

ROMANS

The epistle to the Romans is one of the marvels of literature. The apostle Paul must have had an IQ of 160 or more, and it appears that he had the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures memorized. This literary gem is the greatest apologetic for the gospel ever written. The arguments for salvation by grace through faith are epic, as if set forth by a master logician or a seasoned barrister. Chapters 1 - 8 are about God's salvation for mankind. 9 - 11 are about Israel's past, present, and future. The final chapters, 12 - 16, according to Paul's custom with his end-of-book pattern, are the practical instructions for the Roman believers.

ROMANS 1

WE GENTILES MAY BE SAVED!

GREETINGS

- 1) The great epistle's introduction is our present text. Saul took the name of his first European convert and became Paul. Calling himself a "bondslave of Christ," he notes his calling as an apostle, one "sent with a message." God further separated him from everything else and confined him to the gospel for the duration of his life.
- 2) Though the message of Christ was brand new, it was no surprise. It was as old in concept as the need of man in the Garden of Eden. From Genesis 3:15 forward, God had promised the coming of a Savior into the world.
- 3) This Savior would be none other than God's Son. He would enter the human family through the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, the family of David, and the womb of the virgin girl, Mary. He would become a Man.
- 4) This Son of Man, this human Savior, would be demonstrated in a powerful way to yet be the Son God, Divine. This powerful display, effected by the Holy Spirit, would be the unprecedented resurrection of Jesus from the dead. All His claims would be vindicated here - that He was Jesus the Savior, Christ the Messiah, and Lord.
- 5) This is a "Jew-first" gospel, but not a "Jew-only" one. By grace **this** Jew received his apostleship to preach Christ among the Gentiles. Those who would be obedient to the faith would, with saved Jews, join the body of Christ.
- 6) Paul changes here from third to second person pronouns. He speaks directly to the Romans about the Romans. These believers are in the category just described - non-Jews included in the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ.
- 7) His readers are so privileged - they are God's "beloved," and they are called into sainthood, that is He calls them to be holy and His calling makes them holy. He wishes for them **grace**, God's unmerited favor, and the source of all good things; and he wishes for them **peace**, the crown of all blessings enjoyed here on earth. This peace is a harmonized relationship with God and with circumstances. Both come **from God through Christ**.

GRATITUDE

- 8) The testimony of Christians in Rome was spreading throughout the civilized world. Here in the Gentile capitol of the world men were turning to God. When Paul heard this, he was filled with joy and gratitude to his God.
- 9), 10) Paul had yet to visit Rome. This would be his goal - as the apostle to the Gentiles - to reach their most important city. But until he could come, he wanted them to know they were in his heart and on his mind without interruption, constantly. How solemnly He cites God as his witness to this truth. It is this God to Whom Paul's whole heart and life now belong. He would serve God faithfully until he would leave this world from this city to meet his God. As constantly as he remembered them, so he prayed for them, and especially that God would make a way for Paul to visit this great city and **minister** to and **be ministered** to by these dear saints.
- 11), 12) His hoped-for visit would do both Paul and the Romans good. His desire to impart a spiritual gift means either that he would use **his gift** of teaching to strengthen them, or that his teaching would bring **to them** spiritual benefits. One meaning is little different from the other. May God bless every one of His churches with men of spiritual gift and ability to preach and teach His Word! May every one of His shepherds be blessed with a flock that loves to hear the blessed Book! And may the union of these pastors and people be a mutual blessing to each, not a mixed marriage that is endured to the end rather than enjoyed while it lasts.
- 13) Paul declares his past intentions to visit them, which desires have been prevented from coming to pass - he does not say by what. As Paul had ministered to other Gentiles, so he wished to be a blessing to them at Rome. He wanted some of the fruit in his harvest to be of the Roman variety. God would make it so before the end.
- 14) The Roman Empire contained the cultured and educated, as well as the unlettered barbarians. As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul felt an obligation to them all. A debt was laid upon him on the Damascus Road that he would endeavor to discharge. Would to God that all believers felt such a debt - and had such passion to pay it off!
- 15) Not only was he a debtor, under obligation from without to preach the gospel in Rome, but also was he ready to do the same. The obligation produced a burden and a passion, an eagerness. As Jeremiah of old, Paul had a fire burning in his bones that would not be quenched. He must preach the gospel! Or he would surely die.
- 16) So much is here. Paul was unashamed of the news he shared, the good news! It (the gospel) is God's power (His "dynamite") to blow sin apart from men, saving their souls. All they must do is believe! And it is without ethnic prejudice -

to the Jew first (Acts 1-7), and to the non-Jew as well (Acts 8-28). It is for us and for all!

GOSPEL

17) Christ and His gospel have revealed **in them** God's righteousness. It is a righteousness that **springs from faith** and **leads to more faith**. Paul here quotes Habakkuk 2:4, found also in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. It is a basic truth of salvation - "The just shall live by faith." Have you obtained Christ's righteousness and life by trusting Him?

THE MONSTER OF SIN

REJECTING THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

18) There **are** absolutes in God's universe. Sin is wrong, and it offends a holy God. He **must** and He will exercise wrath against sin. Sinful men are godless and wicked, and they desire and work to suppress God's truth. That truth shows them up for what they are, and it points men to the God Who alone can make a difference for them.

19), 20) Even without the written Word of God, the Scriptures, God is revealed in the universe. *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork."* Every people group in the world has the same opportunity to know **about** God from the created universe. You just have to look at creation to know there is a Creator! I believe that when a man does that, and acknowledges there is Someone bigger than he, Someone Whom he must know, that God will send someone with a Bible to tell them about Him. He sent Jonah to Nineveh, Philip to the Ethiopian, and the church to the ends of the earth. Are you doing your part?

REPLACING GOD WITH IDOLS

21) Only a fool (one with no understanding) will proclaim that "there is no God" (see Psalm 14:1, 53:1). And yet men who had a knowledge of God would not give Him glory or gratitude. The result: sinful man's power to reason was made self-deceptive and vain. Further, their hearts lacked understanding and were shrouded in darkness.

22), 23) Men may, and often do, proclaim to have obtained high wisdom, but if that "wisdom" leaves God out, it's really "moronic," as the original word here clearly states. This is not the "wisdom that is from above," which James praised, but is from below - as all lies are connected in origin with Satan! When man rejects truth about God, he must replace it with an alternate "truth" of his own making and liking. So when the glory of the immortal God was not pleasing to sinful man, he made idols, images of himself. The digression of man without God is seen in his also making images of birds, mammals, and reptiles - down, down, down, goes the heart of sinful man!

REAPING THE RESULTS OF SIN

24) As truly as the Holy Spirit holds back the flood of sin in this world today (2 Thessalonians 2:7), there was a day when man pursued folly so strongly that God withdrew His hand and let man have his sinful way (in the pre-flood world). The mention here of sexual impurity and degrading of bodies certainly sound like "prime time America" today!

25) Man is made by God to desire and need truth. Man is also marred by sin so much that he will take a lie and make it "his truth." Since the lies of man do not conform to reality, they are seen by clear thinking minds to not be true. But as verse 21 reminded us, man's heart and mind are corrupted by sin and cannot distinguish truth from lie.

26), 27) Those today who call homosexuality a sinful perversion are mocked and marginalized in the public arena. This is called an acceptable "alternate lifestyle." Yet truth never changes; it is not in flux like the relativism of the last half-century. God made a man and a woman in Eden; Jesus referenced this as a pattern for marriage (Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6). He thus teaches us that marriage is between a man and a woman, and that it is for life. No amount of slowly heating up the waters of immorality will change the truth of God! While people are more and more coming to accept homosexuality, God's truth stands clear - it is wrong, and there is a price to pay for it!

28) The Scriptures teach that man should approve of things that are pleasing to the Lord. In stark contrast, opposition to that, Paul declares here that sinful man did not approve of the knowledge of God! Man rejects God - so God rejects man! Man who rejects the will and way of God is sailing on a sea of trouble without compass or chart!

29), 30) 31) The Apostle often records sample lists of the vices of sinful man (Galatians 5:19-21 is a signal example of this). Apart from God's grace, this list would describe you and me, dear listener (reader). 21 vices follow: "wickedness" = things not right; "evil" is just that; "greed" is selfishness, not the giving of love; "depravity" = morally bad. "Envy" speaks of discontent; in "murder" lives are taken unlawfully; "strife, deceit, malice" are heart-sins. The next one should convict even many believers "gossip." They speak evil of men, hate God, and are full of self-importance. They take delight in finding new ways to harm others. Filial disobedience finds its way into most lists of wrongs. Moral stupidity follows rejection of God. Such people can't be trusted. They lack God-ordained proper family affection. Depraved men lack mercy for others, resulting in such acts of cruelty as we see today! Again, let's not look down our noses at such as these, but see them as candidates for God's saving grace.

32) God has righteously decreed that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The fallen race of man knows in their hearts that sin exacts an awful price, yet they persist in their sin, "loving darkness rather than light." They also gather like so many Hollywood celebrities, and pat each other on the back for all the ways they contrive to disobey God.

ROMANS 2

To the imperial capital, to a city of many people, to a place of unparalleled power, to a city of sin, spiritually, morally, and philosophically bankrupt, to Rome, Paul wrote this great work, showing men their sin and pointing them to Jesus. Some say this was the finest of Paul's works, the greatest single document on man's need and God's supply ever written. There is no doubt that his explanation of justification by faith apart from human effort contained herein has brought multiplied millions to faith in Christ. Chapter 1 had condemned the pagan world; now he addresses the Gentile moralist and the Jewish law-keeper - also alike condemned! The big question here is "who needs a Savior?" The simple answer is that we all do. Paul analyzes this simple fact by dividing the human race into two groups - those with the law (the Jew) and those without the law (the Greek, or Gentile). It is easy for those with the law to look down their noses at those without the law, but in the end they (we) all need a Savior! It is not man's responsibility to judge other men. Let's examine the first 12 verses of this chapter and follow Paul's logic as he reveals God's mind to us on sin and judgment.

WHAT ABOUT JUDGING and JUDGMENT?

GOD JUDGES INFALLIBLY

1) Just because a person has some morality, some law-obedience, does not mean that they are right in condemning others who don't. In fact, when they judge others, they actually pronounce condemnation on themselves, for it is clear that they do the very things they condemn in others! *"All we like sheep have gone astray."* *"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* There is no acceptable plea that excuses man from sin's charge.

2), 3) It is evident ("we know") that God always judges according to things as they really are ("judgment of God rightly falls"). He is omniscient, therefore nothing escapes His knowledge. Heaven's court has all the facts. He is also holy, set apart from sin, not like earthly judges who may commit the same acts for which they sit in judgment on others, thereby affecting the way they pass sentence! When such is the case, men need to know that they will stand before God the Judge themselves one day, and they will not escape His absolutely just scrutiny! On earth less sinful people judge those more sinful than themselves. We are all judged by the thrice holy God!

4) The Gentile moralist and the Jew may have thought that their position and prosperity were a sign of God's approval on them. Such a mistake showed contempt for God's goodness (in so prospering them) which was intended not to make them think well of themselves, but rather to lead them to repent of their sins! What about us?! A converse principle is that "Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation." God uses diverse tools.

5) When sinful man stops to think about God, it seems often to be in condemning Him (God) for some act they attribute to Him and see as unjust - like allowing some loved one to be ill or die. One day His righteousness will be seen, and men will drink deeply from the cup of wrath they have been filling all the years with their sin. The 6th seal judgment of Revelation 6:12-17 is appropriate to read here.

GOD JUDGES JUSTLY

6) Men are saved for heaven or lost for hell on the basis of their faith in Christ or unbelief. Passages such as this serve to tell that reward in heaven or degree of punishment in hell is on the basis of works done by the individual. Never misunderstand - salvation is *"by grace, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."*

7) The by-faith recipients of eternal life are marked by their endurance in good works. That doing of good is considered a pursuit of glory (not base or frivolous things), honor (not shame), immortality (not living just for the moment). It is saved people who live a life of such character, and to those saved people God has extended eternal life.

8) What a contrast is seen in the end results of God's judgment for sinner and saint! Above He sheds the blessings of eternal life to people whose faith is demonstrated by their good works. Those whose behavior demonstrates a different character (unbelief) receive wrath and anger from God. They deserve that wrath and anger because they were selfish in their pursuits, they rejected the truth, and they followed evil paths. Thank God we were delivered!

9) Here the truth of verse 6 is filled out. ***Like sin, like punishment.*** There is no racial or religious distinction; God judges all alike. Those who sow evil seeds will reap trouble and distress. It is the immutable law of the harvest. *"For whatever a man sows, that he shall also reap."* Again, *"Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble will harvest it."*

10) Once again, there is no advantage in judgment to being a law-keeping Jew or a Gentile moralist. Either, both, can expect the righteous Judge to bless and reward righteous living and to dole out negative consequences for negative behavior. The blessings are tremendous: glory - worthy of praise; honor - having value; peace - to be at harmony with God, self, and the circumstances of life. The cursings are equally horrendous and eternal.

GOD JUDGES IMPARTIALLY

11) This truth permeates Scripture; *"God will have no part in partiality or the taking of a bribe"* (2 Chronicles 19:7). *"To show partiality in judgment is not good"* (Proverbs 24:23). *"Teacher, we know that You teach and speak correctly, and You are not partial to any"* (Luke 20:21). *"Their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him"* (Ephesians 6:9). *"Address as Father the One Who impartially judges according to each man's work"* (1 Peter 1:17).

12) Matthew Henry suggests that God's impartiality in judgment is evidenced here - that He judges men based on the dispensation in which they lived. It may be added in that connection that the amount of light a person had will be

considered in his or her judgment. More light means more responsibility, therefore more accountability.

13) Exposure to truth is good if it is acted upon. If the truth is rejected, exposure is bad, for it increases accountability. However, it is not exposure to truth that is the key factor; it is response to the truth. The law told a man he was a hopeless sinner, and it pointed him in types and symbols to the Savior Who alone can give a man life.

14), 15) Any Jewish readers of the epistle were in for a bit of a surprise here. Paul reminds them, if they ever knew it, that the law of Moses was a written reflection of the moral code God wrote into man's heart long before He wrote it on tables of stone. Granted, the fall into sin marred the heart-text, but there was enough there for man to look at the created universe and see God (1:20), and to know some basics about right and wrong. Conscience, that faculty that helps man analyze his actions for moral value, helps man accuse his actions in proper response or justify his actions if he refuses to acknowledge his sin. Be careful about trusting the conscience of a fallen nature.

GOD JUDGES BY JESUS CHRIST

16) 1 Corinthians 4:5 expands the idea of men withholding their judgments until the time when God brings into the open the hidden things that men cannot see but that are important in judgment. The good news about Jesus includes judgment on sin for those who reject His gracious offer of salvation and therefore remain outside God's faith family.

"THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS THE MATTER OF THE HEART"

PROFESSION OF THE BOASTERS

17) There is in most of Adam's race a bit of "ethnocentrism," or even "egocentrism" - we believe that whatever we are is a bit better than what someone else may be. Even within the church, the body of Christ, there may exist personal prejudices about superior backgrounds, Bible versions used, theological positions held. Here Paul is challenging those of a Hebrew ancestry and upbringing - who love the name, the law-learning, and being the "chosen people of God."

18) These completed Jews had a great background in the Hebrew Scriptures and a leg-up on the knowledge of God's desires for man's life. They were therefore able to discern more clearly what things were more excellent, for the reason that the Law of Moses taught men principles of right and wrong, perhaps even enabling them to understand that while some things may be acceptable, other things may be superior choices for behavior. As the Psalmist said, *"Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path."*

19), 20) He moves now to speak of how these Jewish Christians felt they could positively influence those around them, perhaps looking down their noses while doing so. Others, presumably Gentile believers, were somewhat blind, and these Jews could guide them. Others were in the dark, and these Jews could bring them light. Others may be foolish, while these Jewish believers saw themselves as a people whose minds had been quickened and enlightened by their background in the Law of Moses. And there was a clear advantage in having been brought up under a "schoolmaster" (the Law) that was designed in part to bring them to their Messiah! Their starting-point in the new Christian faith was ahead of those whose pagan backgrounds made them be "infants" by comparison. Psalm 119:66, 142, tell us - *"Teach me good discernment and knowledge... Thy law is truth."*

PRACTICE OF THE BOASTERS

21), 22), 23) In a series of sharp jabs, the master-instructor, Paul, challenges the Jewish Christians about the matter of consistency. It is not enough to have a connection with the law, and to boast about that connection - those so blessed and advantaged should let the law do its work of conviction about sin so that they do not participate in the things forbidden by that very law! "You teach others, but do you learn for yourselves?" You prohibit theft - 'Thou shalt not steal' - but do you possess things that rightly belong to others? You hold up the moral precept of chastity in Moses' law - 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' - but have you been completely faithful to your own spouses?" Had pagan idols found their way into the possession of these saints, a practice known and despised in the era of the early church (Acts 19:37). Such might be justified for so-called "spiritual reasons" like this- "these idols are nothing, since there is no God but ours; we can protect others from vain pagan worship by removing the object of such wicked adoration." Indeed, clearly some had "honored themselves" by boasting of this high moral background and upbringing under Moses' Law, but Paul challenges them to make sure they are not "dishonoring God" by violating the principles set forth by the precepts of that Law!

24) To those who appeal to the Hebrew Scriptures for their own advantage, the apostle quotes from those Scriptures (Ezekiel 36:22) about other Jews blaspheming God's name among the Gentiles (Ezekiel wrote to Jews who were in the exile in Babylon, where they had a duty to represent well the God of Israel. Paul was writing to Jews in the first-century diaspora, who had a similar responsibility). How were his readers doing? How are we?

PICTURES CAN BE BROKEN

25) A man who wears a wedding band and sexually pursues someone other than his wife, nullifies the symbol on his finger. So a Jewish man, having been circumcised on his eighth day of life, can render meaningless that symbol of circumcision by breaking the law God has placed in authority over him. The claim to being a Jew or a Christian is best validated by a life of obedience to the principles set forth for us, in authority over us, in God's Word!

26), 27) Let us flip the coin here. Just as a man of faith may invalidate his claim to faith by a lawless life, so can one who lacks the symbols be counted as possessing the reality if his life follows the principles God has given all mankind to obey!

Is not the law of God in that sense written on the hearts of men? Did Paul not declare it so earlier in this chapter? And while those who possessed the law before they encountered and trusted Christ may compare themselves favorably with those of a "law-less" background, the Spirit points out through Paul's pen that those who have not the law and are not circumcised in the flesh, may by their obedience to God, condemn those as lawbreakers who have their ancestry in Abraham, Moses, and David! The summary lesson is this: "Our roots are not in history; they are in the Word of God." "Trust and Obey, for there's no other way..."

THE PRINCIPLE FROM BETHLEHEM

28), 29) Long ago, in Bethlehem, God taught Samuel a lesson about the difference between God's view and that of man. *"For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* God is less concerned about the outward, physical, observable, and He is more interested in the inward, spiritual, matters of the heart. That is the great lesson of the Sermon on the Mount - *"The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart."* It is also the great lesson of Romans 2. While we do care what people see and think as we represent Christ to them, it is far more important that we care what God sees and knows of our hearts!

ROMANS 3

CONDEMNATION BECAUSE OF SIN

THE ADVANTAGE OF THE JEW

1) A scolding in chapter 2 of Jews who do not obey the law, noting that an uncircumcised Gentile who walks in truth is better off than a Jew who disobeys the Law's principles, leads to two similar rhetorical questions as to whether there is any advantage in being a Jew. The first question addresses his statements in 2:17-24. The second question (regarding circumcision) is about what he said in 2:25-29.

2) Paul answers his own question with an emphatic affirmative - there ***is*** advantage, the chief of such being the production and possession of the Word of God. Except for possibly Ruth, Job, Luke, and Acts, the entire Bible was written by Jews - the custodians of Law. It was and is sad that then and now the Jews did not live up to God's truth revealed in His Word. We should examine ourselves in that regard, as well.

ACCUSATIONS ABOUT THE MISUSE OF GRACE

3), 4) The issue of this objection is whether or not God's promises depend for their truthfulness upon our faith in them or our faithfulness to them. Paul's response is an emphatic *"May it never be!"* He uses this expression throughout Romans - 3:4, 6, 31; 6:1-2, 15; 7:7, 13; 11:1, 11. The first objection related to the failure of the Jew to live up his advantage - verses 1, 2. The unbeliever is the liar, and God, the Author of the promise, is faithful and true. When God judges the world of sinners by the Word He has given them, He will be proved right. Truth and righteousness shall prevail, as David proclaimed in Psalm 51:4.

5), 6) The unrighteousness of the Jews served as a dark backdrop to accentuate God's righteousness. His law is seen to be righteous when the unrighteous violate it. Is it then unjust of God to inflict the judgment of His wrath on them, since they highlighted His righteousness? Again, *"May it never be!"* Paul nearly apologizes for asking such a question, saying, *"I speak in human terms."* If God cannot justly judge the Jews (but He can), how could He judge those who have not the advantages afforded the chosen people? A good question, but it need not be answered, for God can and does justly judge all.

7), 8) When we sin, violating the principles of God's Word of truth, we in effect accuse Him of lying. We are saying that we will do what we please, and there will be no consequences to face. Some accused that Paul was preaching that men should do evil to produce the good of God being glorified even in man's sin. He leaves such to the judgment of God without answering them. "The opponents speak as if, when Paul taught that a person is saved by grace, he meant, 'Go ahead and sin to your heart's content, in order that grace may have a chance to do its work!'" (William Hendriksen).

ALL ARE UNDER SIN - JEW AND GENTILE

As you may know, Jews had moved out of Israel and into many lands even before the destruction of the Temple and resulting Diaspora beginning in AD 70. In Acts 2, just 50 days after Christ's death and resurrection (and 40 years before the Temple was destroyed), Jews from over a dozen countries with different languages are identified. By the time Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church, even more had spread around the Mediterranean world, and even into the capital city of Rome. His epistle then is to Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ. All that he wrote applied equally to both groups. The Gentiles could not claim innocence simply because they had not had the Law. Chapter 1 spoke of Gentile abandonment of the ways of God before there ever was a Law! The Jews could claim no superiority because they had the Law, for rarely had they obeyed it! No writing anywhere has more of a universal indictment of all men under sin than does this letter to Rome. The Holy Spirit leads Paul to draw heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures for his argument - a thing that would be very convicting to the Jewish Christian readers. The Law serves still the great purpose of showing us (all of us, Jew and Gentile alike) that we are sinners. Careful study of the Law also helps to point us to the One Who came and alone fulfilled the Law - by keeping all its precepts perfectly, and by laying down His life as payment for sin - Jesus Christ! 9), 10), 11) Now the issue of one being preferred over the other (Jew or Gentile) comes up again. While the Jew did have

certain advantages, the Law, the Temple, the priesthood, etc., God does not prefer them over the Gentiles. Verses 10 - 18 are quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures. 10-12 are from Psalm 14:1-3. Verse 13 is from Psalm 5:9, Jeremiah 5:16, and Psalm 140:3. Verse 14 is from Psalm 10:7. Verses 15-17 are from Isaiah 59:7, 8 and Proverbs 1:16. Finally, verse 18 is from Psalm 36:1. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God had made it abundantly clear that there was **no racial distinction** when it came to sin, so Paul quotes these passages to back up the charge of the universality of sin among Adam's race. The point is well taken. It is improper to ever say, "If anyone will make it to heaven, she will." That implies there is a goodness of life that can save. Why, no one even understands or seeks God unless God works on them first. In the matter of salvation, God is the great Initiator. If He did not do something for us, we could never be saved at all. Yes, we must come to God, but we cannot come unless He draws us. We must believe in Jesus, but we cannot believe unless God reveals the truth to us. Let us never boast, unless we boast about Christ's cross.

12) The word translated "turned away" is found only three times in the New Testament. Here it describes men turning away from God's intended path for us. In 16:17 it is used a second time, commanding believers to "turn away" from any who would lead men from the truth. Peter uses it (1 Peter 3:11) to urge the man desiring to live for God to "turn away" from evil. In sin, men have turned away from God; in repentance, we must turn away from sin!

13), 14) The tongue, the organ of human speech - so small and yet so powerful. With his speech, man is capable of doing so much good, and it is also true that much evil flows from man's talk. Here the Spirit focuses on the speech of the unregenerate, the people whose lives have not been changed by grace. Nothing good is set forth here! The moral stench of unregenerate speech is like smelling the grave of 4-day-dead Lazarus; it is repugnant! On and on do their tongues practice deceit - truth is absent. Words can be as deadly as the poison of vipers - lives, marriages, and churches can be destroyed by talk! All of this is quotation (11-18) from the Hebrew Scriptures - this preaching is no new fad, it is old truth restated for emphasis. Psalm 10:7 is cited here in verse 14, reminding us that apart from God's saving and changing grace, even our best speech is bitter cursing!

15), 16), 17) Solomon had told his son to avoid the company of those whose paths were wicked (Proverbs 1:11-16). Paul here takes up the same subject in describing men who are apart from God. We are each allowed to choose our path in life - we can choose a bloody path of misery and destruction, or we can choose a path of peace. Until the grace of God touches a life, it is the lesser path that is taken. It appears that people who are pro-abortion have absolutely no conscience about the tortuous murder of the innocents. It is because they do not know God! Their lives have not been touched by grace. As they do get to know the Lord, like the lady known as Jane Roe, in the Roe Versus Wade case that legalized abortion in 1973, they become proponents of life, fighting abortion. It has happened in many other cases as well. Feet can be turned from the path of bloodshed when hearts are turned to Christ. Saul the persecutor became Paul the Preacher, pointing men to life in Christ!

18) Man was made to reverence God by worship, obedient service, and trust. That reverence we call the "fear of God." There is little of that - Paul even says there is NONE of that in natural man. As long as what is "before our eyes" is the entertainment industry's peddling of lust, violence, and greed, there will continue to be "no fear of God before their eyes." America desperately needs a spiritual awakening, but it probably won't happen until the church awakens from her spiritual lethargy to become a catalyst for revival. Could tsunamis and earthquakes help us fear God again?

AIM OF THE LAW

19), 20) Some would make so bold as to deny their sinfulness. The Law argues against this denial, thus stopping the mouths of those who make such wild claims. Every man is shown by the Law to be sinful and accountable for sin to God. Some others claim to become righteous by observing the Law, but God gives the lie to such thinking. No man was ever made righteous by Law-keeping; he only sees in the Law that he very desperately needs righteousness - that he is a sinner. If that man will keep looking into the Law, he will find that it can lead him to the foot of the cross. There, and only there, can a man find righteousness through faith in the Lord Jesus.

*The Epistle to the Romans is one of the greatest works in all of literature. In it Paul defends the righteousness that is by faith apart from "law-works" like a skillful attorney, or even a justice writing a decision in a landmark case. Those first eight chapters deal with that subject in great detail. Chapters 9 - 11 consider God's dealings with Israel, and the final five chapters are of more practical nature, according to the custom of Paul's writings. By the time we reach this part of chapter three (our lesson today consisting in verses 21 - 31), Paul has universally indicted mankind as sinners who need a Savior (chapter one). In the second chapter, the Apostolic Author declares that God's judgment is righteous, unlike much of man's judgment, where those who sit to judge are guilty of the same wrongs which they judge in others. He concludes chapter two and opens chapter three by asserting that Jew and Gentile alike sit condemned before a holy God - "there is no difference." 3:9 - 20 rehearse man's sinful depravity, and there Paul declares again that a primary purpose of the Law of Moses to show man that he is indeed a sinner needing a Savior! Two other purposes of the law were past and present - past, to shape the Jews into a nation, set apart from the world; present - to lead sinners to the Savior: **Galatians 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ...*

21) Certainly righteousness is required if men are to be "right" with God. This righteousness must come **from** God **to** sinners. It is not based on law-keeping, but it doesn't contradict the law either. The Hebrew Scriptures, summarized here

as “the Law and the Prophets,” testify to the fact that this righteousness is not from the Law.

22), 23) It matters not before God if one is a Jew or a Gentile; he may have this righteousness that is **of** God and also **from** God by simply trusting in Jesus as personal Savior. While Jew and Gentile are racially, ethnically, and even religiously different, they are alike when it comes to why they need to be saved and how they may be saved. Scripture declares the universality of sin. To have sinned is to “missed God’s mark,” and all are guilty. We all inherited sin from our first father, Adam, and we have all sinned. In fact, a case may be made for the fact that when Adam sinned, I sinned, and so did you. If Adam’s is a “seminal headship,” we all sinned in him. Many Hebrew Scriptures attest to sin’s universality in the race of Adam: 1 Kings 8:46 *“If they sin against you— **for there is no one who does not sin** —and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near...”* Psalm 14:3 *“**They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.**”* Ecclesiastes 7:20 *“**Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.**”* Isaiah 53:6 *“**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned— every one —to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**”*

24) “Justification” is being “declared righteous.” It is a judicial term, and in God’s court in heaven, our record is clean.

“Grace” is unmerited favor; it is God doing good things for us what we cannot do and that we do not deserve.

“Redemption” is God entering the slave-market of sin in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, then purchasing us from the slave-market by the blood of the Lord Christ Jesus, and then setting us free to be His servants.

25) What the Hebrew Scripture priest did on the day of atonement with animal blood, God did for us at Calvary with the blood of His perfect Lamb, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Though those old economy sins were only covered in atonement, while ours are removed in forgiveness). If the priest’s sacrifice had been unacceptable, He would have died in the holy of holies, and they would have pulled his corpse out with the rope tied to his ankle. Christ’s sacrifice was shown to be acceptable by the fact of His resurrection, for He was Priest and Sacrifice. The punishment that man had long escaped in the past fell on Jesus on the cross. God was satisfied, propitiated.

26) Here is a great difficulty - how does a just God declare sinners righteous and remain just in doing so? The law required death for sin, and God cannot violate the principle which He set in place! The answer lies in God then providing an acceptable sacrifice for sin in their place. He did so in Christ - how marvelous His wisdom!

27), 28) Being God’s chosen people might cause some Jews to boast, to feel that they have an “inside track” with God that Gentiles did not have. Paul excluded that in Galatians 6:14 (using the very word for “boast” that he uses here): *“**But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**”* For a man to boast in heaven, he would have to have gotten there on his own merit. Such is not the case; it is not observing the law that gets a man to heaven, but rather trusting in Jesus Christ. The merit belongs to Jesus; He did the work. Paul’s reasoned conclusion is that a man is not declared righteous before God because he did something good, but rather because he trusted the risen Savior. How blessed are we who heard the gospel and trusted Jesus Christ - we come to God in His Son.

29), 30) Israel belongs to God alone, that is certainly true! But God does not belong to only Israel, by no stretch of man’s reasoning! He is God of all who will trust Him, Jew and Gentile alike. Were justification by the law, then Yahweh would only be Israel’s God, for they alone had the law. But since God declares men righteous by faith, Gentiles may be saved as well as Jews. If God belonged only to Israel, then there would be at least two Gods if the Gentiles were to have a God. But Israel’s prime declaration, **Sh’mā Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad**. *“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One”* (the *sh’mā*, Deuteronomy 6:4) requires that there be only one God! Circumcised or not, men can only come to God on the basis of faith. Anyone can believe! Just accept as true what God says, and then lean on Jesus for life! I’m so glad God included me in that!

31) That “faith” excludes law-keeping as a means of salvation does not make the law of no use. Its purposes included showing men their sin and pointing to the Savior. When a man trusts Christ and is saved, the law is shown to be valid for its intended purpose! It is established. Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf in saving us from sin! Faith doesn’t negate or work against the law. On the contrary, believing in Jesus takes a stand with the law!

ROMANS 4

ABRAHAM’S FAITH, AND OURS

ABRAHAM’S PATTERN OF FAITH - EVEN THEN, RIGHTEOUSNESS CAME BY FAITH

1) The “matter” is whether justification is by works of the law or by faith in Christ. The first-father of the Jews should be a good source for such information. He has made a final discovery, and the record in Scripture will tell us what it is. How wonderful that the Bible lets us “ask the Patriarch” a question 2,000 years after he died!

2) I remind you that to be “justified” is to be “declared righteous.” It is an all-important matter for our standing in the court of heaven. Abraham was a man of great obedience to God, so much so that some might see him as a man justified by

works. But not so - because that would give him reason to boast about how he got to heaven!

3) Finally Paul says, "Let's look at the record. What does it say?" He then quotes Genesis 15:6, making a vital point: Abraham believed God, and on the basis of that faith, God imputed righteousness to Abraham's spiritual account. God simply put something on Abraham's account that took him from the liability to the asset column

4), 5) Here is a clear summary of the matter. When a man bargains with another man to do a job, he performs a task, and then the man is obligated to pay him for his effort. What the first man (Adam) receives then, is a wage, and not a gift. On the other hand, when a man simply believes what God has revealed, and trusts God to save him, rather than trying to save himself, that man has credited to his account that he is righteous - he is justified. It is not the man who attempts to clean up his own life that God can justify. It is a wicked man who comes to God in the merit of His Son, Jesus, that can have this spiritual transaction made for him by a holy God.

6), 7), 8) Even under the LAW dispensation, salvation was not a matter of works, but of God's forgiveness, of God not counting our sins against us for punishment. Paul cites David's great 32nd Psalm (verses 1 and 2) to confirm his point - using the Hebrew Scriptures as support. He uses two different words to speak of our wrongdoing - "lawlessness," which is behaving in a way that violates God's principles for living, and "sin," which is missing God's mark, like an errant archer misses the bull's eye when shooting his arrows. Those whose sins are dealt with on our behalf by God are the happiest of men - thus the word "blessed." There is no true blessing outside of God's provision for us. Under the old economy there was "atonement," the covering of sin by animal blood and faith. In the age of the church our sins are forgiven, removed, gone, washed away, not covered (atoned for).

ABRAHAM'S PRE-CIRCUMCISION FAITH - RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR MORE THAN THE JEWS

9), 10), 11), 12) Twice before Paul had raised the question of whether the Jews' special position gave them any advantage with God for salvation (2:17ff, 3:1ff). God's blessedness for those who believe is for Jew ("the circumcised") and the Gentile ("the uncircumcised"). Paul marvelously uses the first "Hebrew," Abraham, to make his point. According to Genesis 15:6, when Abraham believed God, God put righteousness on his account (we call that "imputation"). Paul then points out that it was "after" (by at least 13 years) God declared him righteous that Abraham was circumcised. So in a sense he is the father of those believing, both the Gentiles and the Jews. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant, a symbol of relationship with God by faith. Apart from faith, circumcision has no spiritual benefit for the sons of Abraham, nor is it necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised to be saved.

ABRAHAM'S PROMISE OF FAITH - NOT BY LAW and OBEDIENCE, BUT BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

13) Not Law-obeying, but Word-believing is the basis for Abraham and his offspring to become heirs. The law did not come until about 500 years later. Abraham's faith in God was how he received God's gift of righteousness.

14), 15) **Negative**- Law doesn't save, because 1) faith would be empty, 2) the promise would be invalid. Earlier (4:1-5) Paul argued the point of faith-based righteousness. He used the Hebrew Scriptures to demonstrate that Law-keeping is not in the equation. **Positive** - the law did bring to sin the nature of transgression, and consequent wrath. No one can keep the law perfectly; to fail to do so is to transgress, to "step aside" from the law. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the Law's purpose was not to give life, but to show us our sin and point us to Jesus.

16) Conclusion: Therefore, the promise must spring from faith to be by grace; the law would bring merit. Also, the promise extends (by faith) beyond people-of-the-Law to all God's children. The Law was specifically Jewish; but the Gentile believers are blessed also by faith. Even we Gentile believers may trace our spiritual ancestry to Abraham.

ABRAHAM'S PROGENY OF FAITH - A "DEAD MAN" BEGETS CHILDREN

17) God's lawyer defends his conclusion with Old Testament statements, a quote from Genesis 17:4, 5. While the physical, temporal dimensions of the Abrahamic covenant pertain to the Jews, the spiritual dimensions go beyond to all who believe God. Abraham (and we) believed in God Who declares what is going to happen with the very same certainty as He records what has already happened. God spoke of things to come.

18) Reason and nature said, "Abraham, Sarah, you will have no children at your advanced ages." God said, "You'll have a son, and nations will come from you." Abraham believed God, hoping where there was no hope. He just trusted God! This is the essence of faith: accepting the unseen as real because God says so. Abraham was the Progenitor of faith, and he was the Patriarch of faith, as well as the Pattern of faith! Let's follow him!

19) Abraham was not oblivious to the fact that neither he nor Sarah were in any shape to bear children. But that did not cause his faith to waver. He knew how old he was, and he knew that Sarah was past her childbearing years. His was not a blind faith; he saw clearly the circumstances, and he also saw clearly the omnipotent God.

20), 21) His decision was not based on unbelief, but on faith in God's promise. God empowered the couple to believe and to conceive. And they gave **Him** the glory. The result of Abraham being fully persuaded that God could do it, God did it. O, that we today would trust God so! Faith lays hold of God's power, and miracles happen!

22) This faith in God's revealed Word is the basis for His imputing righteousness to Abraham. It was not because He obeyed (remember, there was as yet no law), but because He believed. *"The just shall live by faith."*

ABRAHAM'S POSTERITY OF FAITH - NOT JUST FOR HIS PHYSICAL OFFSPRING, BUT FOR US, TOO!

23), 24) The imputation of righteousness by faith is not limited to Abraham alone! We, too, may be justified by faith! God's

righteousness is permanently credited to the account of one who believes that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Justification - being declared righteous by God - is on the basis of faith in the crucified, risen, Son of God!

25) Our understanding of Christ's work must include that He died because of our sins. God raising Christ proves that He accepted His sacrifice, demonstrates His willingness and ability to forgive, justify, and accept us in Christ.

ROMANS 5

WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE ABOUNDED MORE

This marvelous chapter is a high water mark in the epistle. Here Paul rises to his best to discuss the transformation from being in Adam with its awful consequences of sin and death, to being in Christ by faith, with its wonderful results of righteousness and life.

CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTIFICATION - A CHAIN OF BLESSINGS

1), 2) Faith in Christ is the only ground of justification; when we are so justified, we have peace, a harmonious relationship with God, because of Jesus, our Savior and Lord. We can pillow our heads each night in the confidence that we are right with God. We no longer fear death or judgment; our judgment has been taken care of by Christ, and death will simply usher us into His presence. What peace! Not only do we no longer stand afar from God in fear, in Christ we have been given introduction, *entree* to God. The verbs signify a permanent standing. Now we can keep on rejoicing because we have confident hope that we shall enter into His glory one day!

3), 4) We not only rejoice in our future glory, but also in our present sufferings. While this seems strange to the ear of unbelief, the sanctified mind knows there is a chain reaction, a series of things produced in the life that can come by no other means than suffering. It goes like this: if we hang in there when we suffer, there is produced in us a steadfast ability to abide under difficulty. We do not run away from testing. This, in turn, produces proven character in the believer. Last in the chain is the blessing of hope. Biblical hope has no trace of uncertainty in it. We know the outcome, and we rest in Christ until He brings it to pass - and He will!

5) When our hopes don't come to pass, we are disappointed. This is never true with our hopes in Christ - they are all based on God's unfailing promises. In the ministry of the Holy Spirit (first mentioned here in Romans), God has poured out His love for us into our hearts. The Spirit seals us unto the day of redemption - this is certain!

CAUSE OF JUSTIFICATION - THE DEATH OF CHRIST

6) Evidence: "you see." Timing: "right time." Need: "powerless." Provision: "Christ died." God's wrath toward our sin is diverted to, absorbed by, Christ. And this was not to good people, but to sinners. Our condition was contrary to self-help, we were "without strength." We were not lovely to God - "ungodly." Yet He died! Oh, what love!

7), 8) As men think, it is rare for a man to sacrifice himself for another, even though that one may be righteous (conforming to the law) or good (benevolent, kind). **BUT GOD** shows the supremacy of His love by giving Christ to die, not for the righteous or good, but for sinners! Oh what love! When men would not do for one another, when human love is too weak to meet another's needs, why would God reach down where man fails to reach across? Because **He is God** - it is His character and nature to love. And His love is in stark contrast to that feeble thing in man we call "love." We won't die for the good, but Christ died for the wicked, ungodly, sinners!

9) Now follows an argument from the greater to the lesser, the *a fortiori* argument. The greater thing is for God to declare a sinner to be righteous. If God would do that (and He did and does!), will he not also keep us from wrath? To give a sinner a righteous standing is a great thing! Surely he will also keep His child from hell!

10) If Christ's death could reconcile us when we were enemies to God, how much more the active energy of Christ's life above (and in us) can keep us saved! This is wonderful logic: if a *death* can do so much, surely a *life* can do the lesser thing! The jeweler who gives you an expensive ring will surely not withhold a box in which to take it home.

11) Our standing and security are cared for, plus we rejoice! From God, through Christ, we are made recipients of reconciliation. We are changed so as to be made right with God, and He changed us! This brings great joy!

CONTRASTS IN JUSTIFICATION - ADAM and CHRIST; SIN and GRACE

12) This is one of the most important texts in the entire New Testament. It is foundational to our understanding of man's sinfulness. Sin came into human race by one man (Adam); death permeated the race, for we all sinned. The present condition of the race resulted from a single sin in which we all participated; spiritual and physical death as conditions resulted from this sin - and a single disobedience. Death is universal in the human experience because sin is universal in the human experience. Can we lightly consider that which so devastated humanity and which slew our Lord?!! Here is a pair of pivotal questions: "Did Adam sin for us all? Or, did we all sin in Adam?" I am convinced the text says the latter, that we all sinned in Adam.

13), 14) Here is proof that we sinned in Adam. Mankind from Adam to Moses had no specific commands, as had Adam. So the reckoning of sin as a transgression did not exist ("transgression" means "to sidestep a command"). Yet, men died (rather death was a universal and cruel sovereign). Why? They had sinned in Adam and shared his guilt. Wish you proof that man is a sinner? Look at the death notice, the morgue, the funeral home, the cemetery, the last will and testament.

See how inescapable is this thing called death. This is the monstrous result of a greater fiend - sin!! Yes, all have sinned! See Ecclesiastes 7:20, *"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins."*

15) So, we have a trespass, and we have a gift. Each is found in a racial head (the first man, Adam, and the last Adam, Christ) but they differ in intensity. How easy it is to pollute - how difficult it is to purify. It is very easy to slay - hard (if not impossible for men) to make alive from death. The cleansing fountain of Calvary had hard work to do, but Jesus was equal to the task. *"The blood still reaches deeper than the stain had gone."*

16) A second contrast is offered between the sin of Adam and the gift of God in Christ. A single sin's destructive power is in the first; the gift must cover many sins (i.e. all the sins of all the men of all the ages). God's grace is greater than all our sin. "Judgment looks to one sin, the free gift to many."

17) Because of sin, death once reigned. So, now, because of Christ, redeemed sinners may reign (as kings). God's gift of righteousness brings life, where sin had fostered death. This abundant grace of God in Christ is our cause of joy and rejoicing.

18) The first Adam by a single act of transgression plunged the whole race into sin. The Last Adam, by a single act of righteousness, made it possible for all men to be justified. All this was accomplished on the cross of Christ.

19) Restated from a different angle, it was the disobedience of Adam that made all men sinners. The obedience of Christ to the will of God potentially made all men righteous - they need only believe in His finished work, and they can share in the greatest gift ever given. That is the gift of eternal life, sins forgiven, righteousness imputed.

20) Now, where does the Law of Moses fit in all this faith-righteousness business? Does it have a place and a part? It most certainly does! It came in to show that sin goes way beyond the bounds of God's will. But where sin is seen as going beyond (out of bounds), grace goes farther to bring us back. Grace abounded more! "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt; yonder on Calvary's Mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt." What a blessed thought!

21) Sin sat on the throne as king, bringing death to all men (because all were sinners). Now grace kicks sin off the throne and takes its rightful place there, to reign as king. Grace overcomes sin's death by bringing in righteousness that leads to life. Sin abounded, but God's grace abounded more!

ROMANS 6

WE MUST FORSAKE THE PRACTICE OF SIN

I. BECAUSE WE DIED WITH CHRIST (1-14)

1. Death Pictured in Baptism (1-5)

1) Chapter five's ending includes, *"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."* Our text opens with a question - *"Shall we then continue in sin that grace may abound?"* The unregenerate mind's logic may have reasoned such a conclusion, and Paul wished to address it for his readers. Sin in those who are unsaved abounds to grace for salvation. Grace in the saved abounds to a holy life that presents Christ well to the world.

2) When we come to Christ in faith, we are alive to Him, but we die to sin. We who are saved cannot then continue to live the way we did before we were saved. 2 Corinthians 5:17 speaks of the passing away of the old and the coming of the new. Our new man in Christ cannot sin (1 John 3:9). As Lazarus was loosed from the grave-clothes and ordered out of the cemetery, so the new man in Christ must leave behind the things of sin!

3) Ritual, or water, baptism identifies us with Christ in His death - as to the world of sin, we died. Real, or Holy Spirit, baptism places us into Christ's body. Our faith in Christ, symbolized by water baptism, renders us saved, and thus holy. How may we then go on in sin? The sin which nailed Jesus to the cross has no place in the life of those He saves. We died to that sin by coming to the living Christ for salvation. We cannot continue in sin.

4) While Paul may here speak of Holy-Spirit baptism, the ritual of immersion should also lead to practical holiness of life. An "into-death" baptism symbolically buries the believer. He is dead to sin! But by grace, as Jesus was raised, so the believer is now alive unto Christ. We are to live a resurrection life. Jesus told the people of Bethany, in the cemetery where He raised the entombed Lazarus, *"Loose him and let him go!"* May it be so for us.

5) Now a statement and its conclusion about death and life: *"Since we were united with Him in death; it is certain that we will be united with Him in resurrection."* The word "if" here is better translated "since." It is an accomplished fact, not a hypothetical assertion. His resurrection is guarantee of ours, and it is the power for holy living. In Philippians 3:10, Paul expressed a longing to know Christ in the power of His resurrection, the only way to live.

2. Death Frees Us From Sin (6-10)

6) What we had been before we met Christ was crucified with Christ: *"I am crucified with Christ..."* (Galatians 2:20). This death purposed to render the old man inoperative, put him out of business. The result is that we are no longer slaves to sin. The old nature did not die at salvation, but we are to reckon the old man dead, which frees us to live for Christ. This is effected by our having a funeral every day, burying the old man in Adam.

7) All debts are cancelled at death. The living slave is emancipated at the grave. There is no more obligation to sin for those "dead to sin!" Paul's earlier question about continuing in sin gets another answer: "How **can** a dead man sin?" Christ's death became my death! He delivered me from sin's penalty in salvation. Through sanctification, He is delivering me from its power. One day He shall deliver me from sin's very presence!

8) The "if" here should also be "since." All men were present in Adam's sin, so all men share in the death that comes by sin. Even so, all believers were included in Christ's death and resurrection. From the moment of our salvation, we share in Christ's resurrection. We are persuaded that those who died with Christ shall also share in His life. He lives, and we, too, shall live. This is a future certainty.

9), 10) In Adam, mankind died spiritually in sin and became subject to physical death; it served and serves as master over us. When Jesus died, He fought a battle with death on our behalf. The empty tomb is indication of His victory over death. He arose in an undying body, therefore death no longer has any mastery over Him. Our sin caused His death (once for all). Now he lives unto God (once, and for always). All that Jesus did, He did for us. We share in His death and in His life. Though He was not a sinner Himself, but was bearing our sins, He willingly surrendered to sin's consequence - death. Now He has the keys of Hades and of death. His death was sin's payment; the debt is cancelled, never to be raised again. Jesus in death was separated from God - now He lives unto God. There is no more separation of the Son from the Father! The power of His new life is the power of our new life! How good is God to give such gifts!!!

3. Claim Your Position (11-14)

11) Paul now instructs us to do some "dead reckoning" - to "reckon" (consider) ourselves "dead" unto sin and alive unto God in Christ. Our sin was imputed to Him; His righteousness and life are imputed, then, to us. This new mind-set will place us into a new sphere and enable us to live a new life in Christ!

12), 13) The first verb in this verse is a present tense imperative, having this force, "Stop letting sin reign." Paul's readers were losing the battle with sin; it was "reigning over their mortal bodies." He who practices sin becomes its slave. Thus it was with some Roman believers, and thus it may be with some today. The strong desires produced by sin must be fought. We live in bodies, whose members should be instruments for right, not for unrighteousness. It is time for a presentation of these bodies (see Romans 12:1, 2) unto God, to live for Him - not for sin and for self.

14) When men lived under the Law, they had no power to win the battle with sin. The Law could only point out sin. Now that a believer is under grace, he has help to win. There is the power of Christ's resurrection, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the completed Word of God, a family called the "church" to be a support team for us. Let's Win!

II. BECAUSE SIN ENSLAVES (15-23)

1. The Old Enslavement (15, 16)

15) Paul asks another hypothetical question that someone might raise. If the law forbade sin, defined sin, pointed up sin, and it does, what is the relationship of this new grace to sin? Does it allow sin? Are we who are under grace free to continue in sin? Is this a license for lawless living? The new relationship actually gives us a new power to deal with, to battle sin in our lives. Rather than **allowing sin**, it helps us **overcome sin** to please Him Who **called us from sin**. Grace doesn't move us deeper into sin, it positions us to have victory over sin. Again come to mind the hymn's words: *"Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt, yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt."* May we rest in and arm ourselves with this grace and win over sin.

16) Having shouted, *"May it never be!"* the apostle now sets up a scene of slavery. Everybody's somebody's slave. We get to choose whether we serve sin unto death, or Christ unto righteousness and life. Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). God had promised in the beginning that there was a connection between sin and death. Paul had thousands of years of that history to draw from in making his point. You and I get to choose over and over again which master we will serve. Jesus has proven to be a benevolent Master, while sin is an enslaving one.

2. The New Enslavement (17, 18)

17), 18) Paul bursts into a doxology of thanksgiving as he recalls their former estate: they had kept on being slaves to sin in the past, and that the change had come. They had once and for all obeyed, and that from the heart, not in pretense or only externally. The word for "obey" is a compound word that means to "hear and get under" - to place yourself under the authority of Him Who commands. When people commit themselves to the teaching that comes from God's Word, they are enabled by the Spirit to be freed from the grip of sin and live the Christ life. To be cavalier and casual about sin is to set ourselves up to fall into sin. We must remember that sin is a deadly enemy from whose captivity Christ died to free us. As we lean on Him, submitting as slaves to righteousness, we have the best chance of living so that men might see us as "little Christs," or Christians.

3. The Mutual Exclusion (19-22)

19) *"As you once presented...so now present..."* It appears that Paul felt his readers lacked mature spiritual perception, so he said, "I am speaking in human terms." When as unbelievers, our bodies belonged to sin, it was sin in an increasing way. When we present them to Christ (see 12:1, 2), it should be to a righteous standing that grows in practical righteousness - "sanctification." This is a major change in position and in practice!

20) 1 John 2:15, says that love for the world and love for the Father are mutually exclusive. Paul teaches the same thing

about slavery to sin and slavery to righteousness. This may be a good place to stop and reflect on a question like this: "Whose slave are you?" We must ask ourselves such a question because "everybody's somebody's slave." May we find ourselves bound by the liberating shackles placed on us by the Spirit, being slaves to Christ, to trust and obey Him unto righteousness and life. Clearly the alternative is unthinkable.

21) When we have come to Christ and been saved, we look back on our former lives with shame, and well we should. We recognize that there is no gain to the former things; *"What things were gain, I count but loss..."* (Philippians 3:7). That is the new accounting method Paul had in Christ. No gain, ashamed, what were we thinking when we walked in sin? Sin always produces death. It produced spiritual death, and it produced physical death. It can also produce the death of a family, career, education, or any other good thing you can imagine. Daily for decades I have met men at the Rescue Mission suffering these kinds of death. The natural end of enslavement to sin is death.

22) The power of the blood of Jesus Christ broke the shackles of sin and set us free! Our emancipation was the work of God on our behalf (the verb "freed" is passive - we didn't free ourselves - God did it for us!), and it is once and for all accomplished. We must never retreat! Now we are (also "once for all") enslaved to God. What a great change of masters! The fruit and the end of holiness is eternal life - not the former death! Thank God!

4. The Enablement (23)

23) This is a most well-known verse in Romans. Sin makes us work, and its wages are death. Wages are "what you get for what you do," and if we **do sin**, we **get death**, plain and simple. But there is something better than a **wage** - it is a **gift** from a benevolent Giver. That gift from God is eternal life in Christ! Stop the working of sin, the earning death's wage. Rest by faith in Jesus Christ, and God will freely give you the life of the ages. And remember, the gifts "of God are without repentance" - He never changes His mind, nor takes back a gift!

ROMANS 7

WHAT IS OUR RELATION TO THE LAW?

RELEASE FROM THE LAW - "I DIED"

The only man who is free from the Law is one who has died. There is a principle that we died with Christ, and we illustrated that in our baptism. The law's dominion over us is finished (Romans 6:14), and we are under a new principle - that of grace. We have "recognized" our death with Christ in the watery grave of the ordinance of baptism. Now we are to "reckon" that truth in our standing before the Lord. Now we face a new "reality," the old man is reckoned dead, but he is still alive and kicking. Here we are in the Christian life with a new nature, and we find that we have an old nature that does battle with the new one! As we move in the direction of being made over into the image of Jesus, the struggle begins! The process we call "sanctification - being set apart from sin to God."

1) Jew and Gentile alike know that all men are under the authority of some law. For the Jew, there was the Law of Moses, and for the Gentile the laws of the Empire "ruled as lord" over them. That authority ends only when the person has died. The yoke of the law was too heavy to bear, and our freedom in Christ is most welcome.

2), 3) Paul uses marriage as an illustration of this principle of death freeing us from the authority of the Law. The laws of society bind a man and his wife in their marriage union. We sadly take that authority very loosely in 21st century America, using any inconvenience as a basis for divorce and termination of a marriage. I just thanked my wife of over 51 years for sticking by me all these years. By most laws, if a woman moves in with another man while her husband is living, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband is deceased, she is free to marry. The application of this illustration to the argument will follow.

4) The illustration of marriage and death (vss 1-3), Paul now applies to the believer and Christ. We are freed from the Law by death in Christ, just as a person is released from marriage by the death of the spouse, and is then free to marry another. Our relationship with the risen Christ should be a fruitful one. Fruit is internal, growth in the Spirit, and external, impacting the world and blessing the church.

5) Before salvation, the old sinful nature was the governing force in our lives. Prohibitions to sin (the Law) made sin more appealing - "the forbidden fruit." The result of that was the bearing of sinful fruit which led to death. *"In the day you eat it, you will die"* (Genesis 2:17). *"Sin...brings forth death"* (James 1:15).

6) The Law once held us down, but it has been rendered inoperative in doing that by our death with Christ. So we were released from the Law's oppression, domination, its arousal of sin in us. We are slaves now in the Spirit, aroused by His indwelling to do what is right, to live the Christ life (Galatians 2:20).

REASON FOR THE LAW - "IT DEMONSTRATES"

7) The apostle makes it clear that the Law is not a causative factor in why men sin. It does tell us what sin is, but it does not stimulate us to miss God's mark (a simple definition of "sin"). If there were not a standard of moral absolutes, people

would not know what is right and what is wrong. For instance, what could be wrong with seeing something that belongs to someone else and wishing it were mine? Without guidance from God, we would say, "Nothing is wrong with that." But God declared in the Law that we should not covet, thus making me to know that coveting is wrong.

8) My sin nature heard the law say, "Don't covet," and because of my depraved nature, I suddenly wanted the thing God's Law said I could not have. Law is not the problem; sin is. Once Eve, and then Adam, violated God's command, the human race was infected with a nature that is contrary to God and to God's truth. I have nature that knows only sin and to sin. Lust, covetousness, demonstrate my dissatisfaction with the provision of God for me. It challenges God by saying, "You have withheld from me a good thing, and I want it." How depraved is such thinking.

9) Before exposure to the Law, I lived with no pain of conscience or conviction. All was right in my eyes; it mattered not what I did or did not do. I was in effect a "law unto myself." Enter the Law - now I know my behavior is not right. Sin is alive in the sense that I now know it is there. "I died" means I now have a conscience and can feel the guilt of my sin. Though Paul had spent his life in the Law of Moses, until Jesus came into his life, the Law was a dead book. Now the book is alive, as the writer to the Hebrews said, "*The Word of God is alive...*" (Hebrews 4:12).

10) Repeatedly the Hebrew Scripture writers affirmed that those who keep the Law will live. Clearly this is the avoidance of an early death brought on by displeasing God. Capital crimes lead to capital punishment. The Law's principles will also help one live longer than they might have if they chose a path of dissolution and depravity. Paul makes it clear here that the Law in which he hoped for life had actually made him aware of his sin and its consequent death - both physical and spiritual. No one can have eternal life through the Law for no one can keep the Law.

11) Once again, our sin nature deceptively tells us that the Law (and its Author, God) deprives us of good things. We rise up in rebellion against that "deprivation" to pursue those "good things," following our first mother in the Garden of Eden. Satan came at her with this charge, "Hath God said?" He challenged the truth and goodness of God and implied to Eve that God was withholding a good thing from her. He deceived her, and when her husband followed her example, we became a race of sinners. And that sin slew us spiritually, separating us from God, the definition of spiritual death.

12) In verse 7 Paul asked the question, "*Is the Law sin?*" Here he answers it emphatically: "*So the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*" The Law is holy, and it exposes sin. The Law is righteous (just), and it condemns sin. The Law is good, and it points to the Life-Giver. Galatians 3:24, "*Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.*"

13) Seizing the last-mentioned attribute of the Law - that it is "good" - Paul asks then if that good thing became death to him? He vehemently denies that - "absolutely NOT!" It was sin that brought death to the human race, not the Law. The true connection between sin and the Law is that the Law gives sin the opportunity to show itself as the adversary of God. And if that weren't enough, sin is shown to be sin through the commandment, and further, it is seen to be exceeding sinful - the Greek work rendered "exceeding" is letter for letter our word "hyperbole."

LET'S FOLLOW PAUL AS HE DESCRIBES THE INNER BATTLE OF THE CHRISTIAN

CONFLICT BETWEEN SPIRITUAL LAW AND MAN IN THE FLESH

14) Sin brought spiritual death in the race, so men are lost. Once we have life in Christ, sin still does a number on us. It appeals to our sinful nature, creating a conflict between the new man and the old man. When this old nature is in charge, we are once again acting as those enslaved by sin.

15) The closer a man gets to God in his personal walk, the more sinful he feels. This is not because he **is** more sinful, but because he is more sensitive to sin because of the Spirit. Paul was facing this very thing as a quandary: "Why do I do what I don't want to do, and why can't I do what I should?"

16) If I hide the speed limit sign, will it be okay to drive fast? If I reject the Law, then does my behavior become acceptable? **Not so!** The Law is a good thing, and sin proves it! When we walk in the Spirit, we keep the spirit of the Law. Even though I struggle, I agree that the Law is a good thing - boundaries.

17) John said, "*No one who is born of God practices sin...*" (1 John 3:9). The new nature, received through the new birth, is capable only of righteousness. The old nature, received at the first birth, can only sin. It is this part of Paul, the old sinful nature dwelling in him, that makes this agonizing conflict.

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE DEMONSTRATES THAT CONFLICT

18) O, the blessing of having a desire to do good - this evidences the presence of a redeemed nature and of the Holy Spirit. But, O, the burden of not being able to carry out the desire! This, too, is an evidence of something - the powerful presence of a sinful nature, which battles our doing right.

19) Paul seems to be lost in repetition, stating again and again the frustrations of the inner conflict. This invisible war

going on inside us shows the power of the sin nature. It is like the drop of dye that makes the whole container of liquid change color. David had similar expressions in the Psalms.

20) Is this spiritual schizophrenia? Does Paul, and do we as believers have a split-personality? The answer is "yes." Adam bequeathed to us a sin nature; Jesus blesses us with a new nature. And the struggle begins. These two do battle daily for the control of the human will. May the new nature win.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MORAL CONTRADICTION IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

21) It is as if two people were in a room together; one is benevolent ("wishing good"), the other, malevolent ("wishing evil"). The second guy just lies there, close at hand, watching and waiting to inject his evil power whenever the other fellow purposes to do good. This is a principle (Law) in all believers.

22) See also on the "inner man" 2 Corinthians 4:16 and Ephesians 3:16. There is a side of Paul and of us that "joyfully concurs with the Law of God." Regenerate man has a love and desire for doing right, for boundaries.

23) There is a principle (Law) that righteousness leads to life; its converse partner is that sin leads to death. Both these principles are at work in the Christian, for he has two natures. A war is raging.

Two natures dwell within my breast; The one is foul - the other, blest.

The one I love - the one I hate; The one I feed will dominate.

24), 25) The question shows distress, but the answer shuts out despair. Help is needed for time - we can experience victory over sin's power by walking in the Spirit. Help is needed for eternity - at last there is banishment of sin when Christ takes us home! With a glory-shout, Paul thanks God for the rescue that is ours through Jesus Christ! Meanwhile, the battle rages. "I must fight if I would win."

ROMANS 8

OUR VICTORY IN CHRIST!

CONDEMNATION REMOVED

1) Sin brings judgment, which is ultimately "condemnation." To be "in Adam" is to be "under condemnation," a precarious position of jeopardy. To be "in Christ" is to change all that. There is now "no condemnation!" Since our judgment was executed on Him, it will never be executed on us. What blessing we have in Christ!

2) The old Law - "sin produces death" - had me bound. A new, higher, Law set me free! That of the spirit (not letter) of life (not death) in Christ Jesus (not Adam). The new principle abrogates the old, making me alive and free.

3), 4) There was an impossible thing for the Law - saving, sanctifying - because it depended on man, whose sinful flesh is weak. God's incarnate Son made saving and sanctifying possible. Condemnation is upon sin - our sin is upon Christ - He paid the debt. The Law pronounced sentence against us, and it inflicted the penalty that was due us on Christ. Deity robed itself in humanity to do what the Law fell short of doing - helping man satisfy the Law's holy requirements. Jesus was made an offering for sin, enabling man to then live by the Spirit. This walking in the Spirit is evidence of true faith in Christ.

CARNALITY REBUKED

5) Paul asserts that character, thinking, actions are all interconnected. Sinful living and a mind set on sinful things go hand-in-hand. The same is true of spiritual behavior and a spiritual mind. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." A pure soul effects a clean mind, producing holy behavior, which dictates our godly character.

6) A mind dominated by the sinful nature tends to death. Some refer to it as the "carnal mind." It follows the lead of the sinful nature. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12). A mind dominated by Holy Spirit tends to life and peace. Let us feed our minds the truth of God's Word.

7) A sin-dominated mind is at odds with God - hostile to Him. Such a mind lacks the ability to yield to the Law's demands. Here is the problem for the Law - man's sinful nature not only **does not** yield to the holy demands of the Law, it **cannot** yield to them. There is an unwillingness that is finally and fatally combined with an inability.

8) God's good pleasure should be man's chief goal. The man who walks by faith walks in the Spirit and pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). Unbelief walks according to the sinful nature and cannot please Him. Whom do you wish to please? If God, then walk in the Spirit and not in the sinful desires of the flesh. If not God, then repent now!

CHRIST RECOMMENDED

9) There is stark contrast between the carnal and the spiritual: "Since God's Spirit lives in you, you are under His control, not the control of the flesh; if God's spirit does not abide in you, you do not belong to God." Walking in the Spirit evidences His presence in us and assures us of our membership in God's family. When the children of God rebel against the Spirit and sin, they are quickly rebuked, and just as quickly repent and return to the godly path. This is beautifully illustrated in

the lives of David and Peter.

10) The absence of the Spirit (verse 9) means the absence of life; the presence of Christ (verse 10) affords the presence of life. Using these Persons (Christ and the Spirit) interchangeably argues for the unity of the Trinity. At present our bodies are dying because of the fact of sin in mankind. The age-old principle that "sin brings death - righteousness produces life," is restated here.

11) Just as sin guarantees the death of the body, so where the Holy Spirit dwells, He guarantees life from the dead, or resurrection. Yes, we must still die because sin made our bodies mortal, but we who have believed in Jesus will be raised from the dead. We are in Christ (8:1), and the Spirit of Christ is in us (8:11). What a blessed union there is of Savior and saint!

CONFIDENCE RECEIVED

12) This resurrection has a marvelous enabling power for us. Our obligation to the flesh is past! The world's method of determining behavior is, "If it feels good, do it!" That is now a thing of the past for the believer. Everything is now changing. We don't owe the sinful nature a thing. All it ever did was to keep us at enmity with God. The sooner we see its power fading in our lives, the better off we will be.

13) There is an unyielding relationship between sin and death, and between righteousness and life. From the moment of our conversion, we are in a life and death struggle with sin. Fleshly living leads to death. If we keep on putting to death lust, hate, envy, dishonesty, etc., our path will be in the ways of life, not death.

14) Sonship in the family of God is displayed by following His spirit. It is presumption to claim sonship while following the flesh. The privileges of being a member of God's family carry responsibility with them. God's children should bear His resemblance in the world so that people can see God in and through us. This demands consistency of life with our profession. Our claim of belonging is verified by our behaving.

15) Those who are sons are no longer fearfully bound to sin. By Biblical adoption, we are placed as adult sons, heirs. We do not have to wait for some far-off time when we reach our majority. We have all the privileges of sonship now. In Christ, a glorious privilege is ours. "O what a standing is mine."

16) When we claim to be sons of God by faith in Christ, we do not speak alone. God's Spirit testifies with and to us that we have been born into God's family. We do not enter the family by adoption; that great act places us as adult sons, with all the rights and privileges pertaining to the family of God.

17) The "if" is a first-class conditional, and should be "*since we are children*" - this is an assumed fact. Therefore, we are Christ's joint heirs of all that heaven affords. The fact we now share his sufferings means we shall also partake in His glory. We look beyond the present to the glorious eternal future.

SUFFERING AND THE SPIRIT

HOPE IN OUR PAIN

18) We as members of a fallen race will inevitably suffer. Some more, some, less, but all suffer. Paul logically concludes that present suffering is finite, and future glory is infinite; so that the former is not at all worthy to be compared with the latter. Our future glory far outweighs our present sufferings.

19) God showed Paul that the rest of creation eagerly awaits the time of the believer's glorification as we do. Dr. McGee says that creation is "watching with outstretched head...for the revelation of the sons of God." Paul gives rational qualities to the non-rational creation. The curse will be lifted...

20), 21) When God judged Adam's sin, his environment was adversely affected (as was the world of Noah's day, and the environs of Sodom and Gomorrah). Creation did not choose its condition of death, decay, and running down; it was tied to the fall of man because of sin. So, in the lifting of the curse, **creation** is also tied to **man's fortunes** before God. Our future freedoms from mortality, disease, pain, etc., will set the creation free from its present frustration, as well. **Man's hope** is **creation's hope**. Our deliverance will signal the deliverance of creation from the curse we brought upon it.

HOLDING ON IN PATIENCE

22) Browning's "God's in His Heaven— All's right with the world" is only true in the first half. All is not right with the world. Just as trees (Isaiah 55:12) and rivers (Psalm 98:8) are said to "clap their hands," the wilderness (Isaiah 35:1) is said to "be glad," even so creation under the curse can groan in pain until the curse is lifted. This is more than just personification or metaphor; this is creation's reality.

23) Even as the subhuman creation groans, we who have received the Spirit of God also groan. We, too, are eagerly awaiting the time of the completion of the process of adoption (our placement as God's adult sons) - the glorification of our mortal bodies! 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 gives a brief synopsis of this glorious future transformation of the outside to match

the spiritual change that has happened inside.

24) The glorification of our bodies has not yet occurred; rather it is a part of the hope we've had ever since we were saved. If it were a present possession, we would not have to hope for it - no one hopes for things he already has in his possession. We have so many wonderful blessings in Christ already, but this glorification of our bodies is yet future.

25) There are things yet to come, and we **know** they are coming, but we have not yet seen them. Those are the objects of our hope, and we exercise endurance as we patiently wait for them. The world may scoff, saying, "Where is the promise?" But we know the Savior Who made the promises will indeed perform them.

HELP IN OUR PRAYER

26), 27) God did not leave us in this world of suffering and groaning without help. As we wait for our hopes to become sight, our faith to become reality, part of our pilgrim responsibility is prayer. We may at times be ignorant as to what should be the object of our praying, but the Spirit aids us in this weakness by taking our unintelligible prayer effort and translating it to God as intelligent requests. This is part of God's will. Jeremiah said man's heart was deceitful and desperately wicked. Then he stated that God knows those wicked hearts of ours. Our sinfulness impairs our praying, but the **Holy** Spirit makes up for our deficiency by His intercession that always agrees with the will of God. The intimacy within the Trinity allows God to know the Spirit's mind even when the prayer expressions are too deep for words. How comforting to me when my praying is so weak to know that the Spirit helps.

This glorious chapter, one of Scripture's noblest, begins with "no condemnation" and ends with "no separation." These last dozen verses are the great crescendo of this Pauline Biblical symphony. It is one of the classic passages on the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer. Once God has saved you, dear Friend, you can never be lost again!

MY FUTURE IS SECURE IN CHRIST!

GOD'S PLAN FOR BELIEVERS TO PERSEVERE

28) Compare Genesis 50:20. Circumstances may seem to be against us, but **we know** that God is behind the scenes of life, working these things out for our good. When we love God and are called to complete His purpose, we have Him as an incomparable and unconquerable Ally. The clouds of life may temporarily block the sunshine, but they also provide precious, life sustaining rain. We grow through trials in a way that we never could in the easier times of life. As Joseph said to his brothers, "*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.*"

29), 30) The word translated "predestined" is found six times in the New Testament. It relates to Christ's death (Acts 4:28), the believer's conformity to Christ's image (Romans 8:28, 29), our placing as adult sons in God's family (Ephesians 1:5), Jewish converts first glorifying Christ by believing (Ephesians 1:11), and God predestinating the wisdom of the truth about Jesus being a hidden mystery (1 Corinthians 2:7). God determined beforehand that we might join the family as adult sons, with the result of giving Jesus many brethren. Then He invited ("called") us into the family, declared us righteous ("justified"), and planned to make us like Jesus ("glorified").

GOD'S PROTECTION FOR BELIEVERS IN PERSECUTION

31) So we have all this wonder going for us - God at work to secure our future as well as our present! Since God props us up like this, who can knock us down? When God is our strong Ally, no power on earth or in hell can undo our glorious future. What confidence this gives the believer as he walks with God in this world. How much better to have "God for us" and all the world against us, than to have all the world for us, and God against us!

32) One argument in logic is called the *a fortiori* argument. This means that if a greater thing is accepted as true, one of its lesser corollaries must also be true. "If I give you a car, its title in your name, insurance and taxes paid for a year, a tank full of gas, and a credit card for more, surely I will give you the key!" Since God has sacrificed His own Son for us on the cross (the greater thing), surely He will give us the lesser things that accompany salvation. What blessings we have in Jesus Christ! And every good thing comes to us from God!

33), 34) All those who would lay a charge against us have been silenced. God the Creator, God Who Justifies sinners, has personally taken in hand our cause. Who in all the universe is powerful enough to stand up to Him? None! Who has been more offended by our sin than has God? None! And He has forgiven us. If the Holy God of heaven can put away all our sins, who can dredge them up again? No one, I think! The Father has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22), and the Son is the One Who died for us. He also rose again from the dead, and He is in heaven interceding, advocating for us today. With all that going for us, there is nothing that can effectively oppose us. I am not only saved, I am also absolutely secure! God + 1 = a majority, always.

35) He writes rhetorically, planning to answer his own question? Is there anyone (personification) who can cut us off from the love that Christ has for us? He then introduces a series of seven pretenders to that task - things the apostle had no

doubt experienced in the many attacks upon himself. None of them can so separate us! In fact, they are part of the “all things” which he has already stated work together “for our good.” We cannot lose!

36) The Hebrew apostle reaches back into the Hebrew Scriptures to support his thesis. Psalm 44:22 is his text. Here the Psalmist spoke of great victory that God provided; then he continued by describing how it may have **seemed** God had abandoned his people (but He had not). Finally there was a prayer for God to arise and come to their aid. Paul knows as well as the Psalmist that God will never utterly forsake those who are His.

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR BELIEVERS TO PREVAIL

37) Remember that Christ's being slain as a Lamb on the cross was followed by His rising as a Lion from the tomb. These “sheep for the slaughter” in verse 36 can be “more than conquerors” in verse 37 because of Jesus. The expression could better be translated that we are “hyper-victorious.” We don't just squeak by in a narrow victory - we win by a landslide! Never forget Who it is that gives us this victory. It is God the Father in Jesus Christ the Son. The love of God secured for us in Christ every good thing we need for life and godliness!

38), 39) There is an old chorus which goes, “No ill can harm me, no foe alarm me... safe am I, safe am I in the hollow of His hand.” I am inextricably united to God's love in Christ. I am as good for heaven as if I were already there. Compare here Christ's words in John 10:27-29. Either of these two passages should put to rest forever the idea that any truly saved person could ever be lost again! Paul declares that he stands convinced that no dreaded adversary anywhere has the ability to bring space between me and God's love in Christ. He begins a list of potential adversaries that runs to nine before he simply says “nor anything else in creation.” The security of the believer is in God's mighty hand, not in our own. I am in God's hand, and nothing can take me out of His omnipotent grip. The keeping is His to do, and He does it well. Thank You, Lord, for keeping your children.

Chapters 9, 10, 11 of Romans discuss God's dealings with the nation and people of Israel. Generally stated, chapter 9 is about their past, chapter 10 deals with their present, and chapter 11 focuses on their future. The theological mindset of the reader will determine much about how they interpret these chapters. I prefer an interpretation that uses the historical, grammatical, literal method of getting at the meaning of the text. It seems to me that God said what He meant, and He meant what He said. David L. Cooper's golden rule of interpretation says, “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.” So often in discussions with friends who look differently at Scripture, especially when it comes to Israel and the doctrines of last things, I hear them say, “Well, you have to look at such-and-such a book by so-and-so.” This happened only recently with a dear friend from my church. My repeated response to him was that I wanted to get all my doctrine from the Bible, not from some other man's writings. A brief, broad-brush summary of Israel's history is: God called Abram to leave Chaldea and go to Canaan. His son Isaac gave him a grandson, Jacob. His name was changed to Israel, and he had 12 sons who became fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel, the nation. The theocracy turned into a monarchy, which kingdom is now held in abeyance, but it will be restored in Jesus as the final King.

ROMANS 9

THE COMPASSION OF PAUL

1) What Paul is about to say seems incredible - I have had good Bible students take exception to the simple meaning of verse three, saying that no man could ever choose hell for himself to benefit another. But here Paul clearly affirms it as truth, spoken in Christ, agreed to by conscience and by the Holy Spirit.

2) Heartache is evident as the apostle writes of a huge grief and a pain that will not let up in his heart. What is it that could bring such pain to a man of such faith? How can this great heart, so settled in peace with God (Romans 5:1) and the peace of God (Philippians 4:7), be torn apart by some circumstance?

3) No child of Adam has ever uttered such a word (save Christ Himself). He who has just stated the impossibility of separation from Christ (Romans 8:38, 39 - “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ”) now states a willingness to experience just that if only the Jewish nation would turn their hearts to their Messiah! My own zeal for the lost pales by comparison to Paul's expression.

4), 5) Here he lists spiritual privileges the Jews enjoyed, and at which they stumbled in rejecting their Messiah. **Israelites:** descendants (not just from Abraham, for so are the Arabs, but through Isaac and Jacob also) of Israel; **adoption:** the members of this nation were placed as God's special sons (Exodus 4:22); the **glory:** to Israel God appeared in glory over the mercy-seat in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple; the **covenants:** with Israel God made the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants. He further lists the **Law, promises, temple service, the patriarchs,** and

finally, the greatest blessing of being the vehicle through which came the **Messiah!** What great privileges!

THE CHILD OF THE PROMISE

6), 7) Did God's promises in His Word fail because Israel failed? Of course not! There is racial Israel, those who descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, and there is spiritual Israel - those who believe with faithful Abraham. Having Jewish DNA and circumcision are not as important as faith in God through Jesus Christ. Verse 7 makes it clear that there were and are descendants of Abraham through his earlier son, Ishmael, who are not part of God's covenant promises. It was "through Isaac" that the spiritual seed was to be generated.

8) While this verse is technically referring to the descendants of Abraham, it reminds me that God does not have any grandchildren, only children. No one gets into the family of God because their parents or other forebears were believers. We must each stand before God individually, and only in the merit of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ!

THE CHOICE OF PROVIDENCE

9) Paul now takes his Roman readers (and us) back to Genesis 18 and the tent of Abraham on the plains of Mamre. Three men showed up there, two of whom were angels, and One I believe was Jesus Himself! After they dined together, the Lord told Abraham that in the following year Sarah would bear him a son - truly a miracle!

10), 11), 12), 13) God's choice of Isaac was the selection of the son of one woman (Sarah) over the sons of two other women (Hagar and Keturah). There is another twist of His choosing the covenant people found in His confirming the covenant to the younger twin born to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob over Esau. God's prediction, prior to their birth, that "the elder shall serve the younger" demonstrates that His choice had nothing to do with the works, good or bad, or the character of either of the twins. It was simply the sovereign choice of a Sovereign God. God often reverses the birth order in His plan - Seth over Cain, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, David over his older brothers, and so on. We do not take the words "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" in an absolute personal sense, even as we do not take Christ's call to discipleship of "hating" our family (Luke 14:26) in their absolute sense. It is rather a comparative, indicating the greatness of His love for Jacob.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD - JUST and SOVEREIGN

14) This is one of at least 7 times this form of question is asked in Romans. Paul often used literary devices like the rhetorical question (here), hyperbole, and metaphor. So did Jesus. Some outside the family of Israel might call God unjust for apparently excluding them. But such was not really the case.

15) Now begins an important section on the sovereignty of God. Man's views of justice are not the thing - it is the sovereign will of Almighty God that matters! He has chosen to extend His mercy and compassion to people of faith, regardless of their physical ancestry. I am not a physical descendant of Abraham, but by grace, and through faith in Jesus Christ, I am a member of the family of God!

16) Paul describes two things that do not fulfill the purposes of God - wishing and running. What does get it done is the showing of mercy by God; we all deserve condemnation - to escape being condemned is mercy!

17) God's sovereignty includes even the bringing of a certain man to power in Egypt 3500 years ago (from now). His purposes in using this particular man were 1) the demonstration of His power and, 2) the declaration of His name in the earth. God can do that - He is, after all, God, and what He does is always right.

18) God clearly hardened Pharaoh's heart to make a political decision in order that He might with great power accomplish the national emancipation of Israel. The mercy was to the nation of Israel, and the hardening was of the heart of Pharaoh. God showed His power, and He freed Israel.

THE CONVERSATION WITH THE POTTER

19) These are truths hard to understand; no one fully grasps the harmony of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. But none should ever speak against God's plan or His work among men. We cannot use the election of God as an excuse for not obeying Him, or in any way challenge His justice.

20) Isaiah 45:9 says, "*Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?'*" This shows the foolishness of a piece of pottery arguing with the potter who made it. Here Paul rebukes his antagonist for "talking back to" God. The very idea! A worm displaced by the farmer's plow has more right to complain than does a man against the counsels of Almighty God.

21) The clay could have remained in the digging pit, or it may have been made into a receptacle for garbage, or the potter may fashion it into a dish to serve gourmet foods on a fashionable table in a rich man's home. It is all the will of the potter. Say to God, "Thou art the Potter; I am the clay." Accept that He is in charge, and we are to be submissive and obedient to His will.

22) All men are sinners by birth, nature, and choice. Some believe God's truth, repent of their sin, and turn in faith to God.

Others reject the truth, remain in their sin, and say “no” to God. Upon the latter, the rejecters, He shows His mercy in being patient and His power in finally judging their sin.

23), 24) The 3-chapter paragraph (9-11) is about God’s plan for Israel: her past, her present, her future. Israel was and is the olive tree in its natural branches. Those of Israel who reject God’s plan (the height of which is to reject His Son) are vessels fitted for destruction, as are those of the Gentiles who refuse God’s grace in favor of sin. The sovereign God has chosen to be patient with man (2 Peter 3:9), giving him an opportunity to repent. When man rejects all efforts of God’s grace, saying “no” to Jesus, he shows that he deserves destruction. May many turn to God from sin (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

25), 26) As the Prophet Hosea reclaimed Gomer, his wife of harlotry, and made the unloved loved, and restored the unowned to his family, so God has done for Israel. And for that matter, He has done it for us Gentiles as well! As Hosea had to go into the places of shame to redeem Gomer, so Jesus came into the shame of earth to redeem Israel and the Gentiles. Gomer sinned, suffered consequences of her sin, and was restored. Israel experienced all of the same, and so have you and I who believe in Jesus today!

THE CRY OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH

27), 28), 29) A second prophet is called upon to help make Paul’s argument - Isaiah. Sodom and Gomorrah were wiped off the earth without a trace - lost to humanity forever. God would not do that to Israel; there would always be a remnant. The primary application of these verses seems to be a relatively small return from the exile, the captivity. Paul applies it to his own day, with the saving of some of the Jews through faith in Christ. Eschatologically, we are looking at those who make it through the Tribulation Period and are saved when they look upon Jesus at His glorious return. The principle is the same throughout - though there were many who sprung from Abraham, not so many will find grace. But there will be that “remnant of grace.”

THE CONTRARY PURSUITS

30), 31) “Pursuit” is a wonderful thing if its object is a worthy one. Man, however, does not pursue God, even though he desires the things that only God can give him. He is always looking in the wrong places. The Gentiles were not pursuing righteousness at all. The Jews were looking to the Law for righteousness, but it never came by the Law. In fact, the Law showed men that we are sinners and in need of righteousness. James 2:10 set forth a standard of perfection in Law pursuit - to fail only in one point is to fail completely! Righteousness always has come only by grace, through faith.

32), 33) The failure to obtain righteousness by the Law was not the fault of the Law, but rather the fault of Israel. And why? Because they sought it through works and not through faith! Isaiah (28:16 and 8:14) had written of a Stone that God would lay in Zion. It would be a cornerstone, essential to the building, but to those who reject the Messiah, it would be a stone of stumbling. 1 Peter 2:6-8 quotes those passages in this same connection. Isaiah 49:23 and Joel 2, 26, 27 each speak of the people of God not being put to shame - apparently in the Kingdom. Paul seems to apply it to the present. “The substance of the chapter is that, in spite of Israel’s rejection, in spite of the present mixed following of Jews and Gentiles as the Lord’s people, God’s Word has not failed, for God never pledged away His sovereignty in it, but, on the other hand, predicted that salvation turned on His will and call.” J. Stifler

ROMANS 10

GOD’S WAY OF SALVATION

SALVATION’S MAN - JESUS

1) Often the heart of Paul reflects the heart of Christ - here is such an occasion. Christ’s cry in Luke 13:34 is much like this one. Any child of God should wish for the salvation of his own people. Paul covets the souls of the people of Israel for God - so should we. The word “desire” translates a word that means “good wish.” “Prayer” translates a word that suggests earnestness, near desperation. This was no passing fancy for Paul - it was a heavy burden on his heart and soul.

2) The Jews of Paul’s day had hearts that burned for God, but not according to the knowledge that was now made available to them. They were willingly ignorant of the development of truth that brought the Gospel of Christ. While no one could accuse them of being without religious fervor, it was clearly misdirected, aimed at works accomplishment rather than faith reception.

3) Three serious problems for the Jews are detailed here: 1- They were ignorant of the righteousness that originates with God, 2- they wished to present their own righteousness to God, and 3- they failed to submit to God’s righteousness. They wished to substitute works for faith, a thing that is abhorrent and unacceptable to the God of Grace. Willful ignorance, self-will, and resistance to the truth - these are all serious failures of the chosen people of God, especially in light of all their spiritual advantages!

4) On the cross Jesus said, “It is finished” - a single word in the original. Here Paul uses the noun form of that same word to express that Jesus’ cross-work fulfilled the Law’s demands. Jesus literally “paid it all.” The conclusion is that a believing sinner may become righteous in the eyes of a holy God. What wondrous grace this is! Jesus was the Goal of the Law, the One Who perfectly obeyed the Law, Him to Whom the Law pointed as a sign, in every way the “End of the Law.”

SALVATION'S MEANS - NOT LAW WORKS, BUT FAITH

5) Paul refers to Leviticus 18:5; the idea seems to be that if a man could perfectly obey the Law to obtain righteousness, then that would be his own works-righteousness, and not the acceptable righteousness of God which is by faith. Of course, James 2:10 reminds us of the impossibility of a man keeping the whole Law, for one error breaks the entire Law.

6), 7) Faith-righteousness is based on God's work for man, work that He has already **done**, not that man must **do**. Let me emphasize that again, Christianity is a "**DONE**" faith, not a "**DO**" religion. (And there are really only two religions in the world - one that comes to God in the merit of His Son and one that offers God something in exchange for His eternal favor. That latter religion has many forms and faces, but in the end it is only one religion, that of man's works). It was not man ascending into heaven that brought Jesus down to save us. It was God's marvelous plan and work in the incarnation and crucifixion. It was not man that descended into the grave to bring Jesus up again - it was God's greatest work of all, the resurrection! Our faith is in work done by Christ, completed in an "it is finished" kind of way. We "need not work our souls to save, that work's already done..." And it was done by Jesus Christ the Lord!

8) Again Paul refers to Moses, human author of the Law, to demonstrate his point that man cannot achieve heaven by the works of the Law. He quotes Deuteronomy 30:14 as a preview glimpse of the full statement in verse 17 of the faith-producing effect of the Word of God in a life. Far from being some distant, hard-to-reach means of receiving salvation, it is as close to an individual as his own mouth and heart. The mouth and heart aspects are amplified in verses 9 and 10.

9), 10) Here are emphasized two vital things: 1) the content of faith, and 2) the confession of faith. Clearly faith is an inner acceptance as true of what God says about Jesus in relation to our sin and His provision. Confession with the mouth could be empty lip-service, meaning absolutely nothing. The confession only has any meaning if behind it there is an understanding and an agreement with the truths of the gospel. So, in our hearts we must lean upon the death and resurrection of Christ as God's only solution to man's sin problem. The Lordship of Christ, His mastery over our lives, is intimately connected to our faith in Him. The former is a necessary companion of the latter. Paul also points up the importance of our being willing to publicly own Christ as our Savior and Lord. This demonstrates the reality of our faith. In some times and places it has been costly to do so, yet we are called upon to own Him before others.

11) Once again the apostle draws on the Hebrew Scriptures to bolster his argument. Isaiah, in 28:16, prophesied that God would lay down a cornerstone - we take that to be Jesus. He said that any who trusted this Cornerstone would never be disappointed, ashamed, put to shame. The gospel of Christ is a glorious thing, His cross a source of pride for the believer. We who have trusted in Jesus have no reason to shrink in fear or shame from owning Him publicly.

12), 13) In chapter 3, Paul had commented concerning Jews and Gentiles that "there is no difference," meaning that the Jews were sinners just like the Gentiles were. Here he echoes the words of Peter in the first Church Council at Jerusalem (recorded for us in Acts 15), saying again, "there is no difference." This time his intent is that the Gentiles are just like the Jews in God's willingness to save them. The Gentiles did not have a corner on sin, and the Jews did not have a monopoly on salvation. The universality of God's invitation to salvation is race-neutral. We Gentiles stand on the same ground with our Jewish brothers - if we have both come to Christ. A person need not have any particular background of ethnicity, or even have become a proselyte of the Jewish faith. He needs only to "call upon the name of the Lord" in faith to be saved. It is simple, universally available, and absolutely necessary - there is no other way!

SALVATION'S METHOD - HOW GOD PRESENTED IT TO US

14), 15) An assertion about the method of salvation is made in verse 13. In verses 14 and 15 Paul presents a series of logical questions that might arise. John Witmer remarks that these questions each build "on the key verb from the preceding question." To call on the name of the Lord in a way that brings salvation prerequisites faith in the Lord. That faith rests upon a declaration of God's Word about Christ. To effectively declare God's Word about Christ, one must be sent to that task by God Himself (as all we believers are!). Paul returns to the Hebrew Scriptures and quotes Isaiah 52:7 to speak of the beauty of the feet (the coming, the arrival) of the one bringing the good news of salvation to us.

16), 17) The word "Israelites" is inserted. Isaiah's question, "Who has believed our report?" implies that not all who hear, believe. While some (perhaps many) Jews who were blessed with God's Word disbelieved it, others, Gentiles, received God's general revelation with faith and somehow received God's specific revelation, and they were saved. Job, Ruth, Nebuchadnezzar, Cornelius, and the Ethiopian Eunuch are such. They must have gotten the Word, for the faith that is requisite for salvation can only come from the Word of God! We in the church today have an awesome responsibility to see that the whole world gets the gospel. What are you doing to make that happen?

SALVATION'S MYSTERY - FOUND BY THOSE NOT SEEKING IT

18) The beautiful sequence of God sending a witness, they sharing the Word, others hearing the Word, believing the Word, and calling on the name of the Lord to be saved, is given here a strange twist. No one can claim to never have had any revelation from God, thus charging Him with injustice in condemning the man who "never had a chance to hear the Word." As chapter one (18-20) had intimated, a man can know about God from observing the physical creation. Here Paul cites from the Psalms a passage (19:4) that (again) intimates man has heard from heaven through the creation. It is my conviction that when a man so stirred by God's handiwork moves toward God, then God moves toward him to give him more truth so he can believe and be saved. Yes, a man must believe the Scriptures to be saved, but none are excused

simply because a Bible never landed in front of them!

19), 20), 21) God's work among Gentiles had more than one purpose - including saving me and most who hear or read these lines! Additionally, His intention was to provoke Israel to jealousy, a thing none should argue was not known, for as far back as Moses, and as recently as in Isaiah, God had spoken of doing just this! To make this argument, Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:21 and Isaiah 65:1. While many Gentiles to whom God has made Himself known have come to Him in faith, He never stopped pleading with open arms to His chosen ones, Israel!

ROMANS 11

*A major issue in Bible study today (and in any time) is the relation of the church to Israel. Some say Israel is no more - that God is finished with them, and the promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church. Others (and I among them) contend that Israel has a future - that the promises God made to Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob, were unconditional (like our promises in the marriage contract) and will be fulfilled in God's time. Pastor James of the Jerusalem church closed the discussion of the first church council with these words from **Acts 15:14-16**: "**Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it.**" We have every reason to believe that Israel has the future God promised her in the Hebrew Scriptures. We come to our text with that view.*

GOD HAS A REMNANT IN FALLEN ISRAEL

THE FALL IS NOT FINAL

1) Paul asks a question whose grammar demands a negative answer. It is like saying, "Certainly God has not rejected His people!" 1 Samuel 12:22 and Psalm 94:14 are profound statements of God's devotion to His covenant with Israel. Paul's own answer to his polemic question is an authoritative "No, not ever!" God's promises are not to be repented of; He will restore His people, and Christ will be their King.

THERE ARE A FAITHFUL FEW

2) Elijah thought he was the last one left, but God let him know there was a larger remnant than just one. Once again, faith is the thing. Zechariah (12:10) spoke of a day when they would look upon the One Whom they had pierced. The passage there suggests repentance and faith and a restoration of the people who at the present time are away from God. He will once again bless Abraham's seed.

3), 4) The great prophet felt so alone, like he was the only believer in Yahweh in all of Israel. He even expressed as much in prayer, "I am the only one left who is true to you, and they are trying to kill me as they have all of your other followers." Yahweh's comforting response was that He had 7,000 faithful men left serving Him, who had not submitted to Baal-worship. This dialogue is found in 1 Kings 19, where Jezebel is found to have sent a threatening message to Elijah, a message that sent him into a tailspin of fear! Even in times of great opposition, God has His faithful remnant.

5), 6) He further asserts that, even though Israel has a national future, in the present age of the church there are a remnant from Israel included in the body of Christ through the grace of God. Being related to God is always by grace and never by works. If works were the standard in the covenant, then Israel's failure would abrogate the covenant. But since it is by grace, she can no more be cast away as God's chosen people than you or I can be cast out of the family of God once we are saved! Remember that with God grace and works are always mutually exclusive. If it is by grace, then it cannot be by works. Likewise, if it is by works, it cannot be by grace. I rejoice to know several of the remnant, and I pray that other Jewish friends of mine will come to trust Yeshua HaMashiac as Savior.

THIS IS FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

7), 8) The righteousness of God is the thing that "working seekers" miss, but "grace-believers" receive it. As with Egypt's Pharaoh, who when he chose not to believe and obey and had his heart hardened, so Israel over the years experienced a spiritual stupor, their eyes not being able to see and their ears not being able to hear. When men say "no" to God's offers of grace, He hardens their hearts to help them on their chosen path. It is a fearful thing to reject and then to be rejected by the only One Who can enable us to escape the wrath of God for sin!

9), 10) Having looked to Isaiah and others for confirmation of his argument, Paul now looks to another highly venerated hero of the Hebrew Scriptures - David. Psalm 69 contains a prophetic section which seems to set forth the loneliness of Jesus on the cross, rejected by the very nation of which He was to be Savior! God spread a table before them in the presence of Jesus, living and teaching God's truth. They responded to the "dinner invitation" by turning Him over to the Romans to crucify Him! As David prays for God to judge the king's enemies with blindness, and for them to be trapped in "loin-shaking" fear, I hear Jesus on the cross rather praying, "Father, forgive them." But their rejection of the incarnate Son of God led to their "blindness in part" (11:25) until Jesus returns and closes the "Times of the Gentiles."

GRAFTED IN - LEFT OUT - GRAFTED BACK IN

THE EFFECT OF THE JEWISH REJECTION

11), 12) Once again Paul uses a construction in Greek where a question demands a negative answer. The idea is that Israel's stumbling at the Law and at the cross was not a permanent fall. He answers with more than just a "no," using for the tenth time in Romans "may it never be!" Some versions translate it "God forbid!" He declares in a negative sense that Israel has a positive future. God is not finished with them yet. He confirms the promise of Israel's endurance found in Jeremiah 31:35, 36. This next idea is thrilling. God used Israel to bless the nations, and their greatest blessings to date have come while Israel was under God's judgment, including the *diaspora*. That being true, how much more can the nations expect blessing when Israel is restored to her full and God-intended glory?!

13), 14) In Acts 9:15 Ananias was informed by God about Paul's future ministry. It would be primarily to the Gentiles, but would also reach the Jews. While God placed the apostle in a ministry to Gentiles, he never lost his love for his kinsmen according to the flesh. In fact, when he entered a town with a synagogue, it was early on his list of places to share his faith in Christ. He states plainly here his hope that this Gentile-directed ministry would be used of God to make his Jewish brethren jealous to the point of their own coming to Jesus. Paul spent himself evangelizing and discipling Gentiles, but "to the Jew first" was ever the cry of his heart. May we also have a heart for the salvation of the Jews.

15) He returns to the theme of 11 and 12 - that Israel's restoration will be a greater spiritual windfall for the Gentiles than was their rejection, which brought no small favors our way. Once again we see that Paul anticipated a future glory for the nation of Israel. The plain sense of these words makes sense!

EXTENSION OF GRACE THROUGH ISRAEL'S RUIN

16) In Numbers 15:17-21 God commanded that the first loaf of dough was to be made as an offering to the Lord - it was holy. Paul says that by extension, that makes the rest of the batch of dough holy as well. A second illustration speaks of all a tree's branches being holy if the roots are holy - this opens the theme of Gentile "grafting in."

17), 18) A lovely symbol in Messianic art is called the "grafted in" symbol. It is a menorah whose triangular base joins the triangular tail of a fish to form the Star of David. Two of those elements are clearly Jewish, and the fish is the earliest Christian symbol. My take is this: Judaism was the foundation of the superstructure of a divine building that is the church. The church is the next phase in the unfolding drama of redemption. We Gentile Christians are to respectfully recall that we are redeemed by a Jewish Savior; we hold dear the Jewish Scriptures - our Bible! Ours is more of a continuation than a contrast. We grew out of Biblical Judaism, so we should honor it.

19), 20) The unbelief of Israel made way for the faith of the Gentile believers. Faith is the thing, faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. This is not to lead us to pride and consequent boasting, but rather to fear. God saved Paul to bear His name to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). On his first missionary journey, when in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, Paul said that because the Jews there rejected his message, he turned to the Gentiles. Similar words were spoken in the Corinthian synagogue (Acts 18:6). He told King Agrippa (Acts 26:20) that he preached in Jerusalem and then went to the Gentiles. Finally in Rome, the unbelief of the Jews and the Gentiles having faith were commented on by Paul (Acts 28:26-28). So fear, Gentile believers, lest a similar failure of unbelief be yours!

21) Surely if God had no reluctance to set aside His chosen people, the Jews, when they rejected His Son, He can have no difficulty in doing the same with Gentiles who fail to embrace Jesus with the strong arms of faith!

END RESULT OF ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

22), 23) In His role as the Divine Parent, God exercises severity (sternness) and kindness. God's severity was toward the Jews, who rejected His grace in Christ. His kindness then flowed toward us Gentiles, as the Gospel came our way. To disbelieve God is to fall and receive sternness; to trust Him is to stand and receive His benevolence! If we Gentiles fail to continue in God's kindness by faith, we will lose out. Any Jew who returns to God through faith in Christ will be grafted back into the tree - the family of God. God's necessary harshness to unbelief will be lifted, and His goodness will return to Israel when they as a nation trust Jesus at His second coming!

24) For 2,000 years, the Jews had received God's light through revelation, the priesthood and the prophets. For 4,000 years Gentiles had been estranged from God since Adam. If against nature the "wild branch" Gentile could be grafted in, how natural will it be for the Jew to be grafted back in! God is supernatural, overcoming natural and unnatural.

25), 26) We live in a time characterized by Jesus and Paul as "*the times of the Gentiles*." It's an era of Gentile ascendancy over the Jew. It began around 586 BC with the destruction of the Temple by King Nebuchadnezzar, and it will continue until Jesus comes again in glory and restores the kingdom to Israel. We Gentiles should not get cocky that we may have presently risen above Israel - their time will surely come. At Christ's glorious return there will be a miraculous turn-around in Israel's spiritual fortunes. "*All Israel will be saved*," he says. What a day, glorious day that will be! Count on it.

27) Under the old economy, the Law, the familiar word with regard to God dealing with sin was "atonement." The Hebrew word is used 102 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, not all of them dealing with sin, but the idea is "covering." Sins were covered by the blood of the animal sacrifices. The work of Christ does not result in sins being covered, but rather in their being removed, forgiven, remitted. Of a person whose cancer is gone, we say they are "in remission." What a glorious day it will be when Yahweh at last removes Israel's sins from them!

GOD'S PLAN SHOWS HIS GREATNESS AND LOVE

MERCY IN DISOBEDIENCE, TO JEW AND GENTILE ALIKE

28), 29) Israel was temporarily "set aside" in God's great plan, the fulfillment of God's covenant promises "held in abeyance" for a time. That time is the age of the Church, during which God is calling out of the Gentiles a people for Himself. By contrast to what God is doing for us, His present dealings with Israel makes them look like enemies. So they are considered enemies for our sake, but they are beloved for the sake of the patriarchs and the covenants God made with them. While they are temporarily set aside, God still has a plan for them, because His gifts and calling are irrevocable, "without repentance" - meaning God doesn't change His mind. His promises to Abraham will be made good. 30), 31), 32) The gospel was a "Jew-first" message; it had to land somewhere first, and Israel having given us the Messiah-Savior, it made sense that the message began in the city of His redeeming death and resurrection, Jerusalem - a Jewish city! When the national leaders and the people of Israel generally refused God's offer, the result was the messengers "turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46, 18:6, 28:28). The Jews got mercy early, but spurned it in favor of disobedience. We were in disobedience, but God blessed us with mercy when Abraham's progeny said, "No." There is coming a day when the full number of Gentile sheep are in the fold, and things will change again. The Church will be raptured, and the Jew will again become the focal point; after 7 years of misery under Antichrist, they will find their way to the true Christ!

MAJESTY SHINES FROM YAHWEH

33) Overcome with the magnitude of God's unfolding drama of redemption, the apostle Paul yields an exclamation of utter awe! A "bathometer" is an old, rarely-used, instrument for measuring the depth of bodies of water. The word rendered "depth" here is *"bathos."* Paul sees the wisdom and knowledge of God as riches with "ocean-like" depths. The mind of man cannot fathom or plummet those depths! We know something of the judgments and ways of God through the revealed Word - the Bible. There is, however, so much more to God than can be contained in a book, even one as special as the Bible! This doxology of praise flows from the heart of one that likely understood more of that than any other mortal who ever lived! And even he says that the ways of this God of ours are, as the old version said, "past finding out." The words here are beautiful: "wisdom" - knowing the best end and finding the best means to reach that end. "Knowledge" - is God's infinite omniscience; He knows all things, and He knows us intimately. His "judgments" are the decrees and dispositions that flow from His sovereignty. His "ways" are the paths He takes to make those decrees come to pass. Even the paths on which He leads us are marvelous! As Job (23:10) declared, *"He knows the way that take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."*

34), 35), 36) I really think that Paul must have had most or all of the Hebrew Scriptures committed to memory! He used them so often, as here he cites Isaiah 40:13: *"Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?"* And then appear to be thoughts from Job 41:11, *"Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine."* The immensity of God cannot be grasped by a *quid pro quo* humanity. We buy, sell, barter, give, take and the like. With God it all flows from Him to us; all we may give back is praise, but that praise is only us recognizing God's greatness. It does not add to it. What a radical change that requires in our normal thinking! Yet we may also recall that this Sovereign God has set His heart on us; He loves us. His great plan includes good for us in time and eternity! O, Hallelujah, What a Savior!

ROMANS 12

It is generally taught that this marvelous epistle, probably the crowning glory of Paul's writings, divides into three major sections. The first is chapters one through eight, the great doctrinal section on justification of sinners by faith in Christ. Chapters 9 - 11 are frequently said to be a record of God's dealings with Israel, past, present, and future. The section that begins with our text today is the more practical portion of the great letter to the church at Rome. Right doctrine should always lead to right living; belief certainly determines behavior, and Paul concludes the epistle with instructions as to how men whose lives have been redeemed by the blood of Christ should be different from those around them.

A CALL TO THE EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

DEDICATION OF OUR BODIES TO GOD

1) Stated in a slightly different way than in the introduction, in chapters 1-8 Paul has presented the mercies of God to all men. Then chapters 9-11 deal more specifically with His mercies to Israel. The following call is based on these mercies. The verb "appeal" means to "call one alongside another." Paul only asks us to come where he has already been. These bodies of ours are the vehicles we have for living. They are, for believers, temples in which God resides here on earth. Paul calls for us to present them to God; the language makes it clear that this presentation, or dedication of our bodies is a one-time act, not needing to be repeated. Our sacrifice is not one of death, like those of the Hebrew priests, but one of life. And because this sacrifice is holy, it pleases God. This is an act of worship. An Israelite produced his best animal for his offering; we are to give our best, as well, to give ourselves. A living sacrifice has no more right to crawl off the altar

than does a dead one.

2) *"Stop letting this world-system shape you in its mold!"* Paul here clearly implies that his readers were indeed already being shaped by the world, and that they needed to put a halt to that influence. This was to be accomplished by people being changed in their minds, which takes immersing oneself in God's Word. Real change always begins on the inside, and then it shows up on the outside. One with a renewed mind can discern God's will as "good and perfect." Also, when a man is walking with God, His will becomes "acceptable" to that man, even though the natural man rebels against that will. Such a "dedicated" believer is a trophy of God's grace in this world. The word for "conformed" occurs elsewhere only in 1 Peter 1:14, *"do not be conformed to the former lusts."* The Greek expression translated "transformed" gives us our word *"metamorphosis"* - complete change!

DIVERSITY OF GIFTS FROM THE SPIRIT OF GOD

3) Spiritual gifts are not for self-aggrandizement or self-promotion; they are to be exercised humbly, with thought for edification of the body of Christ. Paul speaks in grace, the fountain of all good things. In a culture of pride, Christian humility is part of a *"counter-culture."* The Apostle wishes that we might view things soberly, recognizing that even our faith is a gift from God. He would say in chapter 15 that *"even Christ pleased not Himself."* Faith opposes self-dependence, recognizing our absolute need for transforming grace from God.

4), 5) The body with its many diverse parts, having various functions, illustrates Christ's church. A human body is a marvelous thing - a unity made up of co-operating diversity. Each part is necessary, and the body is incomplete when any part is missing. How blessed is the local assembly with members who exercise the functions of their various gifts to do the work of the ministry. In the church, we are many, but in Christ we are one. Paul describes a two-fold relationship here. We are (1) members of Christ's body, and as such, we are (2) members of each other. Our individual relationships with Him give us a relationship to each other. Unity in Christ's body is **found in** and **enhanced by** our diversity. This principle is illustrated in a typical marriage, where we find that God often places together two very different personalities, and the strengths of the one typically supplement the weaknesses of the other. Apart, a man and a woman are each incomplete; together they complete each other.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE USE OF OUR GIFTS

6) God in grace gave us gifts in the body, here the local assembly, that are different one from another. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that He assigned them **according to His will**. None of them are natural talents, they are *"spiritual gifts"* bestowed by the Spirit! They are not based on merit in us, they are undeserved, gifts of grace. As a team, our differing gifts come together to accomplish a commonly-desired goal. Paul begins a short list (other lists in Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4) with the gift of prophecy. In Biblical times this gift included the foretelling of coming events as revealed by God. Today it is more about the aspect of proclaiming God's truth in calling men to repentance. It is always to be exercised by its recipient in agreement with the body of truth called the Bible.

7) Here are mentioned two more gifts - serving and teaching. The word for serving gives us our word "deacon." This is not a sensational, out-front-and-public kind of gift, but a Spirit-bestowed supernatural ability to work behind the scenes to bless people. Teaching is taking the principles of Scripture and explaining them in an understandable and practically useful way. Notice the implication that our gift should determine our focus in ministry in the body of Christ. To labor outside our area of giftedness leads to frustration and ineffectiveness. Exercise your spiritual gift!

8) The gift of exhortation includes encouragement in private and public ways. We need cheerleaders. God blesses some people with an extraordinary ability to give. Kingdom causes are helped by them. Administrative gifts do not exempt us from work - we must be diligent even in leading. Those who show mercy must be careful not to commiserate too deeply with those being shown mercy, but rather to lift people up in a spirit of cheerfulness.

PLAY NICELY WITH OTHERS

Romans 12 opens the more practical portion of the epistle. It begins with a call for presentation of our bodies as living sacrifices to God. Then come commands to stop conformity to the world system and to be transformed by renewing our minds. The second paragraph of the section is a dissertation regarding spiritual gifts. We are challenged to humility, no matter what our gift from the Spirit. Paul lists several gifts that believers receive from the Holy Spirit, and he adds instructions about the functioning of the gifts in the body of Christ. Our paragraph here, verses 9-21, is loaded with verbs (my favorite words!). Most of them (21) are participles, but almost having the force of imperatives. There are 9 imperatives - words that give a command. Eight other verbs are found here, lots of action called for by Paul.

RELATING TO OTHER BELIEVERS

9) Paul is condemning the hypocritical here. "Be genuine in your love," he says - though in the original he states it in a negative way, "Don't be hypocritical in love." Hatred for evil and clinging to good go hand-in-hand. You cannot have one without the other. Job was a man who "loved God and hated evil" (Job 1:1). Those who love Jesus must hate the sin that nailed Him to the cross. There is no place in the Christian life for sympathy with sin!

10) The family of God is designed to be a loving family. We are to love brothers in Christ as we would brothers in the flesh, perhaps even more where brothers in the flesh are not believers. When we love one another, it shows up in how we

value each other. The person who puts others above himself clearly loves those whom he so honors. This is how Jesus loved us. As a gospel song has it, "When He was on the cross, I was on His mind."

11) For Paul to state this, there must have been in Rome a pattern of indolence, laziness in service. Love produces in us a zeal, a fervor, a fire for serving Christ. Love for the Savior should cause us to serve Him vigorously! We are not casually standing in a "grace-welfare line!" We are boiling-hot slaves of the Christ Who died for us.

12) Biblical hope has no hint of doubt in it; it is that which we know will happen, but it just hasn't happened yet. Our hope in Christ is the inspiration for our joy, and yet difficulty still comes. Affliction is to be met with staying power, with endurance - the ability to hang in there and to let trouble accomplish its work in us. You may ask, "How can I endure such?" The answer is, "Prayer will strengthen us and thus enable us to stick to the task."

13) This is what I like to call a Rescue Mission verse. The needs of any of God's family should be the concern of all. A believer's home should be an inn for traveling saints - ours has been. Love begets charity and hospitality. Hospitality here is "stranger-love." Hebrews speaks of entertaining strangers who may be "angels unawares."

REVERSING NATURAL VALUES

14) Again Christianity is seen as a "counter-cultural." The world says, "Give as good as you get," and, "No one treads on me unpunished" (old Scottish motto)." We are not to speak ill of someone who is persecuting us, but we are rather to speak well **of him** and **to him**. Love leads us to forgive injuries inflicted upon us. When we are buffeted, we should return a benediction. This is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

15) We should congratulate a brother's joy and bewail his woe. Our Lord Jesus set the example in these matters for us. He celebrated in the wedding at Cana and then He wept at Bethany with Mary and Martha over the death of their brother, Lazarus. Love is sympathetic in all seasons. A believer knows when to laugh and when to cry.

16) Here are two prohibitions and two positive instructions for us. Paul encourages us to work at getting along with others, especially those of different social standing. Pride and conceit are forbidden the believer. Diotrophes (3 John 9) and Absalom (2 Samuel 15:4) missed this in promoting themselves. Pride will make a person very small.

REACTING TO THOSE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY

17) Outside the church there are people who will treat you wrongly. If we love them as Christ desires for us to do, we will seek to repay their evil with good. Do not awaken the contempt of men by the way you live or treat others. The world often looks for us to make a mistake so they can justify their own behavior. Let us give them cause only to think well of Christ because of what they see in us. Peter had a similar exhortation in 1 Peter 3:9.

18) Be a peacemaker at all costs. Exhaust every available means to conciliate. Peace may not be possible, but don't let hostility be your fault. My mother's favorite benediction was: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*" So many people stir things up! Let us seek to help men be at peace with men.

19) It is true that when we allow God to take care of us, He does so much better than we ever could. It is equally true that when we allow Him to settle accounts with those who wrong us, He does it better than we ever could. When I try to right wrongs done to me, I'm doing work which God has reserved for Himself, and I am violating the clear teachings of both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament (Deuteronomy 32:35, Hebrews 10:30).

20) While the U.S. was dropping bombs on Afghanistan in the war on terrorism, we also dropped multiplied millions of dollars' worth of food to help the poor of that land. Paul gives us more of a personal than a national instruction here. The best way to subdue an adversary is with kindness in action. This is a counter-cultural principle, and the world will not understand it, but they may be drawn to Christ by it. "*Love your enemies, pray for them...*"

21) When I step in and take vengeance myself, then I am conquered by evil. It has drawn me down to its level. When I return kindness for an insult, allowing God to "settle my scores," I win. We all have opportunities to "bite back" or to "say a harsh word." Don't yield to such provocations; rather let God help you to live on a higher plane.

ROMANS 13

THE SECRETS OF SOCIETAL SUCCESS

3 present-day institutions are ordained of God. They are the family, human government, and the church. Scripture gives instructions for relations to each of these for the believer. Becoming a Christian does not remove our responsibility to the government, for Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, unto God..." Relationship to Christ should make us better citizens of the state. Paul here spends time on the "how" and the "why."

LIVING IN THE LAND

1) The rationale for our obedience to civil authority answers one question ("must we obey them?") and raises another ("why would God put evil men in authority over us?"). Without telling us why, God reminds us that in His sovereignty over human government, He often puts the vile in charge (Daniel 4:17). But He tells us to obey, and we must!

2) Rebellion against man's Law is rebellion against God, Who instituted govt. He did this to establish order in the society of men. Disturbing that order may bring judgment from man, as well as from God! Riot in Christ's name can greatly harm His testimony among the lost. Good citizenship leads to good witness for Christ.

3) Paul gives reasons to obey civil authorities. First stated was that they are ordained of God. Next is that obedience leads to a peaceable life. Right living prevents fear of authority - example: following the highway Laws prevents the need for constant looking in the rear view mirror to see if a patrolman is watching. The lawbreaker fears the law!

4) Reason 3 is that civil obedience prevents civil punishment. Lawmakers and law enforcers are in a sense servants of God (like Cyrus of Persia in Isaiah 44). The sword here refers to the instrument of capital punishment, the backbone of societal law and order. The responsibility of the society of men in human government to execute the capital felon was ordained of God in Genesis 9:6. This was never revoked, but it rather continues always.

5) A fourth reason for civil obedience is an internal one - the reason of conscience. Conscience is that God-given make-up that tells us when we have done something wrong. It operates from experience, desiring not to repeat the act that brings guilt. Conscience can be defiled, wounded, seared, but it should be cultivated and followed in purity.

6), 7) In addition to obedience, we owe support to government in the matter of taxes. God's servants who govern full-time must live of the people they serve and govern. Governing is their job, and they should be paid for it, as ministry is the vocation of Christian servants, and they should have the support of those to whom they minister. The believing citizen is under divine obligation to support the government with taxes. Here "taxes" refers to taxes on property. "Revenue" speaks of taxes on goods bought or sold. "Respect" is reverence for the individual, and "honor" is respect for the office. It is hard to pray for a leader and not then show some respect for him or his office.

LIVING IN LOVE

8) It is the wicked man who leave debts unpaid ("*The wicked borrows and does not pay back;*" - Psalm 37:21). The idea is not that believers can't borrow money, but that we should keep our debts current. To ignore just debts, or default on obligations gives the Lord a black eye before the world. One cannot, however, be paid up in the debt of love to mankind. It is a never-ending obligation, even outside the body of Christ, to love those around us. It is, he says, the "*fulfilling of the Law*" when we love as we ought. "*Love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

9) While obedience to the Law cannot qualify a person for heaven, it does make for good for societal relations - and Paul says that here. He mentions four of the Laws of the second table of the Mosaic code, the part that deals with the relations of a person to other people. He says that the one who loves his neighbor fulfills these Laws. Leviticus 19:18 from Moses, and Matthew 22:39 from Jesus agree with what Paul asserts here. Love fulfills the Law! Man who loves God will not violate the first table, and man who loves people will keep the second.

10) "Love" is the decision, followed by actions, to pursue the welfare of another, no matter what it costs, and whether I get anything in return or not. By that definition, "love" seeks to do good for other people; the Apostle says, "*love does no harm.*" If I love my neighbor (not to mention loving my Lord and my own wife!), I would never think of committing adultery with my neighbor's wife. Neither would I steal from him or covet his possessions. If I am pursuing his welfare, I certainly would not think of taking his life! A focus on love is a fulfilling of the Law.

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

11) Salvation has three tenses: past - "I have been saved" from the penalty of sin; present - "I am being saved" from the power of sin; and future - "I shall be saved" from the very presence of sin! These are, respectively, our salvation, our sanctification, and our glorification. In verse 11 he speaks of the final stage, being glorified and made fit to dwell in heaven in the presence of Christ. We should live here and now as those who will live there and then. This is a high standard, and it can only be accomplished by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

12) Night here is symbolic of the time of Christ's physical absence from the earth and the time of sin's dominion. Day speaks of the coming time when Jesus Christ will return and banish sin. If verse 11 was a call to "wake up," then verse 12 is a challenge to "clean up!" John would later write that the one who has the hope of Christ's return in him purifies himself even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3). Get ready! He's coming! A great part of that preparation is leading as holy a life as we can with the aid of the Holy Spirit. This again is our sanctification.

13) We have a 10:00 P.M. curfew at the Rescue Mission every night of the year. I often tell men that there is nothing outside that they need or that is good for them after that time of night. Satan's work is often done by Satan's imps under the cover of darkness - "*Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil*" (John 3:19). And "*This is your hour; and the power of darkness*" (Luke 23:34). The sinful activities he lists here are fit only for darkness. Let us not accept this as normal behavior, even if our society does so. It is still sin!

14) Here we find two imperative verbs. "*Once and for all put on the Lord Jesus Christ!*" And "*Stop making provision for the flesh!*" Each believer has an old nature in Adam, the flesh, and a new nature in Christ, the spirit. Paul here challenges us to make use of and walk in the power of the new. He tells us to stop giving aid to the old. Here is a great secret in spiritual success. What will feed the one nature will starve the other nature. Feed the new man; starve the old. Then Satan cannot gain an advantage over you. We win! It's time to live out our faith!

ROMANS 14

JESUS, OTHERS, THEN OURSELVES

COMMAND: ACCEPT THE WEAK

1) The believers in Rome are commanded to keep on taking to themselves the man who is weak in faith. Such a one is not to be excluded from the fellowship, but rather to be lived with in peace. This weakness in faith is not about the great doctrines of the gospel, but rather about matters of conduct, to be expanded on in 2, 3. When he comes into the fellowship, he is not to be disputed with about the things wherein he differs from most.

CASES IN POINT - DIET AND DAYS

2), 3) The first disputable area mentioned is diet. One believer feels free to eat anything he wishes. The man with the weaker faith abstains from meats, eating only vegetables. Their living together in the body requires two things. One, the *omnivore* must not hold the vegetarian in contempt. Two, the vegetarian must not condemn the man who eats whatever he wishes. The fact is that God has accepted them both in the merit of Jesus, not based on what they eat or abstain from. I think today's disputes would be what we call the "worship wars." The contemporary worshiper should not criticize the traditionalist, nor *vice-versa*. Our traditional worship was once contemporary, and no doubt today's contemporary worshipers will be tomorrow's traditionalists.

4) Since I am no man's master, it is best for me to serve my own master, and let others do the same. For me to be judging others all the time is to set myself above them. I recall Paul's words, "Let each esteem others better than themselves." Christ is the Master, and He can take care of putting others in their place (or me, in mine)

5) A second disputed issue surfaces here - that of the observance of days. This may apply to the Saturday/Sunday worship dispute, or it may deal with observing certain holidays. Paul indicates that these are matters of conviction, and that a man must follow his own understanding of Scripture, not that imposed upon him by other people. Conviction!

CHRIST IS THE LORD

6) In these and other disputed matters, we all stand (or fall) before the Lord. This is not to say that we waver and stand for nothing. Rather it means that we do not try to impose our convictions on others. Baptists call this principle "soul liberty." I firmly believe what I believe, respecting your right to differ with me. Dr. McGee was fond of saying that others had as much right to be wrong as he did to be right. I fully agree with him (on that).

7), 8) Some refer to "religion" as a private thing. It most certainly is not! It has a public aspect in that I am compelled by my Lord to share my faith with others. It cannot be private also because it is unto the Lord that I live and die, eat or abstain, observe or not observe certain days. I do or do not these things not unto myself, but unto the Lord! I receive my marching orders from the Lord Jesus, and I shall one day stand before Him at the *Bema* judgment and give account for my faithfulness or lack thereof. Again, Dr. McGee, "*Our Christian conduct is not gauged by the foods spread out on the table, but by the fact that our lives are spread out before Him.*"

9) When we try to force others to our position, we strike at the Lordship of Christ. He went to the cross and came forth from the grave with the result that He is now Lord both of the dead and of the living. We must accept as brethren the believers who exercise Christian liberty, as well as the one who has the more tender conscience.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT

10), 11), 12) Paul asks rhetorical questions here, addressing a would-be judge. He inquires as to why we would look down on our brother, or condemn him for his differences from us. And yet the church through its existence has spent no small amount of time, energy, and resources on taking pot shots at itself! What other army turns its guns inward and fires? Paul states here a principle that comes up in other places - that every believer is responsible to God and will give account to Him one day. The clear implication is that we should stop calling each other into account about matters of personal conviction. (Don't confuse this with the body calling into account its sinning member - a thing which Christ and Paul command to the church.) I need also to remember that just as others will give account to God, so will I. None of us shall escape the perfect scrutiny of the Lord Jesus Christ. I must judge myself carefully, for Christ will judge me fully.

LIMITS ON LIBERTY

THE PROBLEM OF CAUSING OTHERS TO STUMBLE

13) The believer should, therefore, not occupy himself judging others, but judging his own behavior so as not to cause another to sin. Self-examination may not come easy, but it is necessary (1 Corinthians 11:31). To sin myself is sad; to cause someone else to stumble is tragic. I should **look out for** my brother rather than **look down on** him. Consideration for our brothers should guide our behavior.

14) The cause of the judgment discussion was someone criticizing another's eating (or abstaining from) certain foods. Paul's conclusion: it is not the food that matters, but the conscience of the person doing the eating. Let each, therefore, follow the dictates of his conscience. The former legal taboos about food no longer pertain, for we are not under Law, but are under grace (Romans 6:14).

15) Love is not the guide of the brother who acts with disregard for another and brings distress to that brother. Dare not to do that before my brother which if he did would offend his conscience; to be gracious to me, he might partake of it and so become "a wreck in his soul!" 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us that love, the governing principle of the Christian life, is not selfish, but thinks first of others.

16) You may have no problem with a certain course of action, so it is good to you, acceptable for you. But it becomes evil if it offends a brother. My liberty can be a thorn to others. So I yield to the needs of my brother, be he stricter or more liberated. I do have Christian liberty, but even that liberty has restrictions of love on it. It is a freedom from legal obligations, not a license to do whatever I want.

THE PURSUIT OF PEACE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, NOT PERSONAL RIGHTS

17) God's kingdom doesn't revolve around temporal, material, issues. It is not being a carnivore or a vegetarian that is the concern of God's kingdom. It rather is concerned with spiritual, eternal values. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. Pursuing righteousness, peace, and joy will lead to right choices. A proper goal will help keep us on the proper path. This requires the Holy Spirit's aid.

18) "In this way" refers to service based on being justified, which results in peace and joy. Such service for Christ makes us pleasing to God and gives us the approval of men (not causing them to stumble or making them sin). How much better to be approved by men for right living than to be evil spoken of for careless behavior. It matters most what God thinks of us, but it also matters what men think.

19) Since we are not living just to ourselves (1, 2), and since tender consciences can be offended to the hurt of souls, and since efforts toward harmony please God and men, THEREFORE strive for peace and building up (not tearing down). This peace is a harmony between believers in Christ's body. In vs. 13, we are not to look down on a brother; here we are not to tear him down, but build him up.

THE POSSIBILITY OF HINDERING GOD'S WORK BY FLAUNTING LIBERTY

20) Here is a negative command, a prohibition, and a word of further explanation. Apparently some in Rome were harming the work of God in their Christian liberty in pursuit of food. The present imperative means they should "stop doing it!" Anticipating the question, "Aren't all things clean for eating?" Paul says that they are indeed clean, but sin comes in when by eating we cause offense.

21) In issues of good and bad, Paul clearly states something here that is good. In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 10:23, that while all things (to eat or drink) may be Lawful, they do not all build up our brother in Christ. Any such things (that may make him stumble), be they food or drink, should be set aside while in his presence. Common courtesy helps guide Christian liberty, keeping it from running amuck.

22) While our faith is not private (it must be shared), it is personal; that is, we may not all agree on all things. But what **YOU** believe that may be different from your brother may also make him stumble. That then should be private in the sense that you don't flaunt your liberty and harm his conscience. The strong believer will be happier if he restrains his liberty to benefit his weaker brother.

23) We should never silence the voice of our conscience. A weaker believer is one who has doubts about whether a certain thing is acceptable or not. If his conscience says, "Don't," we should never try to get him to do it. If he has doubts about the propriety of a thing, then for him it is wrong to do it. As he grows in Christ, so will his Christian liberty. "When in doubt, don't." "If it's doubtful, it's dirty." It is a good thing to live in consideration of the spiritual needs of others. It is the principle of love.

ROMANS 15

PRACTICING THE LAW OF LOVE

1), 2) The Apostle addresses those who are strong in their conscience and in their convictions, those who are more mature in understanding Christian liberty. He says they have an ongoing responsibility to their still growing, but less mature Christian brothers. Galatians 6:2 called this a "*fulfilling the Law of Christ*." Of course that Law is one of love. In this family, love dictates that a person who is strong in their faith must not be self-centered and do something that would undermine the weaker faith of their Christian brother. That would defeat the purpose of helping that person be edified, to grow in Christ. We are not to add to their burden, but help them bear it. This word is used of Jesus bearing His cross and the disciples bearing ours. We must not be self-pleasers, but others-pleasers for their growth in Christ.

3) As in all things, Jesus is our prime Example. In His relationship with the Father, He was willing to bear the insults and grief men intended for God that fell on Christ. Now the application - in our relationship with our brethren in Christ, we should be willing to forego some pleasures of eating and drinking in order to bless them. Christ did the greater thing; we can surely do the lesser thing.

4) Having just quoted from Psalm 69, Paul reminds his readers (and us) of the value of the Hebrew Scriptures for New Testament believers. They were not just written for the contemporaries of the writers; they were also written for us! Reading about the saints of old gives us the ability to bear up as it calls us alongside them. The end result for us is that we have our hope in Christ strengthened.

5) This seems to be a prayer to the God Who through the Hebrew Scriptures gave us endurance and encouragement. The request is that God will also equip us for spiritual unity among ourselves as believers, enabled by following Christ. If we are each following Christ according to the same Bible, we will have spiritual unity. We may not agree on everything, so

organizational unity may not be possible

6) The designed intent of spiritual unity among believers is glory for God. His majesty is best made known when we agree in mind and speak in concert. Six times Luke uses this expression in the Acts to describe the unity of the believers in the early church. Such unity today would testify well for Jesus.

7) There are at least 2 New Testament words meaning to "receive." One is a passive, sometimes reluctant taking. The other is aggressive, desirous, and eager. Here Paul uses the second word twice. Jesus eagerly snatched us in salvation; He calls upon us to be as anxious about receiving our Christian brothers.

8) Christ's life-ministry was primarily to Jews. He fulfilled the Hebrew Scripture promises of a Jewish Messiah born of David's line. He even told his disciples when He sent them out to "Go not to the Gentiles." He rarely left Israel, ministered **in and to** Israel, died **in and for** Israel, but His death went **beyond** the national boundaries in dying for all of Adam's race.

9) Hebrew Scripture prophecies also spoke of the inclusion of Gentiles by the Messiah. By the Spirit of prophecy, David and Isaiah saw the middle wall of partition fall down. Verses 9-12 recite such Hebrew Scripture passages. The first is from Psalm 18:49. David wrote things that went beyond his temporal circumstance. This was Messianic.

10) Deuteronomy 32 is the farewell address of Moses to the people of Israel. The great lawgiver, by the Spirit of prophecy, had seen the nations rejoice with Israel in the day when God blessed the earth through the Messiah. He saw the inclusion of us Gentiles in the kingdom work of God, even when he saw the Law that shaped Israel.

11) Paul continues to pile up Hebrew Scripture mentions of international (trans-racial) unity to make his point! His next quotation comes from the Bible's shortest chapter, Psalm 117, where the Psalmist brings together Abraham's seed and the nations in praise of the goodness of Yahweh.

12) Finally Isaiah is called upon to state clearly that Messiah and trust in Him is the basis of unity - again, it is spiritual unity! This is a future hope for the kingdom of God in its earthly expression, often referred to as the Millennium. This is the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth (see Revelation 20).

13) Returning to prayer, this one a benediction, Paul asks God for things for the Roman believers (and us). He beseeches the God Who gives us hope to provide them fullness of joy (gladness that God is good to us) and peace (harmony in relationships). As men trust God, the Holy Spirit, by His power, gives an abundance of hope (confidence in the promises of God).

PURPOSE IN WRITING THE LETTER

14) Paul has several positive things to say about the Roman Christians. He calls them "brothers" - born of the same womb as he. He "stands persuaded" of their bountiful goodness (like the disciples' ship was "full" of fish in John 21), and their level of knowledge helps them instruct and warn one another.

15), 16) He looks back over his letter, now nearing the end, and mentions the purpose of some of the points he made. It was to be reminding them of things they already knew, things that need to be in the forefront of the believer's mind. Then Paul spends some time discussing his ministry. He calls it a "grace from God" that he was a "minister." This particular word for ministry is about public service - it gives us our word "liturgy." As a priest, he spoke to God on behalf of men, Gentiles, these Romans included. He wanted them to be an offering, sanctified and acceptable to God. Only the Gospel can do this for any of us.

PRINCIPLE OF PLOWING NEW GROUND

17) Paul declared that he "has boasting" (the word is also translated "rejoicing" and "glorying") only in Christ. It is the things that pertain to God that are not the central, but the only focus of Paul's life.

18), 19) Lest someone misunderstand the apostle's tone, he re-emphasizes that the work that has been done has indeed been done solely by Christ. Paul is only a channel through whom Jesus works among the Gentiles. What did Jesus do there? He brought some of them to obedience, and obedience in word and in deed! "Obedience" is a compound word that means to hear and submit ("get under"). Paul's ministry had been credentialized by miracles (taking power), signs (works of signification), and wonders (things that struck men with awe), beginning in Jerusalem to his farthest ministry travels.

20), 21) Unlike some who are just proselytizers, Paul had a pioneer ministry. He had a fond desire to carry the gospel to the "regions beyond." 2 Corinthians 10:15-17 should be compared here. He cites Isaiah 52:15 here to bolster his point.

22) Rome was the capital of the Gentile world - to take the gospel there would be a dream come true for the Apostle to the Gentiles. Men saved in Rome could be, as we would say, "movers and shakers." They might be world-shapers. But again and again, Paul had been "cut in on" in his plans to go there.

PLAN TO COME TO VISIT THEM

23), 24) Several things now seemed to be shaping Paul's future plans that might bring him to Rome. He mentions first that there was no more pioneer territory in Asia Minor or Greece. Churches were in place that could reach all he had not reached personally; and it was his desire to go to new, unreached fields. Next was his long-standing, burning desire (in a negative sense elsewhere, this word is "lust") to see them. So, as he traveled to Spain (western end of the empire and a haven for many Jews), he would get to "look upon" them, visit for a while, and have their help in moving on to his destination.

25) I think I hear a note of joy in Paul's word's here - going to Jerusalem is such a thrill for my own heart - it must have

been for his, as well. He was delivering an offering (vs 26) from the churches in Macedonia to the financially struggling saints in Jerusalem. Paul was a true servant of the church.

26), 27) Here is a blessed principle; it should please us to give to minister to those who have given so much to us. The largely Gentile Roman church owed a great debt to the Jew, even as we do. They did, after all, give us our Bible and our Savior! Are there greater benefactions than these to be had in life? Certainly not, and we must therefore find ways to show our gratitude.

28) The word “sealed” is the one used of Christ’s tomb, the Holy Spirit “sealing” us, and the “sealing” of God’s servants in the Revelation. It speaks of making a state permanent, not intending that it be changed. Paul wanted the fruit of the churches to be “fruit that shall remain” (see also John 15:16).

29) However disappointed the Romans might be that Paul is first going to Jerusalem, he assures them that he will come. And when he comes, it will be with Christ’s full blessing (we get our word “eulogy” here)

30) These brothers he calls alongside himself. The solemnity of his urging is emphasized by calling on them through Christ Jesus the Lord and the love (agape) of the Spirit. He asks them to “agonize with me in prayer for me.” One is reminded of Jacob wrestling with God at Peniel. Paul so wrestles.

31) His (and their) prayer had basically three objectives, two of which are here. (1) He wished to be delivered from the disobedient Jews in Judea, knowing they would be out to get him. (2) He wanted the offering he brought from Macedonia to be sufficient to meet many needs among the poor saints.

32) If he were delivered from the Jews, and if his mission to the Jerusalem saints was accomplished, then he could (as he thought) be in God’s will to joyfully arrive at Rome, where he might be refreshed by the brethren. As it happened, it was falling prey to the Jews that ultimately brought him to Rome.

33) No fewer than 7 other times in the New Testament is God referred to as “the God (or Lord) of peace.” To know Him is to know peace, that harmony of the soul with God Himself (“peace with God,” Romans 5:1), as well as with the circumstances of life (“the peace of God,” Philippians 4:7). To know for a fact that God brings peace and to experience the sense of His peace are treasures beyond compare.

ROMANS 16

COMMENDING PHEBE TO THE ROMANS

1) Phebe has been cited frequently as a Biblical basis for female deacons. The use here of “*diakonon*” to describe her as a servant is the reason for the claim. Two quick responses: (1) most uses of forms of this word in the NT are not of the office of deacon (98 of 101 are not); (2) Paul would not contradict himself by calling a lady a “deacon” while saying in 1 Timothy 3:12 that a deacon must be a “*one-woman-man*.”

2) When Phebe arrived at Rome (was she carrying this letter?), she was to be welcomed. She was also to be helped in any way needed, because she herself had helped others, including the Apostle.

CONVEYING GREETINGS TO BELIEVERS IN ROME

3) Several years after the Corinthian and Ephesian encounters with Aquila and Priscilla, Paul remembers them fondly in writing to the church at Rome. They had come from Rome to Corinth; they had now returned to Rome. There they found a place in the local assembly and got involved in serving the Lord.

4) Here is a mystery. Paul says the godly pair “laid down their necks” for him - they risked their lives. He tells us no more - it was all we needed to know. God used them to spare Paul, a thing for which he and all the churches over which he would have influence could be grateful. Aquila and Priscilla were perhaps not very well known, but this great husband and wife team were very important to God’s work.

5) There is a blessed consistency in the lives of Aquila and Priscilla. In Corinth they hosted a church in their home. A similar circumstance followed on their return to Rome. As Jewish Christians in a city where neither Jews nor Christians fared well at times, they were bold enough to have an assembly meet in their home! Not until the third century were special buildings set aside for church meetings.

6), 7) Scripture space is at a premium, and God never wastes words. When we encounter passages like this one, full of personal remarks, we recognize that people and their interpersonal relationships are important to God. Three fellow-Christians at Rome are mentioned, with greetings sent to each. Mary, probably a Jewish lady, is commended for the “labor” she put forth for the saints at Rome. Here Paul uses a word that means to “become fatigued by work.” God bless Mary. The other two mentioned were at some time and place imprisoned with Paul. He speaks highly of them for all the church to hear.

8) Ampliatus is called Paul’s “Beloved in the Lord.” The word (*agapetos*) is in the family with *agape*, the highest word in the Greek language to represent the virtue of “love.” It is a love that is a decision, followed by actions, to pursue the welfare of another, regardless of the cost, and without regard for getting anything in return. It is the love of God that sent Jesus to the cross. It is the love of Jesus for the church that led Him to “*give Himself up for her*.”

9) Urbanus has “worked with” Paul in serving Christ, and of Stachys Paul uses the same word as he does for Ampliatus -

“beloved.”

10) That Apelles was “*approved in Christ*” meant that he had been tested and come up well! Aristobulus seemed to have been blessed with a family of faith.

11) Herodion must have been related to Paul in the flesh, as well as in the Lord. Like Aristobulus, Narcissus had a family connection to other believers in Rome.

12) Of Tryphaena and Tryphosa, as well as of Persis, Paul relates that their work for the Lord was such that brought them fatigue, exhaustion. Persis is added to the list of those “beloved” by Paul.

13) By some means of faithfulness, Rufus had made known his election of God. The Apostle had found a maternal figure in the Mother of Rufus, and she deserved greetings as well.

14), 15) A list of “saints” is reeled off in these verses without any attribution of character or effort, other than that they hung out with the “other saints.” Nine are named, others made reference to without being named. Julia and Nereus are listed as siblings.

16) The love between saints in a local assembly is and must remain “holy.” Far too often affection between the saints has gotten out of hand and been made a tool of Satan to defame the Lord and His church. In such cases, discipline should be enforced, but, sadly, rarely is.

CAUTIONS AGAINST UNRULY BELIEVERS

17) Some maintain that truth is relative rather than absolute, that tolerance of other views is a high good. While respect of others is desired, those who teach things contrary to the truth of God’s Word must not be entertained. We must “keep on avoiding them.” Departure, not dialog, is Paul’s urging.

18) Such false teachers have a different Lord than do we. They are slaves to their appetites, not to Christ. Their method is to use smooth speech and false flattery to woo people. Then they deceive them with their damnable heresies. Those who follow such are simple in mind and easily led.

19) The Romans did not have a reputation for such *naivete*, but rather their obedience was their reputation. This caused much joy for Paul. The word translated “obedience” means they heard and submitted. Paul wanted them to be “Saint-Smart” and “Street-Simple.” Not wise in worldliness (12:1, 2).

20) Ours is a God of peace - He harmonizes things. There is no discord with God. The word for “crush” or “bruise” relates to things easily broken. God will easily handle the Adversary. He follows the removal of Satan with the addition of grace.

God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. Grace is God’s unmerited favor to men. It is the source of all blessings, among the best words in our language.

CLOSING GREETINGS

21) In personal farewells, Paul leads with Timothy, here said to “work with” Paul. They were certainly co-laborers. Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater are added to the roster (see verse 7 above for 2 more) of people related to Paul by flesh and by spirit.

22) The scribe, secretary, amanuensis, Tertius, adds his name and greeting here.

23) As Paul possibly writes the epistle from Corinth, he mentions in gratitude the host of the church (and his personal host as well), Gaius (see 1 Corinthians 1:14). Erastus is mentioned as treasurer of the city - so one can be a believer and hold public office (see the same name in Acts 19:22 and 2 Timothy 4:20). Thank God for such. “Brother” Quartus also sends greetings to the church at Rome.

24) This verse is not found in some manuscripts. Its contents, however, square with similar phrases in other places, so there is no danger in accepting them if one chooses to do so. See verse 20 above for one such example.

CONCLUDING DOXOLOGY

25), 26), 27) This benediction (“good word” from the Latin) is a single statement. It ascribes praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is through the power of God that we are not flighty, tossed about, but rather established, grounded. God uses for our strengthening the gospel that Paul held dear and held forth. That gospel, the good news of life in Christ for Jew and Gentile alike, had not been revealed until lately; thus he calls it a “mystery.” We are now able to understand the Hebrew Scriptures better, because they are revealed in their fullness in the New Testament. The revelation and redemption that began in and with Israel has now been extended without boundary to all nations of the world. There is a solitude about God - He is unique, supreme, sovereign. Among those called deity, Yahweh alone is wise. He is the recipient of praise and glory forevermore through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.