servant of God for you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for it does not wear the sword in vain; for it is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil. Therefore (it is) necessary to be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.”

In **Chapter 12** Paul kept a fairly narrow focus by outlining the God-given gifts of believers and their responsibility for the use of these gifts in the church. He now goes on to deal with the way we are to function in secular society. Elsewhere in his writings Paul teaches that God has delegated His authority to parents, employers and other authority figures, but his emphasis here is the part government plays in implementing God’s will. The apostle asserts that Christians must hold this authority in high regard and be submissive to it as a matter of conscience.

The issue Paul deals with here was a serious question which had to be answered very early in the Christian church. Christians acknowledged the Lord Jesus Christ as their law giver, judge and king. The nations of the world in which they lived were pagan and ruled by men who were no friends of God or His people. Whether Christians were to acknowledge the laws of such nations and men was a question that, of course, would occur very early. God made the answer very easy for us to understand. He said **“Let every soul be subject to higher authorities,” verse 1**. The principle teaching of **Romans 13:1-7** is this: “A good Christian is a good citizen.” God expects His people to submit to the higher authorities because He is the highest authority. Paul here informs us that God has delegated His authority to man and has appointed our governing authorities. Failure to submit is seen as resistance to divine authority and worthy of judgment, **verse 2**. Jesus confirms that political power exists only by the tolerance of God in His dialogue with Pilate, **John 19:10-11**.

In **verses 3-4** Paul is speaking of governments in general. It may not be universally true that **“...rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil,”** but throughout history, government has been civilization’s only answer to anarchy and has, for the most part, been committed to establish law and order. The preamble of the Constitution of the United States of America expresses this desire very eloquently: “In order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty...” American citizens are and should be proud of such majestic words contained

in our Constitution, but they should also realize that the founding fathers who wrote and passed this document were in direct violation of the law of God.

Too many citizens keep the laws of the land out of fear of getting caught. When I keep the speed laws I do so to avoid a ticket. **Verse 4** supports that as a valid reason, but **verse 5** gives a reason that would appeal only to a Christian. Fear is a great motivator, but we should be motivated to respect authority as a matter of conscience. We, of all people, should have positive attitudes toward authority because we better understand how the purpose of God is served by a structured society.

It must be noted here that nowhere does God say he approves of every act of human government or that Christians must blindly obey every law of man. The major problem early Christians faced was when divinely appointed government acted in ways that directly contravened divine law. The rule of thumb stated by Peter in **Acts 5:29**, **“We ought to obey God rather than men”** applies today just as then. In an era when respect for authority is at an all time low, it becomes important that we consider carefully under what circumstances we can be Godly rebels against man’s laws. Christians must be very careful to insure that any act of civil disobedience is a matter of conscience inspired by the Word of God alone. Paul apparently felt that this was so obvious he needn’t mention it.

Verses 6-7: Pay Your Dues

“For in this account you also pay taxes; for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: Taxes to whom taxes (are due), revenue to whom revenue, fear to whom fear, honor to honor.”

Simple obedience to authority is not enough. Paul lists two more areas of obligation to secular government: The first area is taxes and revenue, which refers to custom taxes and duty on some merchandise. Some Christians live in fear of an audit by the Internal Revenue Service because they think it is all right to fudge a bit on taxes since they do not approve of the way the government spends their tax dollars. Likewise, some play games with the Immigration Service on their way through customs. This is the way of the world. The people of God **“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s,” Matthew 22:21**, as a matter of principle.

The second area of obligation deals with our attitudes. Christians may not appreciate the politics of our government officials on issues of abortion, prayer and related issues, and they may even detest the private lives of some office holders. But this does not exempt us from the responsibility to show them respect (fear) and honor. Christians of the twentieth century must understand that most of the Romans to whom this was written had endured the reigns of terror of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero, whom they were told to honor and respect.

Wake Up

Romans 13:8-14

Verses 8-10: Love Is The Fulfilling Of The Law

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if (there is) any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does not do evil to a neighbor; therefore love (is) the fulfillment of the law.”

We must appreciate how brilliantly Paul has sliced through the complexities of human life and pinpointed our Christian responsibilities in **Romans 12:1-13:10**. Paul tells us how to serve the church, **12:4-8**, love without hypocrisy, **12:9-13**, treat our enemies, **12:14-21**, relate to government, **13:1-7**, and pay our debts, both financial and social, **13:8-10**. In an age of great financial strain and relational selfishness, we need to read and put to practice these wise words from Romans.

Having taught us of our obligation to pay tax and to respect those whom it is due, Paul turns our attention to private financial matters and says simply **“Owe nothing to anyone.”** Paul is not dictating against a proper use of credit in these opening words. Rather, we are being told to meet our financial obligations. When we do, the name of Christ will be honored. Christians should have the reputation of being great credit risks. But now Paul adds a surprising addendum to this obvious legal dictate. He adds on the instruction concerning the obligation to love. He insists that this obligation is as real as taxation and personal debt. The only debt we can never fully pay is the debt of love we owe to the brothers and sisters. In **verse 8**, when Paul says, **“love one another,”** he used the word *allos* which means another of the same kind. However, later in that same verse, he uses *heteros*, **“for he who loves another,”** which means another of a different kind. It should be easy for Christians to love one another, but here Paul is talking about our treatment of non-Christians. God desires His people to reach out in affection to their fellow humans, regardless of the differences that separate them.

In **verse 9** Paul gives us five of the ten commandments and then summarizes the entire second table of the law by saying **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** **Luke 10:27**. This is the Biblical definition of love by which we can measure our actions toward one another. A normal healthy person will not try to harm himself and will work towards his personal safety and security. Normal love for one’s neighbors should have the same concern for them. We all know this, but like the cynical expert of the law who said it, we also say **“And who is my neighbor?”** **Luke 10:29**. This question was answered once and for all by the Lord Jesus in His parable of the Good Samaritan. My neighbor is anyone in my sphere of activity whose needs or suffering I am in a position to help. To love my neighbor is to take action and do something positive because Christ first loved me and did the something about me.

Paul states that if we love our fellow man, we fulfill the whole law. The apostle is not placing us back under the demands of the Old Testament law. Rather, he is bringing

into focus the necessity of demonstrating our love of God by how we love one another, the underlying principle upon which the whole law was based. To emphasize this he places between his statements of love five negative commands from the Mosaic law, **Exodus 20:13-17**. He uses the negative statements to show that genuine love seeks what is best for others. If we really love someone, we will not exploit them sexually nor cheat on them. We will not hurt, steal from nor envy people we love. All of these negatives are summarized by Paul in **verse 10** by saying **“Love does not do evil.”** A good one-word definition of evil or sin is selfishness. And love, the polar opposite of sin, is selflessness. We, the readers, should realize very quickly that Paul’s statement is practical as well as spiritual. If we apply the principles of love to all of our life situations, we will, at least outwardly, be keeping the law.

Verses 11-14: Time To Wake Up

“And (do) this, knowing the time, that (at this) hour we should already be roused out of sleep; for now our salvation (is) nearer than when we (first) believed. The night is far spent, and the day has drawn near. Therefore we should cast off the works of darkness and should put on the armor of light. We should walk respectably as in (the) day not in revelry and drunkenness, not in sexual impurity and lewdness, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desire of the flesh.”

In the preceding three verses Paul had continued the now familiar theme of genuine love. Now, unexpectedly, he changes pace and, in a forceful, almost angry style in **verses 11-12** he tells us to wake up. This catches my attention because I am not a morning person. It’s a struggle to get my eyes open and focus my mind on the business of the day. If I have been in a deep sleep and dreaming when my alarm goes off, I have difficulty distinguishing reality from fantasy. It takes me long minutes to sort out where I am, what day it is and what I have to do that day. I’m at my worst in the morning. I don’t care to talk to anyone, and if I am going to be unkind or unpleasant, it will be shortly after getting out of bed.

What is true physically also applies in the spiritual realm. When Paul tells us that we should **“be roused out of sleep,”** he may have been concerned about his readers dozing off, but it’s far more likely that he refers to spiritual lethargy. There are some Christians who are wide awake spiritually, fully expecting and eagerly anticipating the return of the Lord Jesus. When they pray **“Thy kingdom come,”** they really mean it. But most of us drift along in a religious daze, having difficulty distinguishing between God’s reality and the world’s fantasy. To this point in **Chapters 12 & 13** Paul has told us to return good for evil, to honor politicians even if they don’t deserve it, pay our taxes and love everyone. We don’t like to hear about responsibilities, so we tend to drift off into a dream world which is more comfortable than the real world. Paul seems to realize this, so right in the middle of his love theme, he sounds a wake up alarm that has a critical bearing on how we should live in a world gone awry.

The problem with living on earth is that the things of the world take up so much of our time and energy that we can become totally caught up in secular living. We begin to think like people of the world and to adopt their philosophies and life styles. In these verses Paul finds it necessary to sound the alarm and remind us that our reality is not down here, it is up there! We are really resident aliens here on earth, and someday, and that day is growing nearer, the Lord Jesus will return to take us home as He has promised. In light of this truth Paul provides us with a list of do's and don'ts in **verse 13**. He explains what types of behavior are inappropriate for believers. The negatives he gives us fall into three categories:

1. Lack of discipline: The average American, in this second half of the twentieth-century, has more leisure time than any other society in the history of man. This can, and often does put a strain on personal discipline. Christians are not to use their leisure time as an opportunity for engaging in out-of-control activities. Paul mentions **“in revelry and drunkenness”** as two particularly relevant problems to first-century believers. Nothing has changed for the twentieth-century Christian who must understand that self-discipline is necessary for sanctified living.

2. Lack of Morality: Paul's second category is one of the major issues in society today. Sexual experimentation and exercises in sensuality are both permitted and promoted. What God Himself has identified as abnormal abominations are now considered normal healthy activities. They are not thought of as **“works of darkness”** and any hope of keeping the population moral has been abandoned.

3. Lack of Love: The third trait of a darkened life style may be the most dangerous of them all. For Christians, the first two are obviously wrong and to be avoided. When committed they produce guilt and a trip to communion so we can feel better about ourselves and grateful to God for His forgiveness. But we don't put **“strife and jealousy”** in the same category as the others, and therein lies the danger. These may be normal human errors common to all, but we are now superhuman beings with full power to eliminate our competitive, jealous nature, and Paul makes sure to tell us how it is done in **verse 14**.

The apostle makes two exceedingly helpful remarks that relate to appropriate behavior. They are practical and possible if we can understand them. He says we must **“put on the Lord Jesus Christ”** which is the same as **“put on the armor of light”** in **verse 12**. And we are to **“make no provision for the desire of the flesh.”** The first instruction is remedial; it conveys the idea of equipping or arming ourselves with the resources of Christ. First and foremost, this would including knowing His Word, following His example and claiming His power as our own. The second is preventive: Many Christians weaken their spiritual position by not taking suitable steps to avoid problems. We all are aware of people, places or activities that promote sin in our lives. Knowing this, we should do whatever necessary to avoid them. When we cannot remove them from our sphere of activity, we need to consciously draw upon the power of the indwelling Lord Jesus to be more controlling than our environment.

Chapter 14

The Weaker Brother

Romans 14:1-12

Verses 1-6: Who Is The Weaker Brother?

“Receive him who is weak in the faith (but) not to take issue over questionable things. One believes he may eat all things, another being weak eats (only) vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another’s servant. To his own master he stands or falls. And he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One judges a day above another day; another judges every day (alike). Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, he does not observe it to the Lord. He who eats eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, he does not eat to the Lord, and gives God thanks.”

In the preceding two chapters Paul has taught us who and how to love. In this chapter we are faced with the reality that too often our capacity to love is most severely tested among our Christian brothers and sisters. The weaker brothers’ judgmental, holier-than-thou attitude, and the stronger brothers’ contempt for legalism produces an atmosphere more conducive to division than devotion. The apostle realized that the issues he wrote about were not theological, but attitudinal. The crucial problem that needed to be addressed was the negative response of the groups to one another. So Paul begins this chapter by telling us not to **“take issue over questionable things.”** We should never let anything trivial or nonessential cause divisions or produce disharmony among us. The church has lumped all these disputable matters into a category called *adiaphora*, which refers to issues in the church that God has not addressed in scripture.

The church of Rome had two such matters, neither of which seems particularly important to us, but both apparently were sore spots to the Roman Christians. The first had to do with food and the second with holy days. The problems arose because Gentile Christians tended to have a more relaxed attitude about some issues that had become deeply ingrained in the Jewish consciousness. And Hebrew Christians were very uncomfortable with their New Testament freedom from the ceremonial law. When Paul speaks of Christians who are **“weak in faith,”** he means they are not yet mature in their relationship with Christ. This was particularly evident in those who applied rules and limits to their own lives that Jesus did not teach. This is not wrong, but it is also not biblical and becomes wrong when they try to impose their views upon others.

The contention about food in the Roman church arose between those who believed that all things were permissible to eat and those who ate only vegetables, **verse 2**. Although Paul does not specify, it was probably between Christian Jews and Gentiles. In pagan societies the meat of sacrificial animals was sold as a matter of economics to the neighboring butcher shops. For Gentile Christians meat was meat, but the Jewish

Christians were appalled at the thought that they might be eating meat that had been sacrificed to some heathen god. Many preferred to become vegetarians rather than risk becoming unclean in this way.

The same kind of conflict arose over what day of the week was best for worship. The Jewish reverence for the Sabbath was so profound that even after becoming Christians, only a Saturday could be considered as the holy day. The Gentile, on the other hand, had no such bias. The early church could have become two churches -- one for the conservative Jews and another for the liberal Gentiles, each going their own way. However, Paul could accept no solution that divided the body of Christ over non-Biblical issues. Paul was committed to a nobler, albeit more difficult solution. He sets forth three guidelines for getting along with the weaker brother which must be consistently remembered and applied as we deal with one another. These show us how two factions who disagree on the nonessentials of the Christian faith can live in harmony:

1. Verses 1-3: The stronger Christians have the responsibility to accept the weaker ones. We are to freely embrace those who hold differing views and help them to one day enjoy the full freedom of the Gospel.

2. Verse 4: All Christians are under the same head. Because we are all servants of one master, we do not have the authority to judge other believers. Only the Lord has the right to evaluate the practices of His people. Our accountability is to Christ, not to other Christians.

3. Verses 5-6: Christians should be fully convinced of their position. We should be as certain as possible that whatever position we hold on nonessential issues is consistent with what we know about the Lord Jesus. As we talk about nonessentials in our belief we need to be very careful about what they are. Whenever Christians disagree over the essential truths of Christianity -- such as Christ's deity, the virgin birth, the reality of miracles, His bodily resurrection and the inerrancy of the Bible -- then the issues must be resolved quickly, without compromising scripture. Compromise has become the bane of the modern church as it ignores the truth of God's word for the sake of pleasing all. When this occurs, compromise is not a better alternative than division.

Verses 7-12: Live With Him For The Lord's Sake

“For no one of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we both live, we should live to the Lord and if we die we should die to the Lord. Therefore if we both should live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died and rose and lived again, that He might rule over both the dead and the living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of the Christ. It has been written: ‘As I live says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Verses 7-9 tell us that all Christians are interrelated. Since we are bonded together by the indwelling Lord Jesus, our actions affect one another. We should be

supportive of one another rather than tearing each other down. In **verse 10** Paul has a warning for both the weaker and the stronger brother. In the area of spiritual freedom and scriptural silence, some believers are intimidated. They would much prefer to have everything spelled out in black and white so they know what the rules are. Paul's only hint of criticism is in the use of the word *weak* in **verse 1**. He does not mind what rules they develop for their own lives so long as what they do is compatible with the Lordship of Jesus. He was concerned, however, about the weaker believers exercising a kind of tyranny over the others by forcing their legalism upon the whole body. One example of how easily this can develop is told in **Acts 15:1-29**. Some from Judea were teaching that **“Unless you are circumcised..., you cannot be saved.”** The tendency of the weaker brother is to criticize those who exercise their freedom, and the reaction of the stronger too often is utter contempt for those with scruples. Criticism and contempt were equally unacceptable to Paul, and he deals with both in **verse 10**.

To emphasize this he quotes the second half of **Isaiah 45:23** and then adds his commentary on it in **verse 12**. The weaker brother tends to confuse convention with conviction. Paul urges them and those who have no such problem to deal with controversial issues based upon their commitment to God. He really didn't care if they ate or not provided they based their decision upon what they understood the Lord's will to be. To eat or not to eat, worship on Saturday or some other day, these are probably not problems that keep today's Christians awake at night worrying about them. Unfortunately there are other points of disagreement among believers that result in selfish feuds rather than selfless acts of love. Every reader should be able to recognize areas of *adiaphora* that disturbs the unity of the body of Christ. My own experience with it was the matter of dancing. When I became a Christian my elders taught me that dancing was sinful. This didn't make any sense to me, but I thought they must know what they were talking about. It took me years to realize that they didn't. They were weaker brothers making weaker brother laws.

The Stronger Brother

Romans 14:13-23

“Therefore no longer should we judge one another, but rather judge this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to sin in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean of itself; except to him who considers anything unclean, to him (it is) unclean. But if your brother is grieved because of (your) food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that serves Christ in these things is well-pleasing to God and approved by men. So then we should pursue the things of peace and the things for building up one another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed (are) pure, but (it is) evil for the man who eats something that causes someone else to fall into sin. (It is) not right to eat meat nor drink wine nor (do anything) by which your brother stumbles, or is caused to sin or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have (it) to yourself before God. Blessed (is) he that does not

condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats because (it is) not of faith; for everything that (is) not of faith is sin.”

Verses 13-23: Do Not Give Offense

In many respects our walk as Christians resembles a balancing act between two extremes -- legalism and license. The first thought that comes to my mind is trying to use the balance bar in gymnastics. The beam is only four inches wide, and keeping your balance while moving around is very difficult. An experienced gymnast can make it look easy while doing back flips and hand stands. However, if an inexperienced person tried the same things, they would immediately injure themselves. As believers in Christ, God desires that we fully enjoy our freedom in Him. Like the experienced gymnast, mature Christians can exercise their liberty without much fear or danger to themselves. The less mature feel more comfortable with rigid sets of rules and regulations, a sort of spiritual safety net to catch them if they fall. If the strong believers flaunt their freedom in such a way that they cause their weaker counterparts to lose their balance and fall, great harm is done to the Kingdom of God.

Therefore the advice Paul gives in the last paragraph of **Chapter 14** does not concern the weaker believers, rather it focuses on how stronger Christians ought to deal with the less mature. It is important to note before going any further that the believers Paul describes as weaker brothers are often thought of as strong, both by themselves and by others. The reason for this is that when someone holds tenaciously to traditions and feels deeply about things that scripture treats with silence, they tend to be regarded as very religious or as strong Christians; but, by Paul's definition, the strong believer is the one who is free in the areas of God-given freedom and sees no need to hedge his liberty with needless rules and regulations. In these verses we see Paul clearly on the side of the stronger believers, but he insists that they be neither judgmental nor offensive in using their freedom.

It is equally important to make a distinction between those whom Paul refers to as weak in faith and the dyed-in-the-wool legalists. Weak Christians are immature Christians for whom there is some hope of reaching spiritual maturity. Legalists, on the other hand, are also spiritual babies, but they stubbornly refuse to grow up. Paul challenged this type of individual in his letter to the **Galatians**. There Paul urged Christians to remain free from the tyranny of legalism, **Galatians 5:1**. In the same chapter he exhorted believers not to use their freedom “...as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love to serve one another.” **Galatians 5:13**.

Paul begins in **verse 13** by telling us not to offend or to put stumbling blocks in a fellow believer's path. Literally the word *proskomma* means placing something in a person's path that will cause them to trip and fall. Paul also uses the word *skandalan*, translated offend or cause to sin. In short, when a Christian engages in an innocent activity in front of other Christians who view it as sin, he is running the risk of doing spiritual harm to them. This is called the sin of offense. Paul is still talking about believers with tender consciences concerning meat and holy days who were in danger of

being offended by others who had no problem with these things. We need to translate this into matters related to the church of the twentieth century. Throughout history the church has had a tendency to enact weaker brother laws. Their well-intended motive was to help church members lead healthier and cosmetically better lives. Paul finds this another form of bondage, but he is careful to place the burden of unity upon the stronger brother.

Paul says in the end of **verse 14**, “**...but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**” He states essentially the same thing in **verse 23**. This principle is sometimes referred to as the *sin against conscience*. Simply stated, if you believe something to be a sin even though it is not, and then you do what you mistakenly believed was a sin, you have really sinned. For many believers this is very confusing. Their question is always the same, “If it’s not really a sin, how did it become one?” The only rule of thumb I can give them is if your conscience is troubled, don’t do it. If your church decides that eating a hot dog is a sin and you believe it also, but you eat hot dogs anyhow, you have sinned. One of the terrible things about weaker brother laws is that they create sin where there is no sin.

On the other side of this issue there are Christians who feel that as long as they are not doing anything wrong, what other people think of them and their actions is not their problem. Paul says differently, and in **verses 15-20** he gives seven reasons why we should be concerned about how our actions might “**...cause someone else to fall into sin.**”

1. Not to be concerned about a fellow believer’s distress is unloving, **v. 15a.**
2. Christ died for him, who are we to harm the weaker brother with our liberty? **v. 15b.**
3. An innocent act can become evil by abusing it, **v. 16.**
4. The kingdom of God consists of internal things, peace and joy, not externals, eating and drinking, **v. 17.**
5. Our first duty is to please Christ, not ourselves or others, **v. 18.**
6. We are obligated by the Lord to do works that produce peace and edification, **v. 19.**
7. We must never destroy the work of God by exercising our own rights in nonessential matters, **v. 20.**

The apostle feels so strongly about these issues that he produces in **verses 21-23** a rather radical rule of thumb to follow in order to avoid harm. He says that if there is the slightest chance our eating meat or drinking will do spiritual harm to a fellow Christian, we should become vegetarians and teetotalers. We must act upon our faith, not upon our rights. It is good to be right, but so often it is more Christian to keep it to ourselves.

Chapter 15

Unity

Romans 15:1-13

Verses 1-7: The Responsibility Of The Mature

“We then who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please the neighbor for good, leading up to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it has been written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You, fell on Me.’ For whatever things were written before, were written for our learning, that through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God of all patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that with one mind (and) one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.”

The Lordship of Jesus Christ is the most dominant theme in the New Testament. Following in a close second is the unity of the believers. The night before His death, Jesus gave a magnificent sermon to His disciples in **John 14-16**, which Martin Luther called the most beautiful section of Scripture. Jesus concluded His sermon with a prayer for His disciples and for all future believers. In His prayer He asks for unity, **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” John 17:20-21.** In these and the following verses the Lord emphasized the importance He placed on the unity of all believers. He clearly states that the most effective tool we have for witnessing is our unity. Next to survival itself, our unity remains the most appealing aspect of our faith. We advertise that we welcome all, no matter what social, economic, political or ethnic background, for faith in the cross makes us one. Every New Testament writer has featured this theme, and the sobering fact emerges that if we don’t love one another and do not have unity, we are not what we think we are. In **Romans 15:1-13** Paul highlights the essentials for developing harmonious unity within a body of believers.

From the content of **Chapter 14** we can conclude that all the elements of a schism were present in the Roman church. The Gentile liberals and the Jewish conservatives, each holding strong and opposing views, were threatening the unity of the church. Realizing this, Paul urges them to be considerate and caring about the spiritual well-being of one another. The first half of **Chapter 15** deals with the fact that there will always be differences in background, conviction, and spiritual maturity, all of which can threaten our unity. The apostle outlines Biblical principles for producing harmony without destroying variety of expression in non-essential matters.

In any family unit the adults must act like adults if there is to be any sense of family unity. Likewise, in the church, the responsibility falls upon the stronger or more mature Christian to foster the concept of oneness in Christ. Considering the importance

of this, it is worthwhile to spend a few minutes to discover if we understand Paul's counsel and how to apply it.

In **verses 1-2** he tells the mature Christians that they have a responsibility to the immature; they are to bear the burdens of the weak. Pleasing oneself is perhaps the greatest motivational factor we have. This quite naturally leads to all sorts of selfishness and independence which accounts for most of the woes of society. Here Paul exhorts us to be other-centered rather than self-centered. He gives a more detailed account of this in **Galatians 6:1-10**.

The ultimate example of a lifestyle devoted to the good of others is Jesus Christ. So in **verse 3** Paul draws our eyes to the Lord and His life which was a demonstration of careful sacrificial living that sets the standard of behavior for all mature believers. The apostle also quotes **Psalm 69:9b**. It always fascinates me to consider why Paul left off the first half of this verse, which is critical to the understanding of the full meaning. Perhaps he expects his readers to be as knowledgeable of Scripture as Jesus' first disciples were. Shortly after their calling the disciples saw Jesus cleanse the temple, and John tells us in his gospel, **Chapter 2:17** **"Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.'"** **Psalm 69:9a**. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Paul desires us to understand the price Jesus paid just to become a man. Jesus enjoyed unending glory and unbroken fellowship with His Father. However, when He descended to earth and became flesh, He made Himself vulnerable to the entire range of human experience -- heartache, frustration, pain and even death. Jesus was willing to throw Himself between the sinner and God, to intercept the consequences of our sin and bear them in His own person to the death on the cross.

Verse 4 is Paul's explanation for his use of Old Testament passages, and possibly his reason for just using fragments of passages as he did here. His readers need to understand how valuable a tool the Old Testament can be for believers, both Jew and Gentile alike. These inspired works are a source of power for the Holy Spirit's work in our lives as He equips us for our walk with God.

In **verses 5-6** Paul prays that the Father will give His people endurance, encouragement and a spirit of unity. When he mentions one mind and one mouth we are not being asked to become a group of spiritual clones. He summarizes this in **verse 7**. We are to be a body of believers who have the same focal point in our lives, namely Jesus Christ. The ultimate purpose of our unity is to render genuine heart felt praise to God without the distractions of external differences.

Verses 8-13: Produced By The Power Of God

"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant of circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises of the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for (His) mercy, as it has been written, 'Because of this I will confess to You among the Gentiles and I will praise Your name.' And again it says, 'Rejoice you, Gentiles, with his people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord all you Gentiles! Laud Him,

all you peoples!’ And again Isaiah says, ‘There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall arise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.’ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, for you to abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Paul nails down his message by telling us again the role Jesus has played in laying the foundation of Christian unity. He says in **verses 8** and **9a** that Jesus became a servant for Jew and Gentile alike. No two groups could be more opposite than these. The Jews were super religious separatists with an infuriating arrogance about them. They maintained a narrow and rigorous belief in one God and hated anything that even hinted of idol worship. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were by Jewish standards morally bankrupt and had a very relaxed attitude about worship and idols. The only thing they had in common was a mutual animosity; and yet, the Son of God united these two groups under the common bond of their Christian faith. Quite obviously His followers were expected to emulate His servant role when necessary to preserve His hard won unity.

In **verses 9b-12** Paul quotes from **Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43a, Psalm 117:1** and he paraphrases **Isaiah 11:10**, all of which have the same basic theme. Paul’s favorite technique in debate with the Jews was to use their Scriptures to prove God’s intent to produce the Christian faith. At this point in his argument he demonstrates the frequent and clearly stated purpose of God to bring Jew and Gentile together in the body of Christ.

Paul concludes the theological section of this letter with a positive and exhilarating benediction, **verse 13**. The oneness Paul has been teaching is not possible through human effort; but, as he has so often pointed out, we serve a God who specializes in the impossible. Whenever there is a lack of harmony among believers, there can be few expressions of abiding joy, corporate peace of lasting hope; but where Christian unity is a reality and God’s people are presenting the kind of example that only they can set, then the promise of joy, peace and hope also becomes a reality. The full power of the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in our lives to produce this God empowered unity.

Personal Notes

Romans 15:14-33

Verses 14-22: Personal Care And Ministry

“But I myself am confident concerning you, my brothers, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to instruct one another. Nevertheless brothers, I have written more boldly in part, reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I have reason to boast in Christ Jesus (for) the things pertaining to God. For I will not dare to speak of anything which Christ has not worked out through me, by word and work for the obedience of (the) Gentiles, in (the) power of signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and in a circuit to Illyricum I have fully preached the

gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written, 'To whom it was not announced about Him. They shall see; and those who have not heart, shall understand.' For this reason also I have been hindered many times from coming to you.'

Paul's benediction preceding this paragraph sounds suspiciously like the end of a sermon. And most theologians agree that with **Chapter 15, verse 13**, Paul concludes his major doctrinal thoughts to the Roman Christians. So then, what follows in the remaining portion of the letter amounts to personal notes from the author to a church he only knows by reputation. Nevertheless, the apostle has felt a deep sense of ministry for them, as demonstrated by this letter, and sincere appreciation for their mature witness.

Paul's epistle to the Romans endures as the outstanding doctrinal statement of the Christian church. But, if you skip all the material between **Chapter 1:18** and **Chapter 15:13**, what remains is a pleasant personal letter full of tender expressions of affection and personal information. In these verses the apostle allows us a rare opportunity to peer into his mind and catch a glimpse of his zeal, his planning and his dreams. As we approach this autobiographical section of his letter we can expect to learn much from the life of a man so deeply committed to the Lord. Even though it was written over nineteen centuries ago, it still remains refreshingly relevant for us today.

Paul opens this section with **"I myself am confident."** To find out how Paul had developed such a positive concept of a church he had never visited, it is necessary to turn back to **Chapter 1:8**, **"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the world."** The apostle had heard about the Roman Christians and their acts of faith. Now, toward the end of his letter, he again compliments them on their Christian character. In **verse 14** Paul comments on three characteristics he was confident were present in the Roman Christians because they are commonly found in all mature believers.

1. "full of goodness": Like any teacher, Paul realized the importance of statements of encouragement for those whom he was instructing. This first phrase conveys the idea of moral excellence in their lifestyles. They had a genuine desire to do what is right. This demonstrated that they were yielding themselves to the Spirit's sanctifying work in their lives. Christians who are inwardly good don't need rules imposed on them from the outside; they are motivated from within to be reasonable as well as moral. Paul loved to use the word *full* as did the other apostles. In **Acts 6:3** they told the church to pick for their administrators **"...men...full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom..."** It is possible to be good and to be wise, but to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom puts us in a totally different category. The Holy Ghost loves his vessels to be full, full of Him and everything He offers.

2. "filled with all knowledge": The very reason for believers to meditate on Scripture as readers of Romans are now doing is for this purpose. Christians must know the truth before they can be faithful in executing the truth. That the Roman Christians

were knowledgeable is evident from the difficulty of the subject matter Paul sends their way. Romans is not a book for Spiritual infants.

3. “able to instruct one another”: The Greek verb I have translated *instruct, noutheteo*, is often translated here as admonish. Its first meaning is to teach, but it also means to gently rebuke or warn. Both can and probably should be used in this verse. With teaching there is always need for discipline. The believers in Rome were deeply caring. They were ready and able to admonish those who were back-sliding as well as instruct and encourage others. Mature believers are willing to take the time and the risk to lovingly confront those in their midst who are erring or in need of training in God’s Word.

Right after complimenting them on their knowledge, he delicately explains why he felt it necessary to boldly write to them as students, **verse 15-16**. He simply says that it was his job. He was ordained to be God’s instructor of the Gentiles. Paul talks about his evangelistic ministry as though it were the work of a priest bringing his offerings before God. A priest is concerned with not only converting souls, but also with their sanctification. When we serve others as ministers, we must be as concerned with their continued Spiritual growth as we were with their becoming baptized. Paul has taught us the three states of Christian experience, justification, sanctification and glorification. Our priestly duty is to be concerned about each other’s sanctification and trust God to take care of the other two.

As an active evangelist Paul had many achievements which he refers to in **verses 17-18**. Paul was proud of his numerous achievements, but it was a healthy pride. The victories God had produced in his life brought him an inner sense of reward and joy that he was delighted to share with others. At the same time he is able to give all the credit to the Lord Jesus. He also assures us that he would never dare to lie about these things, **verse 18**. Jesus told His disciples “...for without Me you can do nothing” **John 15:5b**, and Paul had a complete understanding of this truth.

As an aging evangelist Paul could have been content to rest on his achievements and do the things he had been too busy to do, such as visit Rome, **verse 22**. In fact, he states that “...I have fully preached the Gospel” from Jerusalem to Illyricum. If the apostle had been referring to the United States he would have communicated the same idea by saying he had evangelized every state east of the Mississippi. Paul was such a prolific missionary that he must have had the true pioneer spirit. He had a burning desire to carry the Gospel to regions where no man had gone before. He was not interested in re-evangelizing areas already touched by others, **verses 20-21**. That was for men with smaller goals. Paul’s vision was as large as the world he lived in, and he lived in hope of the Gospel reaching it all in his lifetime.

Verses 23-29: Personal Planning

“But now no longer having a place in these regions and having a great desire for many years to come to you, whenever I may journey to Spain, I shall come to

you. I hope to see you as I travel through and to be helped on my way there by you, if I may first be filled in part of you (your company). But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. For they were pleased and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles shared in their spiritual things, they ought also to minister to them in material things. Therefore, when I have finished this and have sealed to them this fruit, I will go by way of you to Spain. And I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”

Not only was Paul not planning to retire, he was enthusiastically considering a missionary endeavor four times as long as anything attempted before. We have to admire his missionary zeal and his optimism. The words of Paul in **verse 23** bear testimony to the thoroughness of his evangelical labors, and now he is ready to take on an even larger task. No one should read this without a pause to consider their own fervor for mission work. Paul’s dream to evangelize the unevangelized was both realistic and optimistic. How can we be less on fire for the mission field when the end is so much nearer?

Verses 30-33: Personal Prayer

“But I beg you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I might be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace (be) with you all. Amen.”

Paul was very aware of the difficulties facing him both in Jerusalem and on his proposed trip to Rome and Spain. He does a very wise thing; he asks for prayer support. In **verses 31-32a** Paul gives specific information as to what they were to pray about. It is important to make people aware of our needs. It not only helps us in times of difficulty, but it also gives them a sense of worth in situations where they are helpless to aid us in any other way. Sometimes we are hesitant to do this for fear of limiting God, but there is nothing wrong with telling fellow believers what we would like them to pray about. Prayer is as essential to our Spiritual life as fresh air is to physical life. It is also a wonderful tranquilizer. I know of no one who needs prozac if they have a healthy prayer life.

Chapter 16

Warm Regards And Strong Warning

Romans 16:1-27

Verses 1-16 Kiss One Another

“I commend to you Phoebe our sister being a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may need of you; for she has been a helper of many and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise (greet) the church at their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is a firstfruit of Achaia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and fellow prisoners who are of note among the disciples who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the (household) of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those who are of the (household) of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”

We live in a society where open displays of affection are growing increasingly rare. Human beings in the twentieth century are fast becoming isolated islands of independence, protecting their feelings with formalities and cool professionalism. Unfortunately this attitude is also prevalent in many churches. We greet one another with a nod of the head or a brief handshake, and too often don't call a fellow member by name because we don't know who they are.

This chapter has a lot to say about how Christians show their affection for one another. There is a temptation for the reader to skim over it, particularly the first sixteen verses. At first glance there doesn't seem to be much spiritual value there, but as Paul told Timothy, **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable...”** **II Timothy 3:16a.** God has seen fit to inspire this example of Paul's devotion to fellow believers; so it seems wise to search for the pearls of wisdom the Lord has hidden there for us.

As we read over these verses we can begin to feel the sort of affection that was, and still can be, common to brothers and sisters in Christ. Although Paul had never visited the Roman church, he had a remarkably large number of friends there. He mentions twenty-seven people by name. The fact that Paul remembered all of these

individuals implies that he cared deeply about them. There is more here than just Paul remembering names of people he had met. In the body of Christ people are memorable for their acts of service and love within the body. Paul also records twenty-one titles such as “**sister,**” “**fellow worker,**” “**beloved,**” and “**fellow prisoners,**” and nineteen times a reference is made to greeting or commending a person. In short, these are people who have made a difference, and they live in Paul’s memory.

It is obvious from the number of names he mentions that Paul knew a lot of Christian people all over the world, and he had the ability and interest to keep track of them. Some we know about; others we know nothing but what is said here. Phoebe was obviously the person who delivered the letter from Corinth to the Roman church, **verse 1**. This is the only place in Scripture where she is mentioned. Yet, Paul pays her great tribute in the way he introduces her to the believers at Rome. He calls her a servant or deaconess and saint who is worthy and has been a great help to many. We know how Paul met Priscilla and Aquila from **Luke’s** account in **Acts 18**, but we have no idea how they risked their lives for him, **verse 3-4**. The names Tryphena and Tryphosa in **verse 12** are both feminine names, and it is possible they were twin sisters. Their names mean *dainty* and *delicate*, but the word Paul used for labor, *kopiao*, means hard work or toiling to exhaustion. We are left to wonder what kind of work *Dainty* and *Delicate* performed for the Lord. Of such stuff was the church at Rome made, and our imaginations are fired by the untold stories they represent.

Paul concludes this section with the directive to “**Greet one another with a holy kiss.**” **verse 16a**. Having some physical contact in the body of the church is still a good idea. As we grow in the Word we also grow together in the Word. A kiss or a hug is the most natural reaction we have to all this growing. Even though we are united by the common bond of faith, this profound oneness does not dictate against individual differences. In the Roman church we find Jews and Gentiles, men and women, couples and singles, slaves and owners. But all were remembered by Paul and told to demonstrate their oneness with a holy kiss. All such diversity was being channeled toward unification, not division.

There are many believers who labor in the service of the Lord without any special recognition or applause. This is a labor of love, and Paul mentions some of these types of Christians in **verses 1-16**. He expresses his deep affection for these people in the simplest of manner. He doesn’t gush or try to write deathless prose to show his love. Instead, he uses very unspectacular terms; yet, who could doubt the sincerity of his words? Christian love doesn’t have to be expressed in a grandiose style; it is often best shown in simple, yet sincere ways. If you are not comfortable with a holy kiss, try a hug or a pat on the back or a gentle touch. Whatever it is, let your love show.

Verses 17-20: Look Out For Troublemakers

“But I urge you, brothers, be concerned about those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the teaching which you have learned and turn away from them. For such do not serve our Lord Jesus, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattery deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. For your obedience has become known to all. I rejoice, therefore concerning you; but I want you to be wise to good and innocent to evil. But the God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (be) with you. Amen.”

Whenever the love of Christ is alive and active among His people, Satan is also right there sowing seeds of dissension. So it is very appropriate that Paul injects a warning against false teachers in the middle of this last chapter. Whether this was already happening in the Roman church or if Paul was just giving them a timely warning is unimportant. We know that was an all too common experience in the early church, and is still with us today. Paul’s letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians were prompted by this very problem. False teachers always do what they do for selfish personal reasons. Throughout her history, the church has been exploited by these enemies of the cross.

Every Christian has a responsibility to be informed enough to combat the deceivers. Paul gives us two ways to counteract these divisive individuals. The first was by careful scrutiny, **verse 17a**. The second was to separate ourselves from the false teachers, **verse 17b**. Paul was not a pessimist. He makes it very clear that under no circumstances should believers be afraid of these people. If we are obedient and wise, **verse 19**, they will not prevail. He tells us in that verse **“...to be wise to good and innocent to evil.”** This phrase deserves some serious thought. We live under such a barrage of media data, that without any effort of our own we can easily become wise about evil. At the same time, because of our busy, stressful lives, we can become innocent of good, which here means Biblical illiteracy. Paul says to focused on truth and that God will **“...bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”** **verse 20**. This is optimism we desperately need to hear more often. It will happen shortly!

Verses 21-24: Greetings From Paul’s Friends

“Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsman, greet you. I, Tertius, who wrote the epistle in the Lord. Gaius, my host and (host) of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (be) with you all. Amen.”

Verses 1-16 were greetings from Paul to friends whom he knew to be in Rome. **Verses 21** and **23** are greetings to the Roman church from Paul’s friends who were near him as he dictated these words. **Verse 22** was a greeting from Tertius whom we nothing else about. It is evident that he was acting as Paul’s secretary or amanuensis for his epistle to the Romans. Almost certainly Paul signed this letter with his own name, though we have no proof of this. But he did this in his first letter to the **Corinthians, 16:21**, also **Colossians 4:18, b** and said in **II Thessalonians 3:16**, that he did this in

every epistle. Gaius, mentioned in **verse 23**, was baptized by Paul at Corinth, **I Corinthians 1:14**, and was so well thought of by the early church that John wrote him a personal letter, **III John 1:1**.

Verses 25-27: To God Be Glory Forever

“Now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages of time but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience of faith -- to God, alone wise, Glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.”

Nothing could be more fitting to end this landmark document for the Christian faith than the doxology Paul writes to the Glory of God. It contains some of the most significant truths about God found anywhere in Scripture. The largest portion of this benediction concentrates on four truths concerning the Almighty Lord God and His plan for mankind.

1. Verse 25a: He established us by the Gospel. Establish means to *prop up firm* or *stabilize*. It conveys the idea of support. God is the one who supports us and has the power to balance our lives.

2. Verses 25b-26a: He proclaims the mystery of Jesus. The only way anyone can come to God is through Christ. Paul explains what the mystery is in **Colossians 1:26-27**. Jesus is more than a conduit to the Father. He is the indwelling force that binds us together and makes us one with the Father.

3. Verses 26b: He makes His will known to the nations. Our gracious God has initiated His plan of salvation for the entire world, **John 3:16**. The Gospel is available to all! Since the Father’s focus is on the world, ours should be also.

4. Verse 26c: He produces obedience. Our task is not to convert anyone. Only God causes people to be born again, **I Peter 1:3**. On the other hand, He has chosen human beings to be the means by which He communicates the Gospel of Salvation. He has given us the responsibility of getting the message out. Our Redeemer lives, our Redeemer loves, our Redeemer saves, believe on Him and receive eternal life. This is our gospel, this is our message.

The final word of the letter is **“Amen.”** Never has *amen* been more appropriately written. Amen expresses the deep conviction every true believer has that this is most certainly true. It is an expression of faith in our God and the truth of His eternal word. It is my prayer now for my own children to whom this commentary has been written.

Roger A. Riggs
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