

A Journey Through

The Book of Romans

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Second Edition

Unless otherwise noted all scripture quotes are from the New King James Version

Lesson #1 - Introduction to the Book of Romans

Welcome to the Book of Romans:

Through this study I pray we will be blessed beyond measure by Paul's deep-dive into the core of salvation. His letter is often called "*The Roman Road*" because it guides us along the path from sinner to saint in a way that is both simple and complex at the same time.

My intent is to start our study with an overview of the city of Rome and the Roman Empire in general. We'll briefly discuss its origins, history, geography, philosophy, religion, people, and its role in the Biblical narrative. This will ground us in the cultural context in which Paul was writing and give us a better understanding of the people he was writing to. Then we will study its writer, the apostle Paul - Saul of Tarsus. A zealous Jew bent on violently destroying the new Christian faith. But Saul's life abruptly changed when he came face to face with Jesus on the road to Damascus. More commonly known as Paul - the Greek form of his Jewish name - he became a messenger of the gospel and a warrior for Christ like no other then or since. In our study we'll discuss his life as a devout but angry Jew and then his transformation to a life of ministry after accepting Christ. Through His ministry Paul seeks to bring clarity of the gospel to the Gentile world. A world that in his day was largely a mix of Jews and pagan cultures. The latter with incredibly immoral religious practices and beliefs.

Although Paul's primary mission was to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, (Acts 9:15) it appears his audience in Rome was a mix of Gentiles and Jews. As a result, much of Romans is focused on explaining salvation through the eyes of a Jew as Paul seeks to reveal the Messianic identity of Christ through Old Testament Law, the sin of Adam, the faith of Abraham and David, the separation of Jacob and Esau, and the history of Israel. All leading up to a clear view of Christ as the Messianic anointing sacrifice. These are topics all Jews would have been familiar with and his teaching would have helped them make the leap of faith that Jesus is the Messiah they had been waiting for. Paul went to this depth because he was raising issues of faith that flew in the face of both Jewish traditions and pagan mythology. But through his in-depth commentary on Old Testament scripture Paul was able to make the connection between the carpenter Jesus and the Messianic prophecies of the coming King. In explaining this connection Paul will dive deeply into Old Testament scripture, (the only scripture they had at the time) in order to bring out its Messianic theme. That's because Paul was given the difficult task of making a compelling argument to people solidly rooted in their Jewish faith and rituals that Jesus is in-fact the promised Messiah. Unfortunately that is a truth

that still fails to be accepted by most of the Jewish community today; two thousand years after it was taught by the Jewish Paul. But as we know, a day is coming when the remnant of Israel, **"...will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."** (Zechariah 12:10b). What a joyous day that will be, but how sad that it will take them so long to get there.

After our introduction on Roman culture and the apostle Paul we will work our way through the Book of Romans chapter by chapter, and in many cases verse by verse. You could literally spend years studying Romans and just scratch the surface because it is unique among the epistles in its depth and complexity. The range of topics Paul covers and the Old Testament context he uses to explain them, are there to clarify God's saving grace. Yet at the same time, its complexity requires a great deal of study to unpack its many truths. Even the apostle Peter recognized the difficulty of understanding Paul's writings when he said, **"...and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.."** (2 Peter 3:15-16)

Potential Area of Concern:

And therein lies an area of concern. Specific passages in the Book of Romans are difficult to understand and are therefore easily distorted. Paul's writings on salvation have become one of the most hotly debated topics in the church today. Namely, the contention between two views of salvation - *"Reformed"* versus *"Traditional"* theology. Both views believe we are saved by grace and not by works, but the disagreement comes from how each thinks God's grace is applied during the salvation process. Dozens of books, commentaries and video studies are available debating both sides of the issue. Unfortunately, that's because the issue is so polarizing it is becoming a source of disunity even within the conservative evangelical church. Both sides feel strongly that their opinion is Biblical, so proponents on both sides are eager for debate. That's the unfortunate part. I believe both sides agree on the fact we are truly saved by grace, they just can't agree on the approach God uses to apply His grace. So for the purpose of our study I would like to avoid this scriptural entanglement. Not because it's not important and worthy of study, but because it is one of the most polarizing theological topics in the church today and if we're not careful it will distract us from the rest of Romans. For that reason I would prefer we approach Romans with an open mind to both views so we don't divide over our individual positions. Particularly as we get to chapters 8 and 9 and study terms like "election" and "predestination." I want to avoid, at all costs, allowing our study of Romans to be a platform for debate. For if we all believe we are saved by God's grace and the atoning sacrifice of Christ, then let's praise Him

for our salvation and not get in conflict over the method by how His grace is applied.

What I would like to do here is the same thing I do whenever we approach a debated topic. I will do my best to accurately explain both positions and then tell you where my heart lands. That way we can study Romans together and not worry about conflict over scripture.

To foster that agreement here's a very brief explanation of each position:

- Reformed Theology:

Commonly known as "*Calvinism*" after one of its early proponents, French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564). Reformists believe man is saved by first being regenerated by God so that he can accept the gift of grace. Calvinists do not believe man comes to God by his own freewill but that each person is preselected (elected) to either salvation or damnation. Those who God selects are regenerated and believe. Those who are not selected and intentionally regenerated cannot believe the gospel. Calvinism is often represented by the acronym TULIP, which stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. Although portions of this theology are believed by both Reformists and Traditionalists, the key difference is a true Calvinist will believe the recipients of God's grace are intentionally elected and saved outside of their own will. This is confusing, so to make sure I don't misrepresent the Reformed view it's best to let Calvin speak for himself: *"God preordained, for His own glory and the display of His attributes of mercy and justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation."*

- Traditional Theology:

Traditionalists also believe mankind is totally depraved by sin and therefore in need of a Savior. They also believe salvation comes through Christ alone and that man's heart is regenerated at the time of salvation - not before. But where they differ from Calvinists is that a Traditionalist believe God offers His grace to all so that whosoever believes might be saved. They believe God gives man the freewill to accept or deny Christ, and that all who accept are elected to salvation once they accept the gospel. Whereas the Calvinist believes God only saves the preselected few, the Traditionalist believes God offers grace to all and adopts all who will accept.

As you can see, both Reformists and Traditionalists believe we are saved by grace through Christ alone. That is a critical point of alignment. But where we differ is significant. Reformists believe God preselects specific people to be saved and then regenerates their heart. In doing so they find His grace irresistible and cannot deny it. Traditionalists believe God offers His grace to all mankind, **"...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.."** (2 Peter 3:9), and by Jesus so, **"...that the world through Him might be saved.."** (John 3:17). In their view God offers grace to all, but then gives everyone the freewill to accept or reject His gift.

Personally, my heart lands in the latter camp - the Traditionalist view. While I understand the view of the Reformists and conform with some elements of their theology (for example, I believe we are all depraved without Christ), I believe God offers His gift of grace to all, that the sin of all mankind was defeated on the cross, and no sin was left unforgiven in the tomb. I believe it is then up to us to accept or reject the gift of grace through our faith in Christ Jesus. This is not for a pre-selected few but for all who will believe. For as the apostle John reminds us, **"... And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."** (1 John 2:2)

And with that it is my hope that we can study Romans together without this becoming a point of contention.

Setting the Stage:

To get ourselves in the right frame of mind to study this amazing letter let's first put ourselves in the shoes of its author, the apostle Paul and the world in which he lived.

Born in the city of Tarsus in present day Turkey, Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen. Sent to Jerusalem as a young boy he was trained under the best Rabbinical teachers of the day (Acts 22:3) and he became in his own words **"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews ..."** (Philippians 3:5b). This earned him a place amongst the Pharisees and probably as a member of the Sanhedrin, which meant he was certainly a man of stature and respect. But over time he became recklessly jealous of the Jewish faith and would do anything to protect it. Even imprisoning or executing followers of a young man from Galilee named Jesus.

That's what he was doing the day it happened. An event that would forever change his life and the course of human history. Paul was traveling with a group of men along the road to Damascus where he intended to arrest more people who were following a new belief system they called **"...the Way..."** (Acts 9:2b). Their affinity for its leader, the young man Jesus, must have seemed odd to Paul, because even though the young

teacher had been dead (and some rumored resurrected) for several years, the number of people following Him was increasing exponentially. Something had to be done about this and Paul knew exactly what that was. So the Jewish leaders had given him written permission to hunt these people down and bring them to trial. Which is why He was headed to Damascus where he believed a group of them lived. But on that day everything would change. Along the road Paul was suddenly blinded by a great light and then he heard the voice of God. In fact, the voice he heard was the teacher Jesus who called out to him from heaven. Paul was stunned. His years of Rabbinical training had not prepared him for what was happening, but he could not deny the reality of what he heard and saw. It was at that moment Paul realized Jesus is real, and not only that, he realized Jesus is the Messiah. — He is God.

Paul's life changed that day and he immediately went from being a persecutor of The Way to its most outspoken ambassador. He had been selected by Jesus to be His apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). To do this Paul traveled thousands of miles across the Mediterranean region and the Middle East preaching the “gospel” truth of the risen Messiah. Along the way He became a hated target of both the legalistic Jews and the Roman government. He was constantly being criticized, mocked, beaten, whipped, stoned and imprisoned. All because he was one of those who “**...turned the world upside down...**” (Acts 17:6) with his radical testimony of the young carpenter from Galilee.

But now Paul found himself between a rock and a hard place. As a Jew he was hated for teaching what they believed was blasphemous. And when speaking to the Gentiles he was hated for disrupting their idol-worshiping life by introducing the idea there was only one God. So Paul was persecuted and imprisoned - multiple times. But he didn't care. He saw himself being in prison because “**...my chains are in Christ;...**” (Philippians 1:13b) and he was perfectly okay with that. So, he wrote a letter to the church in Rome and shared with them a systematic explanation of the gospel truth - that the homeless carpenter from Nazareth is actually the Messiah. And that letter became the Book of Romans.

Why Study Romans?

Of the Book of Romans Martin Luther said: *"This epistle is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel, which deserves that a Christian should not only know it word for word by heart, but deal with it daily as with the daily bread of the soul, for it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled the more delightful it becomes and the better it tastes."* So true.

Prior to starting this study our class spent three years in a verse-by-verse expository journey through Revelation. There our eyes were opened to the amazing connection between the Old and New Testaments and we saw clearly how the two segments of the Bible are actually one continuous story about Jesus. Romans will continue in a similar vein by taking us through the story of salvation as seen in the Old Testament but applied to the New Testament believer. Paul does this to help first-century Jews make the connection between a carpenter from Nazareth and the prophesied Messiah. But in doing so, he gives everyone a clear understanding of our need for Jesus as the atonement for our sin. Like Revelation, the Book of Romans will also take us through Old Testament scripture on an amazing journey through the mind of the early church. Through Romans Paul brings unique clarity to the gospel. He does this by helping his reader understand, **"...There is none righteous, no, not one..."** (Romans 3:10b NKJV / Psalm 14:3 / 53:3), because, **"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,..."** (Romans 3:23) As He explains salvation ("justification") Paul will focus again and again on a key element of our doctrine. That is, that salvation comes through faith and not by works **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9). This dispels any notion that God's grace and the gift of eternal life in Christ can be earned by any effort of our own. Paul's explanation makes it crystal clear that faith alone through Christ alone is the only source of salvation. Church attendance, tithing, baptism, rituals and sacraments have no role in the regenerative grace of God. As a result, **"...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed."** (Romans 3:24-25). Therein lies a key message we will see throughout Romans. That salvation only comes one way, **"...by His blood, through faith."**

Lesson #2, Introduction to the Book of Romans

The City of Rome

Rome - Brief Overview:

The modern city of Rome is an enigma. Covering 496 square miles and with a regional population of 4.3 million people, the "Eternal City" is a thriving metropolis. But Rome is not known for its towering skyline or as a center of commerce. Instead, Rome is known for its antiquity. To the point Rome is most famous for the parts of the city that lie in ruin. One of the most well-preserved ancient cities in the world, Rome is best known for a grandeur that has not existed for almost 2,000 years. The Colosseum, Trevi Fountain and the Pantheon are all well-known landmarks recognized the world over for their historical significance, art and architecture. But sadly, their grandeur overshadows the fact they were built by one of the most pagan, demonic and bloodthirsty societies in history. As Rome grew as a city it spawned an empire like none other in the ancient world. And as its empire grew the term "Rome " came to mean so much more than just a collection of people and buildings in a geographical location. Rome became a world-wide power that stretched from North Africa to Northern Europe. Along the way it conquered, occupied, subjugated and enslaved most of the known world's population. To the point that its gift to art and architecture was overshadowed by the sin and lust of vile men who were pagan in every way. Through their leadership and the people's insatiable hunger for sin, Rome became a tool in Satan's hands as he pursued Israel and persecution of the early Christian church.

In its heyday Rome was more than the name of a city. *"All roads lead to Rome"* was a common expression focusing on the fact that Rome was the source of art, architecture, government and great military power that stretched across the known world. From a primitive village on the Palatine Hills, Rome grew into an empire like the world had never seen before. Extending from North Africa, to Northern Europe, and as far east as modern Russia, the Roman Empire conquered and absorbed dozens of kingdoms, thousands of villages, millions of people and made all the world to be like Rome. As the empire spread, so did its art and architecture and system of government when Rome brought each conquered territory under their control with their unrelenting vice-like power and then sought to make them like Rome. But Rome's glory came to an end as opposing empires overran its outposts and outlying cities. Eventually Rome as an empire imploded on itself and was no more. What had once been the largest and most powerful empire on earth became known for its decaying ruins.

But even to this day the influence of the Roman Empire is more far reaching than we might believe. Hundreds of villages and cities across Europe started as a Roman settlement. Paris (Parisiorum), Salzburg (Iuvavum), Zurich (Tuticum), Vienna (Vindobona) and London (Londinium) are all modern cities originally founded or expanded by Rome as the empire sought to control the known world.

Rome - Its Geography:

Located in West/Central Italy, Rome sits on seven hills - the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal and Viminal. Like many ancient cities Rome began as a small farming community that grew over time. Moderate climate and good soil made it a productive area for sustaining a permanent settlement. Likewise, its location on the Tiber River provided access to the Tyrrhenian Sea, and from there to the larger Mediterranean Sea. From that point sea travel was possible to Spain, Greece, Africa, and the Middle East. This strategic central location made Italy, and Rome in particular, a key east-west sea-bridge to other regions. To the north of Rome lie the Italian Alps - running east and west as a natural defensive wall between Italy and mainland Europe. To the east are the Apennine Mountains running roughly north and south. For a time these two rugged mountain ranges afforded the city some strategic protection against invading armies.

Rome - Its History:

What would eventually become the city of Rome started as an agricultural settlement in the 8th or 9th century BC. Archeological evidence on Rome's hills indicate Neolithic people settled along the Tiber River at a place where it was fordable. Over time these villages were fortified and laid the foundation for the future city. Early cultures included a number of Italic speaking groups, but throughout its development Rome was also heavily influenced by the Etruscians from the north and the Greeks from the east.

Rome's ancient history is generally divided into three periods: the Monarchic, Republic and Imperial.

- Monarchic Period: Early mythological legend contends Rome was founded in 753 BC by two orphaned brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were abandoned near the river Tiber and raised by a she-wolf. More accurately, what would become Rome was a collection of farmers and shepherds who settled in an area near a river crossing. These villages collectively developed into a community with a regional king as their ruler. Legend says early Rome had seven kings but historians are unclear on how many kings there actually were or who they were. This period lasted until 509 BC when Rome came under the rule of a Senate, whose members were typically part of society's aristocracy. Together they

functioned somewhat as a democratic republic.

- Republican Period: Around 509 BC the last Monarchic king was defeated and Rome's government reverted from a monarchy to a republic. Two Consuls were elected each year to work with the Senate to create and enforce law. It was during this period when Rome began to expand its borders and influence. Between the 5th to 3rd centuries BC Rome conquered most of the Italian peninsula. But Rome's military advantage was thwarted by the Gauls who came across the Alps to sack the city. Then between 264-146 BC Rome also came under attack from Carthage who wanted to control Rome's vital trade routes. Rome eventually defeated the Gauls and Carthage and accelerated its offensive efforts conquering Sardinia, Corsica, Syria, Macedonia and parts of Asia Minor. As the republic defeated and assimilated these cultures into the empire they adopted elements of their art, architecture, philosophy, technology and religions making Rome into a true multinational society.
- Imperial Period: This is the era we typically think of as "*The Roman Empire*". In 48 BC a leader emerged whose name has become synonymous with Rome - Gaius Julius Caesar. A successful general and statesman, Caesar became embroiled in civil war with his son-in-law Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus. A highly decorated military commander who became known as Pompey the Great. Caesar's victory propelled him to become a dictator and ushered in his Imperial government. But his success was short-lived and he was assassinated four years later. His successor, his grand-nephew Caesar Octavian Augustus (Augustus Caesar - aka "*The Exalted One*") was the leader who defeated Anthony and Cleopatra in the battle of Actium in 31 BC, and led the empire until 14 AD. He is considered the Roman Empire's first true emperor and was the leader in power when Jesus was born. (Luke 2:1) It was Augustus who ordered the census of the entire Roman "world" in order to register military age men and to establish a basis for taxes. That was the action that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem so they could be counted in the census for their home area. Augustus died in 14 AD at the age of 76. Over the next 500 years he would be succeeded by 41 emperors. Among them were some of the most bloodthirsty and vile men who ever ruled. This included emperor Vespasian and his son Titus who destroyed Jerusalem and most of Israel in 70 AD. But the once strong empire began to implode. Wracked by civil war and armies from the west and north - the Huns, Visigoths and Alerics, Rome began to decentralize. Under Emperor Constantine the empire was divided into Eastern and Western sectors and the capital was moved from Rome to Constantinople - modern day Istanbul Turkey. By 493 AD the Western Roman Empire had collapsed, leaving only the ruins of its former self.

Rome - Its Religion:

Rome was pagan in every way. Their religion was polytheistic which means they worshiped multiple gods and goddesses. Most homes had private shrines where families could worship gods of their own choosing, but a more nationalistic view focused primarily on gods derived partly from Greek mythology. Emperor worship was common and specific emperors were believed to be gods. But whatever belief system was popular at a given time, all Roman religion was pagan, based on idolatry and in some cases reverted to vile and immoral practices. Paul saw this clearly when he visited Athens (a Greek city under Roman rule) and, **"...his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.."** (Acts 17:16) But he used even this occasion to spread the gospel of Jesus. **"Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To The Unknown God. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you."** (Acts 17:22-23)

As we will see, Christianity quickly took root, and although only a small percentage of the total population became Christian, the new "Way" spread rapidly to nearly every region of the empire. So much so, that when the Roman Empire eventually collapsed, Christianity remained behind having taken a foot-hold across Europe. From there it would eventually migrate to America and the rest of the world. But Christianity was unwelcomed and over time the murder of Christians became a government sponsored sport. It is believed several million Christians were killed by the Empire, including an estimated 400,000 just in the Roman Colosseum alone. This last figure clearly illustrates how barbaric the populace had become, given the fact these public murders were considered to be "entertainment". Many of the apostles are believed to have been executed by Rome, and even John, the one apostle who it appears may have died of old age, was in his 90's when banished to a Roman penal colony on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). The place where he would record the glorious Revelation of Christ.

In many ways the Roman Empire has gifted the world with an amazing contribution to art and architecture of great historical significance. Yet, as their culture prospered it grew more barbaric. To the point it became obsessed with immorality. Sadly, as we saw in our study of Revelation, Rome became one of the empires Satan used in his efforts to destroy Israel and later the early Christian community. This is the vile world into which the apostle Paul carried the message of Christ.

Lesson #3, Introduction to the Book of Romans

Rome in the Biblical Context

Rome - Its History with Israel

For over a thousand years the Roman Empire controlled most of the “known” world. Their conquered territories spread from Africa to Northern Europe and included a wide sweep through the Middle East -- which of course included Israel. By the first century AD it is estimated that as many as seven million Jews lived in the Roman Empire. Not only in the Middle Eastern sector, but throughout the villages and cities of Macedonia and what is now Europe.

Throughout history Israel has been a hotly contested land and over the centuries many nations have sought to destroy her. Jerusalem alone has been besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, recaptured 44 times and destroyed twice. Though their enemies have been many, there were six specific ancient empires who sought to wipe out the Hebrew people.

But why?

Geographically, Israel occupies a key strategic location on the north/south route between Asia Minor and Egypt. It also borders the Mediterranean Sea on the west which provides harbors and access to important trade routes. Even today Israel continues to be viewed by its enemies as a potential source of natural resources. Most recently, the rich Leviathan gas fields found off its coast. Some commentators believe these resources could be the “**...hooks into your jaws...**” in Ezekiel 38:4b (NKJV) that will bring the northern armies against Israel in the future Ezekiel War.

Politically, Israel has been a hotbed of conflict since ancient times. As the world's only Jewish nation Israel has always had cultural and ideological differences with its neighbors who were historically pagan and today are predominantly Islamic.

Biblically, Israel, more than any other nation on earth, plays a prominent role in God's plan for mankind. As His chosen nation, people, and intended messenger to the world, Israel has come under relentless attacks from Satan. Throughout time Satan has focused on the destruction of God's plan, defeat of God's Son and disillusionment of God's chosen nation Israel. The latter has come under his intense focus for centuries because it was through them the Messiah would come to earth. But Satan failed over

and over to physically destroy Israel so to this day he seeks to influence its people to turn away from God so they will not be the source of God's redemptive gospel message to the world. But a day will come when God's future plans for Israel will be fulfilled, and at that point, ***"...then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.."*** (Zechariah 12:10b)

Of all the empires satan has used to persecute Israel, the most powerful were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Most conservative scholars believe these are the kingdoms described in Revelation chapter 17, as the beast with seven heads, who John tells us, ***"...are also seven kings..."***. Let's look at this amazing passage, starting in verse 9, to see how it might give us some past and future context for our study of Rome: --- ***"9. Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. 11. The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.... "*** (Revelation 17:9-10). Here in very complex imagery John describes the seven heads of the beast [the antichrist] as seven hills. This has led some to believe John meant the seven hills of Rome, but that explanation seems too simple because he tells us that an understanding of this passage ***"...is the mind which has wisdom."*** (Revelation 17:9). In other words, the meaning of this passage is not as straight-forward as it might appear so we need to apply spiritual wisdom in order to understand it. Or said another way, simply interpreting these seven hills as the seven hills of Rome is just too easy of an answer because it wouldn't require spiritual wisdom to figure that out. As we see in Revelation 17:10, the seven hills refer to seven kings. These probably represent the leaders of the seven empires who over the centuries have sought to destroy Israel. They were certainly not the only kingdoms who warred with Israel over time, but they were the most powerful of the ancient empires who sought to control the world of their day.

Of these John says:

- ***"...Five have fallen..."*** --- these would have been the five warring nations that were already destroyed prior to John's time --- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece.
- ***"...one is..."*** --- here John is speaking in the present tense because when he wrote Revelation the Roman Empire was still in power.
- The five who had already ***"fallen"*** plus the one who ***"is"*** equals six. That leaves one future seventh empire.

- The seventh that, **"...has not yet come..."**, indicating a future kingdom which most conservative scholars believe will be the empire of the antichrist. A future empire that, **"...has not yet come..."** but will exist during the Tribulation period and will be destroyed by Christ at the Second Coming. (Revelation chapters 18 and 19)

These six ancient nation-states sought to control most of the known world of their day. They swept through regions, destroyed their cities, killed or enslaved their people and brought harsh rule on all they conquered. But the fifth empire, Greece, was different. In 338 BC the 20 year old son of Phillip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great, conquered most of the Middle East, including Israel and Judea. But unlike prior conquering nations Alexander took a different tact for subjugation. Rather than killing their captives and destroying their cities Alexander instead sought to psychologically conquer the people by luring them to adopt the Greek way of life. By the time he died at 32 years old Alexander had set the stage for the Hellenistic Age which sought to "Make all Things Greece". As a result, conquered nations often adopted the Greek model of government, studied Greek philosophy, worshiped mythological Greek gods, and in many cases changed their traditional local language to Greek. To the point that when the first non-Hebrew translation of the Bible was printed, the *"Septuagint"*, it was written in the Greek language because so many Jews spoke Greek. Although Alexander's approach was to assimilate rather than destroy, it was ironically the bloodthirsty Syrian-Greek commander, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who attacked Jerusalem in 168 BC, desecrated its temple, abominated the altar and set the prophetic stage for the antichrist to do the same thing during the Tribulation. (Daniel 9:27 / 11:21 / 11:31 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Matthew 24:15).

The Greeks ruled the Middle East from 333 to 166 BC when they were eventually conquered by the expanding Roman Empire. By this point Rome was quickly becoming the most powerful empire on earth and arguably the most powerful of all the ancient cultures. Over time they conquered and occupied the territories previously controlled by the Greeks and expanded their rule into North Africa all the way to what is now Northern Europe and through the Middle East -- an area of almost two million square miles. Although Roman rule would prevail, Greek culture continued to influence Roman society. Art, architecture, and religion were heavily influenced by Greek culture and philosophy, and by the time Paul made his missionary journeys through the empire most of the people he met were Greek speakers. That's why the early New Testament scrolls and letters were written in the Greek language.

The Roman Empire conquered the Greek-held area that included Israel during the period between the Old and New Testaments. In 63 BC General Gnaeus Pompeius "Pompey" Magnus (106 BC to 48 BC), son-in-law of Julius Caesar, conquered

Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, adding Israel and Judea to the empire. But it appears Pompey ordered the temple to be purified, restored the position of high priest and allowed the people to bring offerings to God as was required by Jewish law. He also rebuilt several cities and restored others to self-government. This period of relative peace became known as the “*Pompeian Era*”. Yet, at the same time Israel was firmly under the control of Rome, subjugated to its laws and ruled by a series of regional Prefects, Procurators and Governors appointed by the Roman senate. Among the earliest of these was Herod the Great, the so-called “king” of Judea (Luke 1:5) who ruled from 37 BC to about 1 BC. Probably not a Jew, Herod is thought to have been an “Idumen”. A people group descended from Esau through the Edomites, and therefore a traditional enemy of Israel whose people were descended from Jacob. A ruthless leader, Herod was hated by the Jewish people for his heavy-handed reign. It was Herod for example, who met with the Magi as they searched for the baby Jesus and later ordered the massacre of all Jewish boys in Bethlehem under two years old in an attempt to kill the child the Magi thought was a King (Matthew 2:16). But Herod is also known for his massive building program including the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. At his death the Romans divided Israel amongst his three sons, Herod Archelaus, Herod Phillip and Herod Antipas. Archelaus was an ineffective leader and was quickly replaced by Pontius Pilate as the governor of Judea. Herod Antipas is the ruler most spoken of in the gospels, and it was this Herod who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) and cross-examined Christ prior to His crucifixion. (Luke 23:6-9)

The long occupation of Israel by Rome firmly entrenched their culture into nearly every aspect of Jewish life by the time Jesus was born. In fact, it was a Roman ordered census of the entire empire that required Joseph and Mary to return to their home town of Bethlehem to be counted. (Luke 2:1-7). This move - initiated by Rome, but planned by God - enabled Jesus to be born in the place that brought fulfillment of the prophecy, ***“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”*** (Micah 5:2). Although Rome allowed the Jews to worship as they pleased, Roman administration, laws, taxes and culture were all part of being an occupied territory. This so infuriated Israel’s civil and religious leaders that their hatred of Roman rule eventually distracted them to the point they totally missed the prophesied Messiah when He came to earth. That’s because they were desperately looking for a powerful warrior king who would rid their land of the foreign invaders and establish His promised kingdom on earth. They were not looking for a lowly carpenter who carried a message of love and forgiveness. As a result, the Jewish people misunderstood who Jesus was, viewed Him as a fraud, and demanded the Romans crucify Him. This was still the prevailing attitude amongst Jews as Paul began his ministry, and frankly, is the view of most Jews to this day. For the most part both Jews and Gentiles saw Jesus as an upstart martyr to a failed religion. This is a

perception Paul had to change, which is why in the Book of Romans he spends so much time connecting Jesus to Old Testament Messianic prophecies the Jews were familiar with.

But Jesus foreknew the future and warned Israel their disobedience would be their downfall, ***“41. Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42. saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44. and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*** (Luke 19:41-44). And that is exactly what happened. On April 9th, 70 AD, the Roman General Titus - son of future emperor Vespasian - laid siege to Jerusalem and surrounded the city. They cut off all supplies and literally starved them out. The city fell in September and afterwards was almost completely destroyed. Just as Jesus had foretold, citizens were slaughtered by the tens of thousands and the temple was demolished. Millions more were captured and sold as slaves. Some were destined to the arenas in Rome where they were publically murdered for entertainment. Why? ***“...because you did not know the time of your visitation...”*** The Messiah had come, just as He promised, but the Jewish leadership was so preoccupied with rejecting the Romans they instead rejected God. Even as the Lord Jesus stood in their midst, healed their sick, raised their dead and fulfilled scripture right before their eyes, they refused to accept Him as their King and instead had Him crucified.

Titus' attack was a result of the *“Great Jewish Revolt”*, sometimes called the First Jewish-Roman War (Ha-Mered Ha Gadol). This was the first of three major rebellions by Jews against Rome's occupying forces. From 66 to 73 AD a series of wars erupted that were eventually brought to an end by the sheer size and power of Roman forces. The contemporary historian and Jewish military commander Josephus (Yosef ben Matityahu - 37-100 AD) estimates that 1.1 million non-combatants died in Jerusalem, 100,000 in Galilee and another 97,000 were taken in slavery. The revolt began during the reign of the corrupt and psychopathic emperor Nero as a result of escalating taxes and the continued pressures of occupation. Nero ordered Vespasian to crush the rebellion, and his son Titus became second-in command. During the lengthy campaign Vespasian was recalled to Rome to assume the role of emperor. With his departure, Titus took command and laid siege to Jerusalem for over a period of seven months. After the destruction of Jerusalem the city lay in ruin but Jews continued to live in Judea for a period. But resistance to Roman rule would continue.

The last of the Jewish-Roman wars is called the *“Bar Kokhba Revolt”*, which the Romans called *“The Jewish Expedition”*. From 132 to 135 AD forces under Simon bar

Kokhba fought against the Roman invaders. This was the last of the Jewish-Roman wars and was a decisive victory for Rome. Six full legions and portions of six additional legions of Roman soldiers under General Sextus Julius Severus were combined with soldiers from outposts in Syria, Egypt and Arabia. This resulted in a large-scale annihilation of the Jewish people by Roman troops, suppression of the Jewish religion and barring Jews from living in Jerusalem. The emperor prohibited Torah Law and the Hebrew calendar, and executed many Jewish scholars. All in an attempt to destroy the spiritual strength of the people. It is estimated that 600,000 more Jews were killed during the war and over 950 villages were ravaged. The destruction of Israel was so great that many historians consider the results to have been genocide, and from that point until 1948 the nation of Israel largely ceased to exist.

Eventually the Roman Empire imploded on itself and was split into Western and Eastern sectors. The Eastern Empire was controlled by Constantine, who allowed Jews to mourn their defeat once a year at the temple's Western Wall.

Rome - In the Days of Paul:

The Roman Empire was the society into which Paul would bring the gospel of Jesus. For roughly two hundred years the empire enjoyed a time of "*Pax Romana*", or Roman Peace. An era in which Rome had gained superiority over most of the known world and for a period did not see widespread military action - with some notable exceptions as we have seen. This period ran from the time of Caesar Augustus in 27 BC to the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD. A time when the population of the total Roman Empire is estimated to have been over 70 million people who, for the most part, lived in relative harmony. But it was also a time that saw the emergence of a new religion. A belief system originating in Judaism but focused on the worship of a man who claimed to be the promised Messiah. The Romans couldn't care less about this man or His ministry, but His message stirred up hate and discontent among the Jewish leadership and that caused issues for the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who was tasked by Rome with avoiding any insurrection amongst the people. So Pilate reluctantly became involved in the matter and had the man executed to calm the agitated Jews. Ostensibly, the movement should have ceased when its leader, a carpenter named Jesus of Nazareth, was executed by the Romans at the demand of the Israelite government, but it was not to be, and the new movement grew exponentially despite severe persecution from both Jewish and Roman officials who sought to stop the new "Christian" belief from spreading. It was during this period that Paul, also known by his Hebrew name Saul, a Pharisee and leader in the Jewish community, became focused on destroying the followers of Jesus. Saul was authorized to arrest, imprison or even execute any Jew found to be a follower of Christ, and he did his job well. Like other Jews, Saul saw Jesus as a fraud who was determined to make trouble by disrupting the traditional Jewish faith with new ideas. It was only after Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus

(Acts 9) that he realized Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Saul immediately converted to Christianity and began to spread the message of Christ throughout the Roman Empire. Ironically, it was the relative “peace” of Pax Romana that allowed him to travel throughout the empire on his missionary journeys. Yet, Saul / Paul quickly became the target of those who still sought to eradicate the new Christian movement. Several times he was imprisoned and tortured for disturbing the “peace” by disrupting not only the Jewish faith but also converting those of Roman pagan beliefs. Eventually Paul was arrested and sent to Rome where it is believed he was executed under the orders of the sadistic emperor Nero (37 to 68 AD). A ruler known for his hatred of Christians. It was Nero who blamed the Christian community for the fire that devastated Rome in 64 AD. Rumored to have been set by Nero himself (although that is highly unlikely), the fire spread for nine days and destroyed two-thirds of the city. Looking for someone to blame, Nero used the Christians as a convenient scapegoat and initiated widespread persecution against Jews and Gentiles of the Christian faith. A period of mass persecution ensued that would last for over three hundred years. What started as punishment for their suspected but unfounded role in the fire, led to a bloodsport like the world has never seen before or since. Estimates vary about how many Christians were killed by the Roman Empire, but as each successive emperor established their own plan for persecution it is probable that millions were martyred for refusal to renounce their faith. This led the Roman people to develop an insatiable appetite for bloodthirsty entertainment as hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were publically murdered in the empire’s sports arenas where the citizens cheered as the Christians were killed by gladiators or even wild animals. It is believed that Paul himself was executed around 67 AD, and shortly thereafter Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD and the Jewish people were scattered across the empire. It is believed that all of the original apostles were martyred, with the exception of John who near the end of his life was sent to the Roman penal colony on the island of Patmos, **“...because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”** (Revelation 1: 9)

Rome - A Future View:

Although the Roman Empire ceased to exist by the 5th century AD its legacy endures. When Rome fell to successive invaders the land of Israel came under Byzantine rule until 636 AD, Arab rule until 1099 AD, Mamluk rule until 1516 AD, and finally Ottoman rule until World War I. After the Allied victory in 1918 Israel was occupied by British soldiers until the United Nations granted re-establishment of a Jewish state on May 14th 1948. But the influence of the Roman Empire – principally the idea of consolidation and world-wide control - has continued. In the 1930’s Adolf Hitler began a politically motivated military campaign to take control of all Europe, and by extension the whole world. He called his efforts the “Third Reich”; using the term Reich, that means “Realm” or “Empire” to describe his government. In many ways Hitler emulated the Roman Empire and called his proposed infrastructure “The Thousand

Year Empire”, which in itself seems to be a resurrection of the Roman Empire which he defined as the “Second Reich”. But most troubling was not Hitler’s desire to control the world, but his psychotic focus on annihilating the Jews of Europe. He was relentless in his efforts to pursue and murder every Jew he could find in every country his army occupied. To the point that capturing new territory seemed to be a way to expose and arrest more Jews. By the end of the war he had orchestrated the murder of over six millions Jews across all of Europe and Russia, and did so in barbaric ways that defy imagination. To do this he developed a complex infrastructure whose singular role was the systematic murder of as many Jews as possible. What resulted was a large cadre of soldiers, prison staff, death squads and agents whose sole mission and desire was the execution and mass murder of every single Jew. These men and women were sadistic beyond understanding. To the point Hitler himself became concerned about how these vile murderers could ever assimilate back into “normal” society once he had control of the world. His intense desire to exterminate the Jews resulted in a subculture even he could not control. The role Hitler played in the attempted genocide of the Jewish people was more than just a move to politically control Europe. It was demonic beyond understanding and represents another effort of satan to destroy God’s chosen people. But even today vestiges of this attitude prevails and are increasing. The world, and Europe in particular grow more antisemitic every day. Efforts are underway to block Israel from occupying territory clearly designated to them by God, neighboring nations rally against Israel, and it is only their own internal Islamic theological differences that keep the adjoining Muslim nations from joining forces against her. Russia and Turkey both see Israel as a source of natural resources, but most troubling from an eschatological perspective is the emerging globalist agenda that seeks to form a single government and economic system. Through such efforts Israel has become more and more segregated from the world. The US remains her only strong ally but even our current socialist-leaning government is pulling away from Israel at a record pace.

But all of this appears to be part of God’s end-times plan. As we see in Revelation chapter 17 a seventh and future empire will emerge. The empire of the antichrist (Revelation chapter 18) will exist during the Tribulation period and seek to consolidate all religions and nations under a single government as their demonic leader focuses intently on destroying Israel and everyone else who believes in God. Some see the antichrist’s empire as a resurrected Roman Empire seeking to control the entire world. Many scholars believe it will rise in Western Europe, fed by a globalist agenda whose goal is to bring the world’s population under singular control. But wherever it forms the antichrist’s empire will, like the Romans, turn on God’s people with vengeance as it seeks to focus the world’s attention on worship of its leader, the antichrist. But the Lord will prevail and destroy the final demonic kingdom before Jesus establishes His forever Kingdom for His followers (Revelation chapter 19). And in that, we can be encouraged

Lesson # 4, Introduction to the Book of Romans

Saul, the Zealous Jew

Quick Recap:

The first three lessons provided an historical context of the Roman Empire. I hope this brief familiarization with Rome and specifically its relationship with Israel will help us understand the cultural mindset of the people Paul wrote this letter to. For the most part his readers were part of the new Christian faith which was increasingly unpopular with both Jewish traditionalists and Gentile pagans. The people Paul wrote to lived in a world dominated by oppression, sin and idolatry, and more than likely many of those who read or heard his original manuscripts were later persecuted or killed for their faith. It's important for us in America to understand this because we live in a privileged cocoon where we can legally gather together, openly study God's word and share His gospel message. But that is not the case in many places in the world today and it was certainly not the case in the Roman Empire. As Christianity spread, so did the resistance to its growth. To the point where Christian martyrs became fodder for the empire's thirst for blood. Many of those persecuted were Jews who had converted to Christianity, making them a double target. We see this in Acts chapter 18 which chronicles Paul's first meeting with two Jewish-Christians, Aquila and his wife Priscilla who were exiled from Rome, **"1. After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them."** (Acts 18:1-2). This is in reference to emperor Claudius who around 49 AD issued a decree forcing all Jews to leave Rome. Some scholars believe the decree may have actually been directed more towards Christians than Jews because the Romans viewed Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism so they included all Jews as well. Until that time Jews had lived in relative peace in the empire, but the preaching of the new gospel was seen by many as disruptive to society. This may be why Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi on a very similar pretense, **"20. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, 'These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21. and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.' 22. Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods."** (Acts 16:20-22). The customs they advocated were the worship of a Jewish carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Son of God and a Jewish King. This infuriated the Jewish leadership who in turn caused an uproar in their community which caused civil unrest amongst the Romans.

Hopefully this historical and cultural context will help us better understand the times, the people and the environment into which Paul would share the gospel. It was a hedonistic culture who for the most part had no tolerance for Paul or the new religion he preached. Understanding this culture and their mindset will help us gain a much deeper appreciation for Paul's letter to them. --- And, for the many applications we can use in our world today.

Saul, the Zealous Jew:

Paul was born around 5 BC. Also known as Saul (Shaul), his Hebrew name, Paul was a Jew from the Tribe of Benjamin, and a native of Tarsus (Acts 9:11). A city in the region of Cilicia, which is in modern-day southeast Turkey. An area annexed into the Roman Empire around 64 BC by Pompey the Great, but had been under influence of the Greek Empire for over three hundred years prior to Roman occupation. Although Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37 / 22:28), he was evidently raised in a devout Jewish household. Calling himself **"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the Law..."** (Philippians 3:5), he was also a Pharisee and appears to have been descended from other Pharisees in his family, **"6. But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee..."** (Acts 23:6a / 26:5). He may even have been a member of the Sanhedrin because he stated, **"I cast my vote..."** in reference to persecuting Christians. (Acts 26:10). Apart from his pre-Christian religiously-justified political activities it appears Paul was a leatherworker or tentmaker by trade. We see this in his initial encounter with Aquila and Pricilla where we learn, **"...he [Paul] stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.."** (Acts 18:3).

As a young boy from a devout Jewish family, Paul was sent to Jerusalem for rabbinical studies. There he studied under the celebrated rabbi Hillel Gamaliel, one of the most respected scholars of his day. It was Gamaliel, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, who at the trial of the apostles made an appeal for them that probably saved their lives, **"33. When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34. Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39. but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight**

against God.” 40. And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.” (Acts 5:33-40). Under the tutelage of Gamaliel the young Paul was, **“...taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”** (Acts 22:3). But it was his zealousness for God that actually turned him against God. Just as other Jews did, Paul saw Jesus and His followers as detrimental to the Jewish faith and society as a whole. This poor, humble man - clearly not a king in their eyes - claimed to be the promised Messiah and Son of God. To Paul this was blasphemy of the highest order and was punishable by death. So Paul became the zealous leader of a death squad of sorts who were licensed to hunt down and persecute those of this new faith. **“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.”** (Acts 22:4). He did this because, **“...I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.”** (Galatians 1:13b). It was Paul who guarded the clothes of the murdering mob as they stoned Stephen to death. **“57. Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58. and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”** (Acts 7:57-58). Apparently they had asked Saul to watch over their cloaks while they stoned Stephen. Probably to keep them from being splattered with blood. I have often wondered if the horrible sights and sounds of that day grieved Paul later in life. It would certainly be an event he would see in a different light once he became the one being persecuted. But when it happened he was not an innocent bystander but obviously someone in authority, **“Now Saul was consenting to his death.”** (Acts 8:1)

But all of that would change on a road to Damascus...

Acts chapter 9 chronicles a very unique meeting between Jesus and Saul. A meeting so profound it not only changed Saul's life, but set the stage for the worldwide spread of the gospel. Let's read the account in its entirety.

“1. Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2. and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” 5. And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” 6. So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” 7. And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a

voice but seeing no one. 8. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11. So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." 13. Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." 15. But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." 17. And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18. Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. 19. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. 20. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" 22. But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ." (Acts 9:1-22)

This is such an amazing passage of scripture let's take a few minutes to discuss it in detail.

Paul was on his way to Damascus with the intent to destroy. His attitude is clear as he was, "... breathing out murderous threats..." in his zeal to root-out, arrest and prosecute or kill both men and women who were following Jesus. His intent gives us an indication of how his zeal for serving God became misdirected and turned to murderous sin. Permission to search-and-destroy came directly from the Jewish high priest. Basically the same group who insisted Jesus be crucified by the Romans (Matt. 26:57-67 / John 18:19-24). They gave Paul legal permission to arrest anyone in Damascus **"...who were of the Way..."**. The term **"Way"** is of course speaking of the new Christian faith. Of all the people in Israel who should have recognized the Messiah these are the men who were the most blinded. (John 12:37-40 / Isaiah 6:10), and they continued to be blinded as they watched the growth of the new Christian faith.

But along the road, at about noon (Acts 22:6) something extraordinary happened that would literally change the course of human history. Paul, the self-righteous and murderous Pharisee, was literally knocked off his feet by a light from heaven. The light was Jesus in His glorified state, who is so often described as light. (John 12:46 / Luke 2:32 / John 1:1-9), and now we see how His presence literally knocked this upstart hunter to the ground. And yet, there was more than light for Paul heard the very voice of God call out, "...***Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?***...". Notice, He doesn't say, "*Why do you persecute these Christians?*". Or "*...these people?*...". Instead, He says "*...why are you persecuting Me?*" Speaking of Himself, in the same vein as His parable of the sheep and goats when He said, "*... inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me...*" (Matthew 25:45). In other words, by persecuting the people of God - the bride of Christ - Paul was in effect attacking Jesus Himself. But Paul's response was totally out of character. Instead of resisting or asking "*Who are you?*", Paul says, "*...Who are you, Lord?*..." He recognized he was being addressed by God. A fact validated when Jesus said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "***Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.***" So Paul did as he was told. Blinded by the light and therefore helpless, the men with Paul had to guide him to Damascus where he was left at the house of a man named Judas on Straight Street (modern day Darb el-Mustaqim). Paul was there for three days, during which time he did not eat or drink. That may be an indication of the emotional shock he experienced in going from a brash young man with a murderous heart, to realizing he had been blinded by God.

But the Lord, in His supreme authority, already had a plan. In Damascus there was a follower of Christ. A man named Ananias, "***...a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there.***" (Acts 22:12). Although he was a devout Jew he was also a convert to Christianity because Luke calls him a "***...disciple...***" (V 10) and he tells Paul it was, "***...the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road...***" (V 17). The Lord called to Ananias in a vision and directed him to find Paul and restore his sight. But understandably Ananias was frightened because he had, "***...heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem...***". But the Lord insisted and then clarified His intent, "***Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.***" --- What an understatement that would prove to be. So Ananias went to Paul, healed his blindness (of course through the power of God) and told him what he had been told. Paul believed and accepted Christ as his Savior. This is indicated by the fact he was immediately baptized, not as a means of salvation, but as a public affirmation of his faith in Jesus.

Paul was now a part of the Way.

Lesson # 5 - Introduction to the Book of Romans

Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles

Quick Recap:

So, is the apostle's name Saul or Paul? Actually it's both. We know this because Acts 13:9 says he was called, **"...Saul, who also is called Paul..."**. Jesus, Ananias, Luke and the Holy Spirit all called him Saul (Acts 9:4&17 / 13:2), but to most readers he is more commonly known as Paul. So why is there a difference? To begin with, I don't think the name change from Saul to Paul represents a shift from evil to good as some would contend. In fact, the name Saul is used eleven times in the Bible after he converted to Christianity. More likely it is because Saul/Paul lived in a bilingual society. Saul was born in Tarsus Cecilia, in modern day Turkey. An area that had been part of the Greek Empire and had adopted Greek language and culture. Paul is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Saul, so as a Greek speaking Jew he could have been called by either name, and obviously was. I believe the transition simply highlights the fact that Saul was a Hebrew appointed as the apostle to a largely Greek speaking region of the world.

Either way, Saul/Paul was from a devout Jewish family who lived in what is now southeast Turkey. As a youth he traveled to Jerusalem where he trained under the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel. There he became, **"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the Law..."** (Philippians 3:5), and at some point became, **"...a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee..."** (Acts 23:6 NKJV / 26:5). But his zeal for serving God became grossly misdirected and he developed a hunger for Christian blood. It was Saul who approved the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), and it was Saul who, **"...persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."** (Acts 22:4). And as he did he, **"...persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it..."** (Galatians 1:13).

But all of that changed on the road to Damascus. There Saul met Jesus and through that unique encounter was changed from a devout Jew to an unequaled warrior for Christ. Saul was temporarily blinded by his meeting with Jesus and had to be helped to Damascus. But once there he met a disciple of Jesus, Ananias, who healed him through God's power. It was also there he found out he had been selected by God to be Christ's, **"...chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."**

Paul - Apostle to the Gentiles:

Saul was now a believer in Christ and immediately became an enemy of the Jewish infrastructure he once served. In modern America Christians don't understand what a potentially dangerous decision this would have been for him. We are sheltered in a "free" society and for the most part can practice whatever belief system we want without fear of retaliation. But Saul's decision to follow Christ would have been like publicly accepting Jesus today in North Korea or Iran. Society would shun you, your family would probably disown you and the government might even kill you. That's the type of change Saul would now see in his life.

After Saul was saved and regained his strength he, **"19 ...spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. 20. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?'" 22. But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ."** (Acts 9:19-22)

Two things stand out to me in this passage:

- **"...Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues..."** Here is a man who just a short time before denied the divinity of Christ to the point he killed His followers. Now **"...Immediately..."** and without delay he began to preach, and he did so with knowledge and confidence. Going first to the Jews in their synagogues, and then branching out into the Gentile community. Yet how did he become so knowledgeable so quickly that he could convince devout Jews, **"...that He is the Son of God..."**? Let's look at a similar story in Luke 24:13-35. Here we see Jesus after He had risen from the tomb. As He walked along the road to Emmaus He came upon two men who were probably both Jewish and Christian. They were disturbed because Jesus had been crucified and they had lost hope in Him as the Messiah. **"...25. Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?'" 27. And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. 28. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29. But they constrained Him, saying, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.' And He went in to stay with them. 30. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32. And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while**

He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

Did you notice how Jesus taught them who He is? He didn't perform miracles or call legions of angels from heaven to prove His divinity. Instead, ***"...beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself..."***. He used Old Testament scripture - here described as ***"...Moses..."***, the first five books of the Bible and ***"...all the Prophets..."*** - to show them the Messianic prophecies, ***"...concerning himself..."***. And when that happened their eyes were opened and they made the mental connection between the ancient Messianic prophecies and the carpenter from Nazareth! That revelation is why they found, ***"...our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?..."***. All Jesus did to open the Scriptures was to show them evidence in the Old Testament that He is truly the Son of God. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus had the same outcome as the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. He made the connection, and when he did, the story came together and made perfect sense. Basically what Saul was now teaching was simply using very familiar scripture to help them see the truth. In this way Saul, ***"...increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ."*** (Acts 9:22).

- The second thing that stands out to me is that Saul had a reputation that preceded him -- a really bad reputation. As he began to spread the gospel the people, ***"...were astonished and asked, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?..."*** Saul was known for his hatred and murderous zeal to persecute Christians. Now he was one, which understandably confused people. I suspect this probably hampered his ministry at times because many he witnessed to would have remembered his prior life and questioned his motives and intent. But the dramatic change may have also helped his ministry once the same people started seeing the fruits of the new man he had become. This can give us encouragement that no matter what we've done in the past the Lord will still use us if we give our hearts to Him. But Paul's life was now totally changed. From a devout Pharisee bent on the destruction of the Christian faith, to a devout soldier in the army of Christ, Paul's ministry would literally turn the world upside down. (Acts 17:6). As a result, the Jewish infrastructure he had abandoned sought to kill him. So much so that at one point Paul's testimony before the Sanhedrin caused a dispute that, ***"... there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them...."*** Resulting in, ***"...the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul...."*** (Acts 23:10 & 12) Even the disciples in Jerusalem, ***"...afraid of***

him, and did not believe that he was a disciple....". That is until Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, also known as the **"...Son of Encouragement..."** took him to meet the apostles and told them how he had **"...preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus..."** (Acts 4:36 & 9:26-27)

But there may be more to Paul's instruction in the gospel than simply applying Messianic prophecies. It appears He was personally instructed by Jesus and therefore became known as an "apostle"; a term in Greek that basically means "one who is sent". So in the broadest terms it could be used to describe a missionary. But the term apostle was also applied more specifically to the small group of men who were personally selected by Jesus to follow Him during His ministry. Men who would both learn from Jesus and suffer with Jesus. In Luke 6:13 we are told, **"13. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles..."** Clearly Jesus had more than twelve followers. In Luke 10:1 Jesus **"...appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go...."** But the twelve were different, **"...1. Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick...."** (Luke 9:1-2). Although the "disciples" and other followers were a key component of Christ's ministry it is clear the Twelve were given a more defined role with greater authority. They were with Him when He fed the five thousand (Mark 6:30-42), when He calmed the storm (Matthew 14:22-33), when they sat on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:1), when He washed their feet (John 13:5), at the first communion (Luke 22:14), when He met with them after the resurrection (John 20:19) and when He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:2). Given these examples, it seems to me this close personal relationship with Jesus during His ministry and having been instructed by Him is what defines a true "Apostle". The original twelve apostles were personally trained by Jesus as they traveled with Him for about three years; learning and being imparted with unique gifts. Even the replacement for Judas - Matthias - was selected from those, **"...who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus ..."** (Acts 1:21). So how could Paul, a killer of Christians be qualified as an apostle? I think in a couple of ways. First, he was personally called by Jesus. As Jesus told Ananias, **"...he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel..."** (Acts 9:15). Then we get an indication that Paul may have been personally instructed by Jesus. In Galatians 1:15-18 Paul explains an unusual encounter with God that may have been a time of instruction, **"...15. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16. to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17. nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem..."** Logically you would think Paul would seek

counsel from the remaining apostles for spiritual training. Who better to train him about Jesus than the men who learned it directly from Jesus? But that's not what Paul did. Instead, he did not **"...confer with flesh and blood..."** ["...consult any human beings..."] but appears to have gone into the Nabatean Arabia desert where he was instructed by the Lord. We don't know how long he was there but it was three years before he finally went to Jerusalem. But even then, **"...19. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother..."** (Galatians 1:19). Many believe the comment in Acts 9:23), **"...Now after many days were past..."** may indicate the three year period in Arabia before he returned to Jerusalem.

But there is another unique event that may indicate divine teaching. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul describes a man in the third-person, but is presumably speaking of himself, and he tells us this man was apparently taken into heaven, **"2. ...I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4. how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. 6. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. 7. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations..."**, (2 Corinthians 12:2-7) The term **"...third heaven..."** is often thought of as a way to describe God's heavenly home (1 Kings 8:30 / Psalm 123:1). Compared to the first heaven, the earth's atmosphere (Genesis 8:2 / 1 Kings 8:35) and the second heaven, which is defined as space (Genesis 15:5 / Psalm 8:3). Paul alludes to this when he says the man (presumably him) was, **"...was caught up into Paradise..."**. Where he **"...heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter..."**. Things that were an, **"...abundance of the revelations..."**. The Bible speaks of **"...Paradise..."** as synonymous with heaven. In Revelation 2:7 Jesus speaks to the church at Ephesus and says, **"... 7. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."** And, as we know from our study of Revelation the **"...tree of life..."** is in heaven. (Revelation 22:2). Likewise, when Jesus comforted the repentant thief on the cross He said, **"...Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."** (Luke 23:43). In each of these examples the Greek root for paradise is *"Paradiso"*, which appears to be from an ancient Persian word for a beautiful garden.

So given this context and the background of his Arabian studies the point is Paul appears to have been taught by Jesus. Had he been instructed by the apostles or

disciples his listeners could have rejected his message as repeating something told to him by another man. But the fact he gained his revelation and instruction from the Lord did two things. First, it allowed him to teach what he had learned directly from the source, and second, it qualified him as an apostle because he had been instructed by Jesus Himself.

And with that instruction Paul was ready to carry the Lord's message to the world.

Lesson # 6 - Paul, the Missionary and the Martyr

Quick Recap:

Saul, a zealous Pharisee, sought to destroy the new Christian faith. In his view, the poor carpenter from Nazareth who claimed to be the promised Messiah was a fraud and His followers deserved death. But all of that changed on a journey to Damascus when he was confronted by Jesus Himself and heard the shocking reality of what he had done, **"...why do you persecute me..."** (Acts 9:4). This question changed Paul's life forever. From a man who hated Christians he became history's greatest gospel apologist. Immediately after converting to Christianity Paul spent time in the Arabian desert, and possibly in heaven, being personally instructed by the Lord. This qualified him to be an apostle but set him at odds with both the Jewish infrastructure and eventually the Roman Empire.

Paul, the Missionary and the Martyr:

Paul was now ready to face the world. Trained and confident, he would accomplish four mission trips around the Mediterranean region. In those days and prior to modern transportation these trips would have been extremely arduous. Thousands of miles would have been trod on foot, by donkey or boat and would often take weeks between stops. Along the way Paul would often be hungry and tired, and probably slept many nights on the ground. At times he saw great victory as the gospel was accepted and congregations grew, but there were many other times when he was pursued, beaten, arrested and stoned. Yet he persisted, and over a period of over 20 years he covered an area that today stretches from Israel through modern day Syria, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and maybe even Spain. Along the way Paul planted churches, appointed elders, instructed believers, endured hardship and wrote thirteen letters that would become a significant portion of what we now know as the New Testament.

As difficult as it was, Paul's efforts to share the message of Jesus spread rapidly through the Roman world and as the empire expanded so did the gospel. The book of Acts and the epistles of Paul chronicle these journeys and the victories and hardships along the way. But the scope of his ministry is so complex and widespread it would take volumes of commentary to even scratch the surface of what he did. So, as context for our study I have provided a brief timeline of key events in Paul's life. This will give us an idea of the scope of his ministry and how the Book of Romans fits into the big picture.

A note on the timeline:

This timeline does not provide enough detail for an in-depth study but it gives us enough to understand the scope of his amazing mission journeys and several key events along the way. But I need to add a disclaimer of sorts to explain the dates on the timeline.

Scripture does not provide exact dates for specific events. People in ancient times had a very rudimentary understanding of how to measure time and would not have known what terms like "BC" and "AD" would later refer to. Instead, they would often measure time by linking it to the reign of a king or the timing of a significant event. For example, 2 Kings 16:1-2a describes the reign of king Ahaz in this way, **"...In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem..."**. We now know from other historical accounts that king Ahaz began his reign in 735 BC. We know this because centuries later calendars were established allowing us to calculate when specific events might have occurred in the past. I tell you this to clarify that the dates assigned to Paul's ministry below are not recorded in scripture but have been deduced over time by scholars linking his actions to the timing of known historical events. For that reason you may find slightly different dates across multiple commentaries. So, the dates provided here are just to give us an approximate time span for the chronology of events and to help us put them in context.

- 35 AD - Paul's encounter with Christ and his conversation on the road to Damascus. (Acts 9:1-19) Through this event he was saved and baptized.
- 35-38 AD - Paul apparently spent time in the Arabian desert receiving divine instruction from Jesus. (Galatians 1:17)
- 38 AD - Afterwards Paul went to Jerusalem where he met with Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days. He also met James, the earthly brother of Jesus. Afterwards Grecian Jews tried to kill him and he fled to Tarsus. (Acts 9:26-29 / Galatians 1:18-19)
- 38-44 AD - Paul conducted a localized ministry in Syria and Tarsus Cilicia. (Acts 9:30 / Galatians 1:21) This was during a short time of relative peace for the early church. (Acts 9:31)
- 44 AD - Barnabus went to Tarsus to retrieve Paul and bring him to Syrian Antioch. They stayed there for a year preaching to the local believers. These were the first congregations called "Christians". (Acts 11:25-26).
- 46-48 AD - First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:2-14:28) with Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem with several coworkers bearing a gift for the church who were suffering through a famine. (Acts 11:30). Among them was Barnaba's cousin, John who was also known as Mark. (Acts 12:25) This is the same Mark who would later write the Gospel that bears his name.

- It was at this time the Holy Spirit called for Paul and Barnabas to be sent out on mission. John Mark went with them.
- From Syrian Antioch they went to Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch (a different city named Antioch), Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and returned to Syria. Paul's teaching quickly infuriated the Jewish leadership. (Acts 13:44-52) but many Gentiles believed and were baptized. (Acts 13:47-48)
- In Lystra Paul healed a lame man and the people watching proclaimed him to be a god from Zeus. This caused a great disturbance which infuriated the Jews who stoned Paul. They left him for dead but he survived. (Acts 14:8-20)
- 48-49 AD - Paul may have written the letter to the Galatians while in Syria.
- 49-50 AD - Legalistic Jewish-Christians were causing confusion by teaching that circumcision was a part of salvation. Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and to gain a ruling on legalistic views of Jewish traditions and Gentile salvation. This resulted in the Council's letter to the churches in Acts 15:23. (Acts 15:1-29 / Galatians 2:1-10)
 - Following this there was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over Mark because Mark had previously abandoned the group. (Acts 13:13). Barnabas and Mark separated from Paul and sailed for Cyprus. Timothy then joined Paul and Silas, another co-laborer who, **"...was well spoken of by the brethren..."** (Acts 16:2b)
- 50-52 AD - Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:40-18:23) This was a long and arduous journey from Syrian Antioch west by foot to Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Troas (Troy), Samo-Thrace, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus and then back to Jerusalem.
 - It was on this trip when Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from going into Asia Minor. He then had a vision of a man from Macedonia who asked him to come preach there. (Acts 16:9). This move would eventually take the gospel into what is now Europe and from there to the rest of the world.
 - It was at Philippi where Paul led Lydia to Christ. (Acts 16:11-15)
 - It is believed that Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Thessalonians from Corinth.
 - Paul and Silas were imprisoned after an encounter with a demonic woman. That night an earthquake shook the jail and they were freed. They then led the jailer and his family to the Lord. (Acts 16: 31)
 - It was in Athens that Paul made his impassioned speech about the unknown god. (Acts 17:23)
 - At Corinth Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish/Christian refugees and tentmakers exiled from Rome. Paul, who was also a tentmaker, stayed and worked with them. (Acts 18:3).
 - Paul traveled to Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla. It was there they instructed Apollos. (Acts 18:26)

- 53-57 AD - Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23 - 21:17) Another long and arduous journey took Paul from Syrian Antioch to Tarsus, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Ephesus, Troas, Neapolis, Phillippi, Amphipolis, Apologia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth. And then return basically along the same land route, then by boat to Rhodes, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea and Jerusalem.
 - It was during this time, **"...that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.."** (Acts 19:10)
 - It is during this four year journey he is believed to have written:
 - 1 Corinthians at Ephesus
 - 2 Corinthians in Macedonia
 - Paul's ministry created a stir in Ephesus. A riot erupted because the sale of pagan idols declined. Paul then left for Macedonia and passed through there to Greece. (Acts 20:1)
 - At Troas Paul raised Eutychus from the dead. (Acts 20:7-10)
 - On his return he stayed at the house of Phillip in Caesarea. The people pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but he said, **"...For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus..."** (Acts 21:13)
 - It may be from Corinth that Paul wrote the Book of Romans. In Romans 16 (16:1, 23) he mentions Phoebe, Gaius and Erastus. All who were associated with Corinth.
- 57 AD - Paul arrived in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:27 - 26:32) There he met with James and other leaders, and learned that Jews were angry because he taught Gentiles not to follow the law of Moses.
 - Angry Jews stirred the people against Paul and a mob drug him from the temple and tried to kill him. The disturbance was so great a Roman commander and troops were sent to stop the riot. They took Paul prisoner - basically to protect him - and took him to their barracks.
 - Paul then spoke to the crowd, in Aramaic, which calmed them down. He told them who he was and of his conversion with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He then told them he had been sent by Jesus to the Gentiles. When the crowd heard this they rioted again and demanded Paul be killed. The Romans planned to flog him to make him explain why the people were so angry. But when they found out Paul was a Roman citizen they had to let him go. It was not legal for them to punish a Roman without cause.
 - The next day Paul was taken before the High Priest, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. This resulted in a great uproar and a group of Jews vowed to kill him. Paul was then taken through a series of trials so that the Jewish leadership could bring charges against him. Because Paul was a Roman citizen he was afforded the right to stand trial before the Roman governor. First he went before Felix, governor of Judea, then Festus, then king

Herod Agrippa II (son of Herod who killed James the brother of John. He was the grandnephew of Herod of the gospels and great-grandson of Herod who was king when Jesus was born.). They all found him innocent of any crime deserving death.

- 57-59 AD - Paul sailed for Rome as a prisoner of the Imperial Regiment. Their journey went from Jerusalem to Caesarea, Sidon, Syrian Antioch, Myra, Cnidus, Crete (Titus 1:5), then by sea voyage to Malta, Syracuse Sicily, Rhegium, into Italy and Puteoli, Appius, Three Taverns and finally Rome. They were shipwrecked along the way. (Acts 27:1 - 28:16)
They washed ashore in Malta.
 - It was there he was bitten by a poisonous snake but showed no ill effect. As a result the people thought he was a god. (Acts 28:3-6)
 - They wintered on the island and left after three months
- 59-61 AD - First imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:16-31)
Paul was under house arrest and allowed to stay in a rented home with a Roman guard. There he was allowed to meet with both Jews and Gentile Christians. People came in large numbers to hear him speak.
 - Paul stayed there for two years and, ***“30. ...received all who came to him, 31. preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him...”*** (Acts 28:30-31)
 - It is from here, while Paul was in prison that he is believed to have written:
 - Ephesians
 - Colossians
 - Philemon
 - PhillipiansThese are often called the "prison epistles".
- 62 AD - Paul was released from the Roman prison.
 - Shortly after it is believed he wrote I Timothy and Titus
- 62-67 AD - Paul's final journey to Rome (Titus 1:5) and his second Roman imprisonment (2 Timothy 1:16 / 4:6-8)
 - Luke was with him and he asked that Mark be sent to him as well. (2 Timothy 4:11)
 - From the Mamertine prison he wrote 2 Timothy, shortly before his death.
- 67-68 AD - Trial and execution. The Bible doesn't say where or when Paul was executed. There are lots of theories and church history contends he was beheaded, possibly during the persecutions initiated by the emperor Nero. Some believe his execution occurred at a place on the Ostian Way just outside of Rome. But whenever and wherever it occurred Paul was prepared. He had already told Timothy ***“...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*** (2 Timothy 4:7)

And with that background, we now begin our study of Romans.

Lesson # 7 - The Book of Romans - Overview

Brief Overview of the Book of Romans

The Book of Romans is arguably one of the most important books in the Bible. Not because of its encouraging prose like Psalms, or its great historical significance like Chronicles, or even the prophetic insights of Revelation. Romans is critical because it explains salvation in a clear and concise way. So much so that the term "*Roman Road*" is often used to describe the journey Paul will take us through from the recognition that there is a God, through instructions for how to live a Godly life.

So Who Was Paul Writing to - and Why?

Most of Paul's epistles were written to a specific person (like Timothy or Titus) or to a congregant body of believers in a specific city he had visited. In many cases his audience were new churches he helped plant, and in some cases he used his letters to address issues within a particular church. But Romans are none of these. It is written to people he did not know who lived in a place he had never been.

We don't know how the church in Rome was originally established. Even though Paul had never preached there it appears they were a vibrant and faithful church. We see this in Romans 1:8 where Paul says, **"...your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."** Undoubtedly something extraordinary was happening through this body for them to have a reputation throughout the Roman Empire. It's possible the church in Rome was founded by those saved at Pentecost. There, Peter spoke to a large crowd from all over the Mediterranean states including, **"...visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes [non Jewish converts]..."** (Acts 2:10-12). It may have been these new believers who returned to Rome and established a church. But whenever it was established they lived in an age when organized Christianity was new so they probably understood only the most basic elements of our faith. This is because for the most part the New Testament as we know it was not written at that time. They may have had access to a couple of the early Gospels and some of Paul's other writings but they would still need to be taught about salvation, for their own spiritual growth, but also so they could effectively witness to their lost countrymen.

Paul's Roman audience was probably a mixture of converted Jews and Gentiles. His message is deep in Old Testament Messianic prophecy and the Law, which would have been relevant to Jews, but he also speaks to those, **"...among all nations for his name, among whom you also are called of Jesus Christ."** (Romans 1:5-6). As such, his readers would have either been Jews steeped in generations of legalistic rabbinical

teaching, who came from a culture that generally rejected the carpenter from Nazareth as a fraud. Or, they were Gentiles who were raised in an idol-worshiping pagan culture with very complex and often immoral religious practices. In either case, Paul would need to explain salvation from the most basic level, with a connection to the Old Testament scripture, in order to show that the carpenter Jesus is in-fact the promised Messiah, and as such, is God in the flesh. That's why Paul develops a detailed narrative to help explain who Jesus is and why we need Him. In doing so He also has to dispel the age-old notion that righteousness can be obtained through adherence to the Law or through works. This will be the core focus of the first parts of Paul's letter.

To see the flow of its truth let's discuss a quick overview of the entire book. Hopefully this will give us a broad context that will make the individual verses come to life as we dig deeper into this wonderful book.

Overview of Romans:

Chapter 1:

Paul begins his epistle by introducing himself as both a slave and apostle to Christ. His introduction includes a very concise summary of the gospel and begins a common theme of this letter by explaining who Jesus is using Old Testament prophecy. This is important because these early believers were some of the first to realize the poor carpenter from Nazareth - who had been crucified - is in fact the promised Messiah. This seems logical to us, but to a first-century believer it was a profound revelation. Paul then praises the church for its obedience (Romans 1:8) and expresses his desire to see them. In doing so he clarifies why, ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."*** (Romans 1:16). To many this would be a novel concept so it was Paul's intent to explain salvation to both Jew and Gentile believers so they can understand more detail about their new faith.

Later in the chapter Paul focuses on idolatry and depraved sin (Romans 1:22-23). This may indicate chapter 1 is written primarily to the Gentile members of the church in Rome who had been idol worshipers. But whoever the intended audience is, chapters 1 and 2 set the stage for an iconic tenet of our faith found in Romans 3:23, ***"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."*** This is key, because in order to understand your need for redemption you must first understand your position as a sinner. Paul builds a case for this by helping his readers understand their need for a Savior. He starts with the most basic fundamentals by explaining that there is a God. Then he illustrates that all of us are sinners who need forgiveness from our sin. Through this discussion Paul will clarify:

- Jesus is the Christ - the promised Messiah and heir to the throne of Israel. (Romans 1:3)
- Jesus is the true Son of God and our Lord (Romans 1:4)
- God's existence should be obvious to all (Romans 1:18-20)
- All of mankind sins and is without excuse (Romans 1:21-30)
- There are consequences [wrath] as a result of our sin (Romans 1:18 & 32)
- It is grace, through the gospel of Jesus that enables salvation (Romans 1:16-17)
- But salvation does not come through Abrahamic heritage, the Law [works] or through religious observances.

Here Paul weaves a very simple chronological gospel he will expand on in later chapters. He clarifies the existence of God, the fact everyone sins, that sin comes with consequences and that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah through whom the gospel is revealed (1:17). This may seem overly simplistic to us now, but it provided early believers and even believers today the fundamental starting point of coming to Christ for the redemption of sin.

Chapter 2

Unlike chapter 1, chapter 2 does not mention idolatry but talks about the Law and circumcision. Both are topics that would have been part of a Jewish mindset. Given that, chapter 2 may be intended primarily for his Jewish readers.

Either way, Paul expands on the premise that, **"...all have sinned..."** (Romans 3:23). Speaking of Gentiles who are, **"...without Law..."** and Jews who are, **"...in the Law..."**. (Romans 2:12). In Romans Paul will talk a lot about the "Law". He does this to bring clarity that all of mankind has a moral code in which to operate. Jews had the Old Testament Mosaic Law - the Ten Commandments plus hundreds of other rabbinical regulations required for Israel to be obedient to God when they functioned as a nation (Exodus 20). But Gentiles also have a law through their conscience so that, **"...although not having the [Mosaic] law, are a law to themselves,..."** (Romans 2:14). Paul stresses adherence to the law, not as a source of salvation, but as a way to recognize our sin, so that we can recognize the need for redemption.

Chapter 3

Here Paul starts with a very profound statement, **"...because to them [Jews] were committed the oracles of God."** (Romans 3:2). Whether Old Testament or New, the Jewish people have been entrusted with transcribing the inspired words of God that guide our faith in Him. It is a responsibility modern Jewish people only partly honor. Paul then brings out the zinger, **"There is none [Jew or Gentile] righteous, no, not one;..."**. Despite the Law - Mosaic or moral conscience - no one can gain righteousness through

their actions, but in doing so Paul then points out the purpose of the Law, so that, **"...by the law is the knowledge of sin."** (Romans 3:20). This applies to either a Jew with rabbinical Law or Gentiles with a natural law. In both cases everyone is guilty of committing sins against God's will. Paul then begins a discussion he will expand on throughout Romans and in several of his other epistles - and that is - salvation comes through faith and not works or the Law, **"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."** (Romans 3:28). This will begin a detailed discussion of justification (salvation) through faith in Christ alone. This truth was vital to Paul's Jewish readers to help them understand that salvation never came from the Law. The Law enabled them to recognize their sin and therefore their need for redemption. Likewise, the Gentile readers, governed by the natural law, would also recognize their sin and the fact that nothing they could do themselves would result in redemption. This is all part of Paul's efforts to help them understand that redemption and salvation can come only through Jesus.

Chapter 4

Now in chapter 4 Paul goes back to familiar scripture to give testimony of David and to tell the story of Abraham's faith. David is a credible source because he is considered the greatest earthly king of Israel, and Abraham is as well because he is viewed as the father of the Jewish people. But as we will see, Abraham is also a blessing to all nations, which means the Gentiles are covered by the same salvation theology as the Jews (Genesis 12:3). What better example than Abraham to illustrate faith-based salvation to a people who viewed their heritage in Abraham as a source of righteousness.

Paul's argument is based on the premise that Abraham lived before the Law was given to Moses and therefore could not have been saved by obedience to the Law. Instead, **"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."** (Romans 4:3 / Genesis 15:6 / Galatians 3:6). Here Paul uses the word **"...righteousness..."** to describe what Abraham was credited with for his faith in God. By helping his readers understand that Abraham was saved by faith in what God said (His promises), before there was a Law or before the gospel was fully defined shows that Christianity is not a new concept but is prophetically described in the Bible. It also shows that justification through the Law was not God's intended plan. Going a little deeper, even the most ardently legalistic Jew would have to admit that Abraham somehow knew that God would provide a sacrifice for sin (Genesis 22:8). He probably didn't understand the meaning of the cross, but he knew that sin was only redeemed by God through a blood sacrifice; and that understanding was the faith Abraham needed for imparted righteousness. Adam and Eve learned the same truth when an animal was killed to cover their sin (Genesis 3:21). Just as Abel knew when he offered the firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:4). And just as the Israelites in Egypt knew at the first Passover

when they sacrificed the spotless lamb to atone for their sin (Exodus 12). Through this Paul will continue to illustrate the truth that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not through the Law or through works, because, **"...It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."** (Romans 4:24b-25)

Chapter 5

Now, within the context of salvation by faith, not by works, Paul presents another iconic element of our theology, **"But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8) This is one of the most fundamental truths of our justification to God - through the Lord Jesus - who came to earth in flesh and paid the price for our sin. But this fact should not have been a new revelation to the Jews. They knew full well that Adam's sin was covered in blood, that Abel provided his first-fruit blood offering, that God provided a lamb for Abraham's offering and that sin was atoned in the temple by the sacrifice of a spotless Passover lamb. Then why didn't they understand that the man whom John the Baptist called **"...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!..."** (John 1:29) is the promised Messiah whose birth was prophesied by Micah (Micah 5:2) and whose death was prophesied in Psalms and by Isaiah (Psalm 22 / Isaiah 53:5). They should have known this, as Paul emphasizes, by pointing back to Adam, who brought sin into the world, but was also the first to benefit from redemption through a blood sacrifice provided by God. Both Jews and non-Jewish readers of Hebrew scripture should have recognized this truth - that salvation is not by works, nor is it by the Law, nor by religious observances. It is made possible only through God's, **"...abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."** (Romans 5:17)

Chapter 6

Nearly every chapter of Romans includes an iconic verse most Christians have heard and many can quote, and chapter 6 is no exception. Here Paul continues his deep-dive into salvation by reminding us that, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23) Paul uses this chapter to continue his discussion of sin and salvation by focusing in several key points:

- As believers we have died to sin, through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, so that sin is no longer our focus. (Romans 6:1-7)
- Christ died once and was raised to eternal glory. In doing so He defeated death for eternity and since we - as believers - have had our sin die with Him we too will be raised to eternal life. (Romans 6:8-10)
- Through the death of our sin we can now focus on a life lived for Jesus. (Romans 6:12)

- And none of this is due to our own works or observance of the Law because, **"...sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but grace..."** (Romans 6:14)

This will continue as the central theme of Paul's writings -- salvation comes through God's grace, provided to man by Christ on the cross. No work, or religion or Law could ever erase the blight of even one sin. It can only be erased by the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb, and that is only possible because of God's amazing grace.

Chapter 7

Paul now digs a little deeper to expose the true meaning of the Law and why it did not bring salvation. Our salvation comes from recognizing our sin and then seeking redemption through the sacrifice of Christ. In this way, **"...you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ..."** (Romans 7:4). Prior to salvation our lives were controlled by sin, but after we're saved we are no longer slaves to sin but instead, **"...we should bear fruit for God."** (Romans 7:4). Further, Paul continues to stress the real purpose of the Law, which was not to save, but to point to our need for a Savior. Why? Because. **"...I would not have known sin except through the law."** (Romans 7:7). He then talks about the struggles we still have with sin. As believers we are forgiven but our sin nature still abounds. He describes this battle in verses 14-25. A battle we all face everyday. To the point Paul proclaimed, **"O wretched man that I am!" (7:24). And yet, 'I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord.'** (Romans 7:25)

Chapter 8

Paul begins this chapter with reassurance, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."** (Romans 8:1) --- What comforting words, **"...no condemnation..."**. As believers in Jesus as the promised Messiah and Son of God we are no longer condemned by our sin. As we learned through Adam, Abraham, Abel, David and so many other Old Testament examples and Messianic prophecies, **"For what the law could not do [to save] in that it was weak through the flesh, [our sin] God did by sending his own Son [the atoning Lamb] in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin..."** (Romans 8:3). And now Paul's readers could put it all together. The lamb of Abraham, the first fruits of Abel, the spotless L lamb in Egypt, all point to the Lamb of God who came to offer a final sacrifice of atonement to all mankind.

Paul then begins to discuss our Christian life, lived in Christ. He discusses our hardships and challenges in this life and the fact that, **"...sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."**

(Romans 8:18), and offers the encouragement, **"...If God is for us, who can be against us?"** (Romans 8:31), for, **"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us..."**. (Romans 8:37) And if that were not enough He then adds one of my go-to verses. A promise I read often when the stresses of life emerge, **"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:38-39) --- Amen Lord Jesus - Hallelujah!

Chapter 9

Although Paul is tasked with bringing the gospel to the Gentiles he is still a Jew and grieves over their disobedience and rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. He reminds them that God's word has not failed (Romans 9:6). In other words, their knowledge of the promise given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the prophecies given to Moses, Hosea, Daniel, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and many others should have been enough information for them to understand that God's grace would come through a sacrificial Lamb for both Jews and Gentiles. But they stumbled because they sought redemption through works and the Law, but not by faith. They stumbled because they failed to see Jesus - the stone in Zion (Romans 9:33) - as their Redeemer and as a result they tripped and fell into disbelief. Paul doesn't remind them of this with his own words or new theology, but uses the words of the prophets Hosea and Isaiah. Words they all should have known. (Portions of Hosea 1:9-2:23 / and Isaiah 1, 8 & 10). This troubled Paul in, **"...great sorrow and continual grief in my heart."** (Romans 9:2). To the point he says he would trade his own salvation for the salvation of Israel.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 continues Paul's plea for Israel's acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. I suspect if Paul could visit Israel today he would be appalled to find they still don't accept Jesus over two-thousand years after he made this persuasive argument. So here he summarizes his previous discussion of the Law versus grace by clarifying that, **"...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."** (Romans 10:4). Not only does this clarify the fact Christ is the fulfillment of the Law - through His sacrificial atonement of sin - but it also dispels the Reformist view of salvation because it offers righteousness, **"...to everyone who believes..."**, and not just to those who believe through a pre-regenerated heart that cannot deny God's irresistible grace. Instead, God's grace is offered to all so that, **"...whoever believes on him will not be put to shame."** (Romans 10:11), because, **"...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."** (Romans 10:13 / Joel 2:32). After this Paul expands on the spread of the gospel by asking, **"...How can they call on him in whom**

they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace." (Romans 10:14-15 / Isaiah 52:7). — How incredibly beautiful are the feet (and hands and voice) who bring the news of Jesus to a wretched lost world.

Chapter 11

Paul further expands on the story of Israel from both an historical and end-times. Those who study Revelation study will recognize what he means when he says, ***"...all Israel will be saved..."*** (Romans 11:26). Of course this doesn't mean all Jews will be saved just because they are Jews. Instead, Paul is pointing back to Old Testament scripture that prophesies a future event when the remnant of Israel, ***"...will look on me [Jesus] whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son..."*** (Zechariah 12:10b). But this event will not occur, ***"...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in..."*** (Romans 11:25b / Revelation 11:2 & 14:15). In other words, until the last Gentile who will accept Christ has done so. Leading up to this discussion Paul identifies Israel as a remnant and reminds them that through time God has always known a portion of His people would be obedient. But Israel's heart was hardened and for the most part still refuse to accept Jesus today. As a result, the gospel came to the Gentiles, who for a time will accept Christ and become His bride - the church. Paul makes this very clear, ***"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh [Jews] and save some of them."*** (Romans 11:13-14). In other words, Paul hoped that by leading Gentiles to Jesus that his Jewish brothers and sisters would become envious of what the Gentiles had and want it too. Paul completes this chapter with a doxology that combines portions of Psalms, Job and Isaiah as a beautiful praise of the majesty and power of God. (Romans 11:33-36)

Chapter 12

Now in chapter 12 Paul focuses on our life as a believer in Christ. Not just a believer, but a believer who lives for Jesus. Here we find another iconic Roman Road verse, compelling us to, ***"...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service..."*** (Romans 12:2) What an amazing statement, that our, ***"...reasonable service..."*** for the Lord is through our life lived for Him. But this is more difficult than it seems because our human nature is sinful, even after we are saved, so here Paul admonishes us to, ***"...not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** (Romans 12:2). Paul then instructs us how to do this. By not thinking too highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3), but instead to love, teach, encourage, give, show mercy, and to do all of that with

"...cheerfulness..." (Romans 12:8). He then provides one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible related to love (Romans 12:9-13), further instructing us to love those who treat us poorly. (Romans 12:16).

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 continues Paul's instructions on living a life for Christ. Here he focuses on a topic that will certainly hit home with us - living within an ungodly government. This is a passage Paul wrote at a time when the church was under extreme persecution from the Roman Empire. I look forward to investigating this in detail when we get to this chapter because I think it will help us better understand how Jesus expects us to act in our own time. Paul then takes another foray towards end-times prophecy by reminding us to, **"...awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."** (Romans 13:11). Paul is not talking about our justification (salvation) because he is clearly speaking to those who already believe. Instead, he is speaking of the Rapture. The time when Jesus will return to gather His bride (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). He then reminds us of something we need to remember everyday, **"The night far spent, the day at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."** (Romans 13:12). This is counsel we would do well to head today.

Chapter 14

Paul speaks here of living with one another without quarreling (Romans 14:1). We need to remember he was speaking to people from different backgrounds and cultures who were living in a totally hedonistic society (sound familiar?) To them, just as it is for us today, unity in the church and amongst believers is something we must seek and nurture. It is also something the enemy will seek to destroy through conflict and discord. Therefore, **"Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."** (Romans 14:19). This is something we should pay close attention to today.

Chapter 15

Paul reminds us of our reliance on God's word and our hope in Christ, **"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."** (Romans 15:4). He further emphasizes unity among believers by asking us to be, **"...like-minded toward one another..."**, to, **"...be with one mind..."**, as we, **"...abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit..."**. (Romans 15:6,7,13). Paul then shares his passion to come to Rome. He is shortly returning to Jerusalem to carry a donation given to them by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Apparently the church at Jerusalem was going

through a difficult time, so churches in other regions offered to help them. He also speaks here of his desire to go to Spain (Tarshish) and plans to stop in Rome along the way - possibly with their assistance (Romans 15:24). He then asks for prayer for the difficult mission ahead. A difficulty that would be much greater than he now anticipated.

Chapter 16

Paul concludes this beautiful book by commending several people who are part of his ministry. These included Phoebe from Cenchreae, near Corinth, a faithful servant of the church and apparently in need. Priscilla and Aquila, exiles from Rome with whom Paul lived and worked (Acts 18:1-3). Paul mentions his friend Epenetus, who was apparently the first Christian in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. He then mentions thirty-four other people. All identified in some way with supporting Paul and his ministry, including Timothy, and even the city director of public works. In citing all these names Paul shows his true love for people. At one time in his life he would have killed them all for following who he thought was an upstart carpenter, but now he praises them and shares even with us today, those who were near to his heart.

And with that, let's now venture deeply into God's word through the Book of Romans.

Lesson # 8 - Romans, chapter 1 verses 1-7

Quick Recap:

Rome:

The first several lessons in this series provided an historical and cultural view of the city of Rome and the Roman Empire. I hope these gave you sufficient understanding of the place and people Paul was writing to so we can put his message into its original cultural context.

Few cultures have had a greater influence on art, architecture and history than did the Romans, but few cultures unknowingly had a more bloodthirsty role in satan's plan to destroy Israel. It was into this culture Paul wanted to go but his plans were derailed for a time. Yet the early church in Rome flourished to the point Paul would recognize them for their strong faith. Eventually the Roman Empire imploded on itself but by that point they had unwillingly played a role in the spread of the new religion - Christianity.

Paul:

Saul, a zealous Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia was an angry man. Trained under the best rabbis in Jerusalem he became, **"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews, concerning the Law..."** (Philippians 3:5), and **"...a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee..."** (Acts 23:6 / 26:5). But his zeal for serving God caused him to misunderstand the young carpenter from Nazareth who claimed to be the promised Messiah. As a result, Paul sought to destroy anyone and anything associated with this new religion - the "Way" - because he felt it threatened to unravel centuries of Jewish tradition. So Saul, **"...persecuted this Way to their death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."** (Acts 22:4). And as he did he, **"...persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it."** (Galatians 1:13).

But all of that changed when Paul, on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians, met the resurrected Jesus face to face. Recognizing his error Paul accepted Christ and became His most zealous disciple, spreading the gospel throughout the Mediterranean nations and through them to the whole world. Along the way Paul endured extreme suffering and persecution. Beaten, stoned, shipwrecked and imprisoned he endured hardship after hardship as he traveled thousands of miles, planted churches, trained teachers and shared the gospel like no other. As he did he wrote thirteen epistles - letters of instruction or counsel - to both individuals and congregations. One of those letters, written to the early believers in the city of Rome,

became a primary source of the gospel truth and Christian life. A book like no other, it brings clarity to the connection between Old Testament Messianic prophecies and the carpenter from Nazareth named Jesus. A connection that clearly shows He is the Son of God and Savior of the world. Further, the book firmly establishes that our faith in Christ is not of our own efforts, but through Jesus who is the only source of salvation. It then implores us to live a life reflective of the grace we have received.

Overview of Chapter 1

Paul begins his epistle by introducing himself as both a slave and apostle to Christ. His introduction includes a very concise summary of the gospel and begins a common theme of this letter by explaining who Jesus is using Old Testament prophecy. This is important because these early believers were the first to realize that the poor carpenter from Nazareth - who had been crucified - is in fact the promised Messiah. This seems logical to us now, but to a first-century believer it was a profound revelation. Paul then praises the church for its obedience (Romans 1:8) and expresses his desire to see them. In doing so he clarifies why, ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Gentile."*** (Romans 1:16). Paul's intent is to explain salvation to both Jew and Gentile believers so they can understand more detail about their new faith.

Later in the chapter Paul will focus on idolatry and depraved sin (Romans 1:22-23). This may indicate chapter 1 is written primarily to the Gentile members of the church in Rome. But whoever the intended audience is, chapters 1 and 2 set the stage for an iconic tenet of our faith found in Romans 3:23, ***"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."*** This is key. Because in order to understand your need for redemption you must first understand your position as a sinner. Paul builds a case for this by helping his readers understand their need for a Savior. He starts with the most basic fundamentals by explaining that there is a God. Then he illustrates that all of us are sinners who need forgiveness from our sin. Through this discussion Paul will clarify:

- Jesus is the Christ - the promised Messiah and heir to the throne of Israel. (Romans 1:3)
- He is the true Son of God and our Lord. (Romans 1:4)
- It is by grace and through the gospel of Jesus we are saved (Romans. 1:21-30)
- And there are eternal consequences [wrath] for our sin. (Romans 1:16-17)
- God's existence should be obvious to all. (Romans 1:18-20)
- So, all of mankind sins and is without excuse as a result of our sin. (Romans 1:18 & 32)

Here Paul weaves a very simple chronological gospel he will expand on in later chapters. He clarifies the existence of God, the fact everyone sins, that sin comes with

consequences and that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah through whom the gospel is revealed (Romans 1:17). This may seem overly simplistic to us now, but it provided early believers and believers today the fundamental starting points of coming to Christ for the redemption of sin.

And with that, let's begin our journey with Paul through this amazing book.

Romans 1:1-7

Verse 1:1

There is no doubt who wrote this epistle. Not all of Paul's letters bear his name but this one does. But more importantly Paul tells us what he is, not just who he is, ***"...a bondservant of Jesus Christ..."*** Before he introduces himself as an apostle Paul declares himself to be a servant of Jesus. There are a couple of common ways this verse is interpreted:

- On one hand the word ***"...bondservant..."*** can be interpreted as a slave. Bought and paid for - as in this case by the blood of Christ - and therefore under servitude to that person.
- But there may be another way to look at this title. Paul uses the word *"doulos"*, a term that in Greek can mean, *"a slave, one who belongs to another without any ownership rights of their own"*. But in this application it could also mean more than we would generally think when we hear the word slave. In Greek *"doulos"* can also describe someone who willingly commits himself to serving his master. In the Hebrew mindset this could be a servant who, ***"...plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free..."*** (Exodus 21:5). It can be a term used with dignity to describe Paul's willing desire to live under Christ's sole authority. In the feminine tense it is the same word used by Mary when she was informed she would bear God's Son, ***"Behold the maidservant of the Lord!" Let it be to me according to your word."*** (Luke 1:38). Her response shows Mary's willingness to serve God without question, but not because she was forced to. By using this term Paul may signify he is more than just a bonded servant. He is a man who was once a true slave to sin (John 8:34) but is now a willing slave of the Lord Jesus. A transition he will describe later in Romans 6:6), ***"...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin..."***

Then Paul says he was ***"...called to be an apostle..."***. In doing so Paul declares himself to be an apostle of Jesus. In the Greek the word ***"...apostle..."*** literally means *"one who is sent."* Generally it is the term used to describe the twelve men chosen by

Jesus during His earthly ministry (Mark 3:13-19) plus Matthias who was later selected to replace the traitor Judas. (Acts 1:21-26). Apostles were not only followers of Jesus but were given special powers and the authority to speak for Christ. (2 Corinthians 12:12). Like them Paul was personally selected by Jesus Himself to be His apostle as the **"...chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel..."** (Acts 9:15) This made Paul a true apostle; specifically and uniquely trained by Jesus for a very special role. (Galatians 1:12) In this role he was not sent-out by men, **"...but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead..."** (Galatians 1:1). As he did here in Romans, Paul's introduction to his Galatian letter is also a summary of the gospel message. In this verse Paul declares Jesus to be the Messiah (the Christ), and proclaims His divine resurrection from the dead. Both are core elements of theology he was teaching to both Jews and Gentiles.

And through this role Paul was, **"...separated to the gospel of God..."**. Paul's task was clear, in that he was **"...separated..."** - specifically selected - for one purpose; to spread the gospel of Jesus. And as we will see, that is the essence of the entire Book of Romans. A clear and concise declaration of Christ's gospel truth linking Old Testament prophecy with Jesus as the Messiah. This message resonated with many in both the Jewish and Gentile cultures, and through Paul's ministry began to spread throughout the whole world. This was now Paul's life. To spread the gospel wherever he went, **"...to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you."** (1 Corinthians 9:22-23)

Verses 1:2-3

In verses 2 and 3 Paul summarizes the main theme of his epistle - to help his Jewish and Gentile readers make the connection between Old Testament prophecy and the man called Jesus of Nazareth. This was written at a time when many saw Jesus as a fraud who was crucified for the blasphemous act of declaring Himself to be God. Even Paul, the author of this letter, was originally a persecutor of those who followed the new religion. But now Paul will take those earlier prophecies, **"...promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,..."**, and illustrate they were in fact speaking of Jesus. His Jewish audience in particular would have been familiar with Messianic prophecies, **"...promised before..."** and should have recognized their fulfillment in Jesus:

- Paul wanted them to be aware of what Abraham foresaw when he comforted Isaac with the fact, **"My son, God will provide for himself the Lamb for a burnt offering."** (Genesis 22:8 / John 1:29)
- Or the prophet Micah who declared, **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come**

forth to me One who to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from the old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2 / Luke 2:4)

- Or like Isaiah, who tells us, ***"But he [Jesus] was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed"*** (Isaiah 53:5 / Luke 23:40-43)
- Or the Psalmist, who declared the Messiah would proclaim, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?..."*** and prophesied that His executioners would, ***"...divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots..."*** (Psalm 22:1&18 / Mark 15:34 / John 19:23-24)
- And Zechariah, who told Israel they will one day. ***"...look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn..."*** (Zechariah 12:10 / John 19:37)
- Paul wanted his audience to understand who Jesus is just as Phillip did when he met Jesus for the first time and quickly made the prophetic connection, ***"We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph..."*** (John 1:45)
- And as Nathaniel recognized, ***"...and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"*** (John 1:49)
- Or as Martha understood, ***"...Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."*** (John 11:27)
- Paul wanted them to grasp the prophetic connection like Mark did. Who in the introduction to his gospel account (which may be a re-telling of Peter's ministry) wrote, ***"...The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You." 3. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight."*** (Mark 1:1-3 / Isaiah 40:3 / Malachi 3:1). Do you see what he's saying? ***"...The beginning of the gospel..."*** didn't start in Bethlehem or on the cross. The gospel message began in Genesis 3:15 with the promised Seed, and in Genesis 3:21 when God covered Adam's sin with blood. Isaiah made that connection, as did Malachi and the other prophets, hundreds of years before the blinded and arrogant Jewish leadership crucified the Messiah.
- Paul wanted them to understand as John the Baptist did - the one who prepared the way - who upon seeing Jesus said, ***"...Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (John 1:29)
- He wanted them to examine the prophetic teachings and come to the same conclusion Simeon did, who when seeing the infant Jesus said, ***"...“Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to your word; For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of***

your people Israel." (Luke 2:28-32). His comment, ***"...prepared before the faces of all peoples,..."*** references hundreds of years of prophecy given to all people and meant to prepare the hearts of man for the coming Messiah.

- And Paul wanted their hearts to burn like the men on the road to Emmaus when the resurrected Jesus clarified who He is by explaining, ***"...and beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."*** (Luke 24:27)

Now through his clear and inspired writing Paul weaves together the prophetic story of Adam, Abraham, David and others to show a direct correlation between Jesus of Nazareth and what had been foretold by the Prophets of the promised Messiah. He begins this connection in verse 3 by clarifying that, ***".. his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh..."***. This proclaims the earthly bloodline of Jesus that made Him a descendent of David, the king who represents the traditional royal lineage of Israelite rulers. From a genealogical perspective this would have qualified Jesus as a literal "King" of the Jews even in an earthly sense. (Matthew 27:11) They should have understood this connection, if for no other reason than by the Messianic prophecy in 2 Samuel 7:12-14, where God established the throne of David but clarified it is in reality ***"...the throne of his kingdom forever..."*** ; speaking of the future kingdom of Christ that, ***"...shall be established forever..."***. From this the Jews should have recognized that Jesus was in the lineage of David and therefore the rightful heir to the throne. Given that and their knowledge of these and other prophecies they should have been able to ask as the Magi had done years before, ***"Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?"*** (Matthew. 2:2. The Magi understood this connection even though they were foreigners to Israel and probably not Jewish. And their claim was substantiated by the chief priests and teachers of the Law who confirmed for Herod where the Messiah would be born, ***"In Bethlehem in Judea," for thus it was written by the prophet..."***. (Matthew 2:5 / Micah 5:2). Yet Israel failed to recognize Jesus as God and ***"...did not know the time of your visitation ."*** (Luke 19:44). But now Paul intended to right that wrong by clearly explaining that Jesus, the poor humble carpenter from a small town, is in fact the Messiah. And as such, is God in flesh. (John 1:14).

We should also note the significant term, ***"...Jesus Christ our Lord..."***. To a Greek speaking Jew the name ***"...Jesus Christ..."*** spoke volumes. The term Christ - ***"Christos"*** - is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word ***"Masiah"*** which is Anglicized as ***"Messiah"***. Both translate as the term ***"Anointed One"***. In other words the name ***"...Jesus Christ..."*** declares the carpenter from Nazareth, named Jesus, is in-fact the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God, the King of Israel, our Lord and Savior to the world. Today we tend to take this term for granted and often use it in a casual sense without truly understanding the amazing prophetic connection. To a first-century Jew (as

it should be to us today) connecting the common name "Jesus" to the title "*Messiah*" meant this man from Nazareth is God.

He is the one spoken of throughout the Old Testament:

- He is the focus of every prophet.
- The Creator of all things.
- The Lamb promised to Abraham.
- The sacrifice of the Passover.
- The torn curtain in the temple.
- The Bread of Life.
- The Living Water
- The force that will crush satan's head.
- The One seated on the final throne of judgment.
- The Groom to His Bride.
- The one who will bring about the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem.

Once you get your mind around the depth and scope of who Jesus really is the term "Christ" will never be the same again. Instead, it will evoke trust in His word, confidence in His coming and strength in His fulfilled prophetic message. How tragically sad that even today most of Israel still does not see the connection. But may we, as His true followers, when we hear the word Christ, have an exhaustive mental rush of scripture that runs through our consciousness and takes us through the Biblical narrative of who He is.

Verse 1:4

Here Paul further clarifies the divine person of Jesus, as God, by providing three qualifiers:

- ***"...declared to be the Son of God..."***
 - The word "***...declared...***" in Greek, "*horizo*", is where we get the English word "horizon", and can mean "to distinguish from". In other words, Jesus is God in every sense but He is distinguished from the role of the Father or the Holy Spirit through His role as The Son of God, who putting on flesh became the Son of Man. A wholly unique role accomplished by no one but Him.
- ***"...according to the Spirit of holiness..."***
 - Although Jesus is God, just as the Father and Spirit are God, (John 1:1) His earthly ministry was fulfilled under the power of the Holy Spirit. The prophet Isaiah foretold this unique arrangement when he declared God's words, "***Behold! My servant whom I uphold, my elect one in whom my soul delights! I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring***

justice to the Gentiles." (Isaiah 42:1) Luke speaks of this when he recounts, **"Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee..."** (Luke 4:1) We see this connection again at Christ's ascension, when Jesus was, **"...taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles ..."** (Acts 1:2)

- **"...by the resurrection from the dead..."**
 - Paul further expands on the divinity of Christ by pointing out His resurrection, which is a key component of our salvation. As he explains later in chapter 10, **"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved."** (Romans 10:9). And as Jesus declared, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live..."** (John 11:25). Paul's core message is the gospel, and core to the gospel, and therefore core to salvation, is faith in the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as the holy sacrificial Lamb of God. A person cannot be saved who does not believe in the resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:12-20), so Paul makes it clear to his readers the salvation power of Christ's resurrection.

Verse 1:5

In John 14:6 Jesus tells us, **"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** From this we know that salvation comes only from one source - our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As Paul will clarify multiple times in this letter, no work or effort on our part can earn God's saving grace. It is only through our faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent resurrection that redeems our sin. This is a key qualifier for Paul's audience to understand. Particularly for his Jewish readers who had been raised in an environment focused on adherence to the Law and religious rituals. Here Paul will reveal that the Law was never intended to save, but was there to help us recognize our sin and the need for redemption. This same truth applies to Jews with the written Law of God or Gentiles with their inner law of morality given to them by God.

Paul's message to Jew and Gentiles alike was the same, **"...to bear my name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."** (Acts 9:15). Through this Paul was given the unique role of taking the gospel to the pagan Gentile world while also being witness to his Jewish brethren.

Verses 1:6-7

Paul's specific assignment was to be an apostle to the Gentiles, but he was also a teacher to Jewish converts which is why he spends considerable time making the connection between Jesus and Old Testament prophecy. Here he speaks to **"...all who are in Rome..."**, both Jew and Gentile, reminding them that they are loved by God and called to be His people.

Lesson # 9 - Romans, chapter 1 verses 8-17

In his introduction (verses 1-7) Paul identified himself first as a bondservant of Christ and then as an apostle. These were the credentials his Roman readers would need in order to understand who the writer is. Undoubtedly many of them would have heard of Paul. Some probably heard about his role as a missionary of the gospel, but others may have heard, as Ananias had, that he had been a zealous murderer of those who followed the "Way". (Acts 9:13). So in the next few lines of Paul's letter he would remove all doubt about his intent by clearly stating that he believed Jesus the carpenter is in fact the promised Messiah and the resurrected Son of God. This would bring credibility to his letter because people would understand that a Pharisee like Paul would never put something like that in writing and send it across the empire unless he was completely sincere in his beliefs. To do so would put him at odds with both Jewish and Gentile leadership, which was a very dangerous place for a person to be.

Now in the second part of his introduction Paul will express his longing to be with the church in Rome. A desire he had not yet been able to fulfill.

Romans 1:8-17

Verse 1:8

At the time Paul wrote his epistle to Rome he had never been there. Despite that, the church was obviously active and growing because he thanked God, ***"...through Jesus..."*** (see John 15:16) that, ***"...your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world..."***. Of course in Paul's day ***"...the world..."*** would have meant a much smaller place; namely the Roman Empire and a few outlying areas people in ancient times knew about. But even though their knowledge of the world was limited, his comment is still significant because two thousand years later we (the whole world) can still read of their amazing faith. Now, let's be clear. The fact Paul heard about their strong faith doesn't necessarily mean the reports were favorable. It's very possible Paul heard they were being persecuted for their faith, but even that would be praiseworthy to Paul because it meant their faith was out in the open and being noticed. This is important for us to understand in context. Rome, as the capital of the Roman Empire, was in many ways the epicenter of sin. Pagan idolatry, extreme immorality, and a blood-lust like no other made the Empire a very difficult place to be a Christian. We know this from Acts 18 which describes Paul's meeting with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. They were Jewish-Christian refugees from Rome who had been driven out by emperor Claudius when he evicted all Jews around 49 AD. Some believe it's very possible this eviction included, or may have even been focused on Christians, because Christianity was

viewed by the pagan Romans as an offshoot of Judaism. We see this in the writings of the ancient historian Suetonius who recorded that the eviction order was due in part because, "...their [the Jews] *continual tumults instigated by Chrestus...*"-- "Chrestus" may be an aberrant spelling of Christ indicating the riots may have been the result of conflicts with Christians. We see a similar situation in Ephesus when Paul's teaching resulted in riots (Acts 19:23-41) and in Thessalonica when it was said of Paul, **"These men who have turned the world upside down have now come here too."** (Acts 17:6). The Roman expulsion occurred just a few years before Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome. (Acts 18:1-3 / 16:20). That means those believers still in Rome who received Paul's letter were probably living under great persecution.

Based on that I believe these verses provide clear application for us today. Given the sinful condition of our society it is very easy for us to get frustrated. Failing morals, a progressive-socialist government and our nation's move away from God can really weigh heavy on your mind. But think about our ancient Brothers and Sisters in Rome. Surrounded by pagan idolatry, open and illicit behavior and a society with a thirst for killing Christians. It must have been a horrible place to be. Yet, in spite of their difficult environment their faith was so strong it was, **"...spoken of throughout the whole world."**

So, in self-reflection, I wonder if Paul would be able to say the same thing about us and our faith if he watched how we deal with our issues today?

Verse 1:9

Throughout the Book of Romans Paul will go to great depth to explain the gospel. He wants to be very clear that his service to God and the focus of his ministry is one thing, preaching, **"...the gospel of his Son..."**. Paul had to be very clear about this. The pagan people of Rome worshiped multiple mythological gods and at times even worshiped their human rulers. Likewise, and as we'll see in later chapters, his Jewish audience was deeply seated in observance of the Law and rabbinical teaching. In other words, the term "god" could mean different things to different people. So Paul is careful not to let his writings confuse anyone. He is a minister of the gospel message of the Son of the one true God. Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Messiah. Once this was made clear he then encouraged his readers by telling them he prays for them, **"...without ceasing..."** and they are, **"...always in my prayers..."**, undoubtedly interceding for their strength and witness in such an inhospitable place. And yet, even though Jews and Gentile Christians were both being persecuted (Paul qualified for persecution on both accounts), he wanted to be with them. He expresses this beautifully when he proclaims, **"...now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."** He seeks a way, through God's will, to get to Rome, because...

Verse 1:11-13

Paul wanted to be with them to teach the finer points of theology. The **"...spiritual gift..."** he wants to impart would be sharing with them what Jesus had taught him, and by doing so strengthening them in their faith (Galatians 1:15-18 / 2 Corinthians 12:1-7). But, it was more than that. He wanted to be encouraged by them too.

This speaks to my heart because it is something I have experienced firsthand. Several years ago I had the opportunity to work with Christian refugees in Thailand. These were people from all over Asia who had come to Thailand to escape persecution and death in their own countries. For the most part they had lost everything, and most were living in one or two small, hot rooms with only the most basic necessities. But despite these hardships many were so eager to tell you about Jesus. In fact, one young man from Pakistan told me, *"I believe God allowed me to be persecuted over 20 years to teach me how to share the gospel in this dark place."* I cannot begin to tell you how humbled I was (still am) by the faith of these Brothers and Sisters who showed such amazing strength under such extreme conditions. I went to Thailand thinking I was a strong mature Christian who would be a blessing to them. But instead, they were such a blessing to me. I was so encouraged by their faith in the face of such adversity that I have a hard time explaining the impact they continue to have on my life today. Given that, I can understand why Paul felt he would be encouraged by being in the midst of the church in Rome so, **"...that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."**

But it was not to be...at least not yet. As Paul explained, **"...13. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles...."** Apparently Paul had desired to go to Rome for some time but had been, **"...hindered..."** over and over. We don't know the details but Paul was obviously prevented from traveling to Rome even though he had planned to go, **"...often..."**. Later in chapter 15 he will explain his desire to come through Rome on his way to Spain. Although several early church manuscripts and writers indicate Paul traveled to Spain, the Bible is unclear whether or not he ever got that far west. But what is clear is that he hoped the church in Rome would assist him in his efforts to get there (Romans 15:23-25). And yet, even though he had, **"...a great desire these many years to come to you,..."** (Romans 15:23) at least for now he had been prevented from going. But prevented how and by whom? Paul isn't clear, but I think it's probably safe to assume it was not God's will for Paul to go to Rome - at least not yet - even though he kept trying and hoping, **"...now at last I may find some way in the will of God to come to you."**

I find his failure to achieve his desire to be very encouraging. How many times are there in our own walk with Christ when things don't go exactly like we planned? Maybe a ministry you were part of, or a service you provided just didn't pan out like you wanted. But why? You were doing it for the Lord - right? Well...maybe, and maybe not. Maybe you were doing it correctly but it was not something God had planned for you - at least not at that time. Obviously Paul's desire to go to Rome was honorable as he sought to bring the gospel to a new area, but as we will see later, it eventually happened in God's timing and in God's way. It is in these times in our own lives when we have to prayerfully step back from our own plans and seek the plan God intends for us to do. (Jeremiah 29:11). But what I also find interesting and encouraging, is apparently Paul didn't know why either. Here is a man called by God, trained by Jesus, taken into heaven, and yet, he had tried many times to go to Rome but, **"...was hindered.. "** from doing so. It would seem that Paul, of all people, would know exactly what God wanted him to do. But obviously he didn't. Yet he didn't give up. He continued in his desire to go even though his efforts had been thwarted many times.

But why did he want to go so badly? **"...that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles..."**. His comment, **"...among the other Gentiles."** may indicate the intended purpose of his epistle was aimed primarily at Gentiles, but in either case his desire was to, **"...have some fruit among you,.."**. This is the intended fruit of his ministry - any ministry - to bring lost souls to Jesus and to encourage and disciple their faith. To Paul the city of Rome must have seemed like an amazing mission field. Millions of lost souls with a vibrant young church already faithfully rooted in their midst. This is the harvest he sought. A harvest just like Jesus spoke of when He said, **"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few, therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold I send you out as lambs among wolves."** (Luke 10:2-3) Or the Lord's promise of a fruitful gathering, **"I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"** (John 4:35) This is the harvest Paul sought and he viewed the city of Rome as a fertile field for the picking. That's why he didn't give up trying to get there. Because he knew, **"...in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."** (Galatians 6:9)

Verse 1:14-17

Paul wanted this for everyone, **"...both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."** It is his eagerness that is so captivating and encouraging. He knew he had repeatedly failed in his attempts to get to Rome, but he also knew the opportunity for a great harvest was there. So he persisted in trying to get to Rome for one purpose, because, **"...16. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the**

power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Paul was not ashamed of the gospel message. The zealous Pharisee Saul was now Paul, an apostle of Christ, and nothing excited him more than the prospects of sharing Jesus in a new place. Here he simply states a truth we often miss by emphasizing that the gospel is more than truth. It is more than a story of saving grace. The gospel is **"...the power of God..."**. A power we can share. A power that reveals God in His glory to **"...everyone who believes..."**. Not to just the self-righteous Jew with his Law, but to everyone, no matter how sinful or pagan they may be. They can all be made righteous by faith - through the gospel of Jesus the Christ, so that, **"The just shall live by faith."** Here he quotes from Habakkuk 2:4. A verse that would be used centuries later by Martin Luther in his rallying cry for church reformation. This is the central theme of Paul's message - salvation through faith alone, in Christ alone. Faith, **"...from faith to faith..."**, a term that may mean all encompassing faith, as Paul says later in chapter 4 when he describes faith for the Jew and faith for the Gentile. (Romans 4:13-15) Just as Abraham had faith the Lamb would come (Genesis 22:8), and echoed by John the Baptist's proclamation that the Lamb was here (John 1:29). It is this righteousness that Paul seeks to bring to the people of Rome.

But the remarkable thing is Paul was able to influence Rome even if he wasn't able to be there. The fact he was hindered from going there in person resulted in the Book of Romans. No greater epistle of the gospel exists than this, and no telling of the gospel had more influence over more people, over more centuries than what we find here on the "Roman Road". Paul's inability to physically travel to Rome did not hamper his ability to give them the gospel. And in doing so, he is still sharing the gospel with the world two thousand years later.

Lesson # 10 - Romans, chapter 1 verses 18-32

Those who study Revelation will be familiar with the Biblical theme of “wrath” - God's judgment actions. In the most basic sense wrath is a direct by-product of sin. Mankind was originally created sinless, in a sinless environment and could have remained that way had he remained faithful to God. But God allowed man's obedience to be tested by enforcing strict adherence to a single commandment. If man remained obedient he could continue to flourish in God's perfect creation. But disobedience would bring death (Genesis 2:17). This promised death was a consequence of disobedience and set the stage for God's wrath against man's sin. That same battle rages in every lost soul even to this day and will continue to rage until Jesus returns as a Warrior King and, ***“...treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of God Almighty.”*** (Revelation 19:15). But God's wrath is not like a human emotion. Nor is it an irrational knee-jerk reaction to anger. God's wrath is measured, calculated and intended to ensure His will is done.

Through Revelation we also learn that God's wrath is just and righteous. Although God is a God of love, He is also holy and cannot tolerate unrepentant sin. He has made every effort to bring sinful mankind to repentance but for those who refuse His offer of grace there will be wrath. As a result, God's application of both love and wrath can be confusing. So to further explain the righteousness of God's wrath I will borrow here from the introduction to our lesson on Revelation Chapter 17.

- *"Through these seven Seal, seven Trumpet and seven Bowl judgments God will punish and eventually destroy the sinful remnant of mankind. The study of these judgments should have rendered our hearts even more broken for the lost. It is so sad to think of mankind refusing to turn to God for redemption and salvation even at a time when He openly proclaims the gospel in mid-air to the whole world. (Rev 14:6). Granted, it is a harsh reality that those who refuse God's free gift of salvation will fall under His firm hand of wrath. But as harsh and absolute as God's judgments may be, we must remember His actions are justified. As we look back on the sin of mankind and his continuous rejection of God's gift of salvation, we come to realize His judgment is holy and righteous because He has and will give every opportunity for mankind to repent. Over the centuries God has been so patient, wishing that no one would perish (2 Peter 3:9). Even to the point of sending Himself, in the person of Jesus, as a holy sacrifice for man's sin. (John 3:17) But even Jesus was rejected by the very men and women who should have accepted His offer of eternal grace. And that rejection, as we have seen, will continue through time and even escalate during the Tribulation. As a result, God's ultimate and eventual judgment comes down to one thing --- He is holy --- and because God is holy He cannot tolerate the unredeemed sin of man*

*or let it enter His kingdom. (Habakuk 1:13) Sin must and will be punished. For a believer, it was punished for us on the cross, but for a non-believer punishment will begin either at their individual deaths or in the judgment death of the Tribulation. Either way, their punishment will be justified and eternal. It is the time prophesied by Paul when, **"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."** (Romans 1:18)*

Now, to begin his detailed discourse on salvation, Paul takes his readers into a deep dissertation on sin and its consequence - the very essence of wrath - and the root of the gospel. He will do so by going back to the very basics of our faith and establishing the fact there is one true God. A God who has made Himself known to all mankind through the *"General Revelation"* of His creation. Here Paul cuts to the chase, and before going into much greater detail on the theology of salvation he sets the stage by helping his readers understand:

- There is an All-Holy God who has made Himself known.
- All mankind has sinned against the All-Holy God.
- And without redemption, the All-Holy God will reveal His wrath on sinful man.

This seems so simple and logical, but to a first-century reader, and to millions of lost people today, those truths represent a core understanding you must have in order to understand the need for salvation. So here Paul brings clarity to the fact that man's sin must be recognized in order for the application of grace to occur. Whether sin from the Gentile perspective (1:18-32) or Jewish perspective (2:1-3:8) it must be redeemed. This is important for his readers to understand. Whether Jew or Gentile his readers in every era must come to grips with the fact they are sinners, and as such, are doomed to wrath unless rescued by God --- who uses a lifeline of love and grace called the gospel.

Romans 1:18-32

Verse 1:18

Paul starts by clarifying that wrath comes from God. Whatever form wrath may take it is never the result of fate, chance or bad luck. **18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."** Paul is clear about the origin of wrath. It is **"...of God..."** and is **"...revealed from heaven..."**. In other words, wrath is a holy consequence from God against the actions of an unholy people. Going back again to Revelation again we see wrath is clearly a product of God's judgment actions. From the stormy mood of His throne room (Revelation 4:5), through the release of twenty-one end-times judgments, wrath is an intentional action of God against sin. (Revelation 6:1).

Just like the original curse (Genesis 3), the flood (Genesis 6), the exile of Israel (2 Kings 17:18 / 25:21) and countless other examples, wrath is both a punishing and realignment action of God against the disobedient. But here Paul is more descriptive about why God's wrath is revealed in the first place, **"...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."**. Basically, anything that is ungodly, or apart from God, is **"...unrighteousness..."**. It is sin. But he further notes a key element of man's sinful actions - that is, they **"...suppress the truth..."**. In doing so they either ignore or discredit the truth of who God really is and what God demands. In other words, their wickedness against God's commands either denies God's existence altogether or denies His supreme authority as the All-Holy God who deserves our praise and worship.

But we might ask, "How would someone in a different time and place know there is a God?" Paul explains this very simply by pointing to the fact, **"...19. because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them"**. So to make it **"...manifest...."** [visible], God generally reveals Himself in two ways:

"General Revelation" - is the undeniable presence of a higher power and Creator. Even the most staunch atheist will recognize the amazing mechanical "design" of nature. From the size and grandeur of the universe to the most infinitesimal subatomic particle God's supreme work is revealed to all. We see this clearly in Psalm 19:1-4 - **"1. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. 2. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. 3. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. 4. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."** God's amazing creation speaks to man's heart. It reveals His power and reveals knowledge of Him if man will simply seek to know Him more.

"Special Revelation" - God also reveals Himself through His word which has been illustrated by actions of divine power that could only be accomplished by God - like Jesus rising from the dead, the burning bush or parting the sea.

Here Paul focuses on *General Revelation* to show how God has revealed Himself plainly through His creation so that everyone, no matter how primitive, can understand that a Creator must exist. He has done this, **"...since the creation of the world..."** through His, **"...invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."** -- God reveals Himself through His creation so that man should seek to know Him more. In seeking Him they, **"...will call upon me and go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart."** (Jeremiah 29:12-13), so that eventually, **"...they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."** (John 17:3). Paul goes

a step further and declares the fact that mankind having, **"...clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,..."** is totally, **"...without excuse."** We could spend considerable time studying this truth and still not clearly understand how God's revealed nature removes man's excuse, but suffice to say, God has provided enough knowledge through both *General* and *Special Revelation* about who He is to remove any excuse mankind might have about why they did not pursue Him.

Paul clarifies this by declaring, **"...although they knew God,..."** through His *General Revelation*, **"...they did not glorify Him [recognize Him] as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22. Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23. and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."** Here Paul seems to be speaking primarily to idol-worshipping Gentiles. They had been given enough knowledge and moral consciousness to understand there is a Creator. Yet rather than seek to worship Him or thank Him they instead devised gods of their own invention, even going so far as to create images of their gods to worship. Paul addresses this same issue when speaking to the people of Athens Greece. A city that was, **"...given over to idols..."**. He challenged their idolatry by pointing to the fact there is one God who is Creator of all, **"...24. God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27. so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28. for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31. because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."** (Acts 17:24-31). There in Athens, speaking to the educated Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, Paul explains the gospel in much the same way he does for the Romans. Simply, there is a God, the supreme Creator, who makes all things and who does not desire to be worshiped through an idol. Instead, He asks His creation to seek Him, repent of their sins against Him and follow the one He has sent to lead them – the one risen from the dead - the Messiah Jesus. In this description Paul comes full circle again and goes back to his central theme...The gospel.

But mankind, in his godlessness and wickedness has drifted deeper and deeper into sin. As a result, **"...24. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25. who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen...."** This is a warning to all mankind. Despite God's efforts to reveal His divine nature to them, they ignored Him and **"...exchanged the truth of God for a lie,..."**. In doing so they ignored the obvious call of creation (Psalm 18) and His **"...eternal power and Godhead..."** [divine nature] that **"...are clearly seen,..."**, and have exchanged them for the lust of the flesh and turned to the worship of gods crafted by their own imaginations. For this, **"...God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts..."**. Allowing their sin to run its course as it self-destructs those who cling to their sin and will not repent. This in itself is a form of wrath. A self-imposed wrath that will lead to self destruction.

Paul then gets down to details and provides a list of deplorable sins the Roman people would have recognized. Sins that would eventually bring on them the, **"...penalty of their error..."**. Not simply because of each sin, but because their sin began to characterize who they were as a people. A society focused on wickedness to the point they were devoid of God. This is because they, **"...did not retain God in their knowledge..."**, by either *General* or *Special Revelation* to recognize who He is, **"...so God gave them over to a debased mind,..."**. A mind, **"...filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife..."** Paul continues with a long list of sin and pointing how it had come to characterize who they were as a wholly ungodly people. The Roman Empire was singularly wicked and actions generally considered vile and completely immoral were not only practiced but were praised, **"...not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."** This is not only a commentary on the heart of the people, but on the makeup of their society as a whole. Resulting in an empire that would eventually implode on itself after becoming one of the most sinful and bloodthirsty societies in history.

And yet Paul saw these people as a field ripe for the picking. Which is why he went to such lengths to explain their sin. He wanted them to understand that recognition of our sin is our first step to salvation. In fact, there can be no salvation until we come to grips with the fact we have sinned against an all-holy God and it is only through God's grace that those sins can be forgiven. The recognition of our sin, and the confession of that sin is the first step in the forgiveness of sin. Paul was preaching to a society much like the one we live in today. Immorality was not only accepted but was celebrated. To the point "sin" was difficult to recognize because it was considered to be "normal" behavior. It was a time much like our very own when there are, **"...those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"** (Isaiah 5:20). A time when even their religious leaders

and government swayed wildly from their moral conscience. Just as Paul told Timothy, ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*** (2 Timothy 4:3)

But without the recognition of sin a civilization cannot recognize their need for salvation, and without a need for salvation they don't recognize their need for a Savior. Paul's description of sin would speak to the heart of his listeners so they could begin to piece together the threads of the gospel and their need for Jesus.

I believe there is a valuable lesson for us in all this. Like Paul, we live in a hedonistic society bent on denying the very existence or supreme authority of an all-holy God. Morals are failing at a rapid clip as our government promotes laws legalizing practices in direct violation of God's clear directives. Even elected leaders who claim to be "Christians" often support platforms against both our internal moral compass and God's word - and they do it under the umbrella of "progress". This results in a society that fails to recognize their actions as sinful and therefore discounts their need for a forgiving Savior. Instead, they are so self-absorbed that concepts like the Prosperity Gospel movement seem to make sense to them. In this culture it is so easy for us as believers to become frustrated by what we see. To the point we huddle in little groups and point fingers at everyone. Instead, we need to be like Paul and embrace the opportunity we've been given to spread the truth of Jesus to a world that desperately needs Him.

Paul wanted to go to Rome - the epicenter of sin - because he saw a field ready for harvest. May we have the same goal in our own world.

Lesson #11 - Romans, Chapter 2 verses 1-16

Quick Recap:

In chapter 1 Paul expressed his desire to be with the believers in Rome. His hope was they would mutually encourage one another by their strong faith. But for some reason he had been hindered from going so instead he wrote them a letter to clarify the gospel of Jesus and to help them understand the beauty of their salvation. He begins with the basics. First, declaring there is a God who is clearly seen through the divine attributes of His creation. Then he focuses on idolatry and sin as mankind's dismissal of God through his wickedness against God's intended desires. For this rebellion no one has an excuse and all mankind will be eternally punished by God's wrath unless they recount their sin before God and accept His grace through faith in His Son - the promised Messiah.

Overview of Chapter 2

Unlike chapter 1, chapter 2 does not focus on idolatry but talks about the Law and circumcision. Both are topics that would have been part of a Jewish mindset. Given that, chapter 2 may be intended primarily for his Jewish readers.

But whoever the audience, Paul expands on a key truth and is leading up to the fact that, **"...all have sinned..."** (Romans 3:23). Which includes Gentiles who are, **"...without Law..."** and Jews who are, **"...in the Law..."**. (Romans 2:12). In Romans Paul will talk a lot about the Law. He does this to bring clarity that all mankind has a moral code in which to operate. Jews had the Old Testament Mosaic Law - the Ten Commandments plus hundreds of other "laws". These provided the moral, judicial and ceremonial regulations required for nationalist Israel to show obedience to God when they functioned as a nation (Exodus 20). But Gentiles also have a natural and moral law through their conscience so that they, **"...are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts."** (Romans 2:14-15). Paul stresses adherence to the law, not as a source of salvation, but as a way to recognize our sin, so that we can recognize the need for our redemption.

Now, let's dig into chapter 2

Romans 2:1-16

Verse 2:1-3

Verse 1 continues Paul's focus on mankind's sin and a key point he is working up to, which is the fact that, **"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23). Paul's statement, **"...you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge..."** is another way of saying, **"...they are without excuse..."** (Romans 1:20) because when they bring self-righteous judgment on others, they are, by their knowledge of sin, also judging themselves. Here Paul is speaking to those who judge others without recognizing they, **"...practice the same things [sins] ..."**. Jesus spoke of this when He said, **"...and why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?..."** (Matthew 7:3). Jesus is not telling us not to judge, but to first self-reflect on our own life and recognize our own sin before pointing out the sin of another. In this way we, **"...remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."** (Matthew 7:5). By removing the **"...plank..."** from our own eye, we recognize and correct our own sin, which then helps us **"...see clearly..."** so we can more effectively help our brother remove theirs. This verse is often misinterpreted to mean we should not judge others when in fact, Jesus says we should judge those who are morally wrong or outside the intended will of God. He clarifies this by saying, **"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement."** (John 7:24). In this case, **"...appearance..."** could be our own opinions or self-righteous viewpoint, whereas, **"...righteous judgement..."** would be driven by scripture. Isaiah speaks of our role in applying righteous judgment to failures in human morality when he says, **"...Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"** (Isaiah 5:20) To ignore evil would in-effect condone evil, which is something we should not do.

For example: Is it wrong to "judge" those who support the murder of unborn babies? No, because the Lord clarified the condition of unborn babies when He said, **"...Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you..."** (Jeremiah 1:5). Or even more clearly, **"...For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them..."** (Psalm 139:13-16)

Or, Is it wrong to "judge" a pastor of Prosperity or Progressive Gospel for being a false teacher? No, because Paul tells us, **"...As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed..."** (Galatians 1:9). Was Paul judging? Yes. He was judging **"...any man..."** who preaches a gospel other than redemption through Christ on the cross.

But before we seek to point out the failures of others we should humbly recognize the failures in ourselves. In doing so, we will seek to help our failing brother rather than self-righteously thinking ourselves superior to them. First century Jews in particular (part of Paul's intended audience here) and their pious leadership were known to judge arrogantly, because they thought they could judge through the lens of the Law. So they often did, and in a very self-righteous way. This made them feel superior to others who did not have the Law. So much so, that over time Rabbinical law added more and more restrictions in an effort to drive righteous living. Unfortunately, the result was a Jewish mindset so focused on self-righteous legalism they completely missed the coming Messiah simply because He came as a poor carpenter and not who they thought He should be. It was this righteous arrogance Jesus addressed when He told the Pharisees, **"...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also..."**. (Matthew 23:25-26). In other words, they were so focused on their righteous attitude and appearance, that they failed to recognize how corrupt they were on the inside. In doing so they failed to recognize God in the flesh even when He fulfilled prophecy and performed amazing miracles right before their eyes. So here Paul is very clear that whenever, **"...you judge another** [in this legalistic way] **you condemn yourself..."** because we all sin and fall short of God's expectations. Or put another way, we all sin, which is why we can all recognize sin in others, but in order to judge we must first recognize sin in ourselves. Paul will stress this again and again for the simple reason that recognition of our sin, and recognition of our inability to earn forgiveness ourselves, should cause us to recognize the need for God's redeeming grace.

So why is this focus on recognizing sin so important? Because, **2. "...we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"** The truth is, we will all be judged. Whether through the believers judgment at the Bema Seat, where, **"...we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."** (Romans 14:6-11 / 2 Corinthians 5:10), or through a non-believers judgment at the

Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11). In both cases God's judgment actions are just and righteous because they are **"...according to truth..."**. The truth of His word and the gospel of Christ. Going back to verse 1:20 it is this truth that does not allow anyone to, **"...escape the judgment of God..."** for the sins we all commit.

Verse 2:4-5

Paul continues this train of thought by stressing the attributes of God's amazing grace beyond the legalistic view of the Law or the moralistic view of man. The **"...riches..."** he speaks of is the gift of grace afforded to all who will accept. Jesus reminds us of this when He says grace is applied to all because, **"...He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."** (Matthew 5:45). He does this because He loves all the world and offers His grace to all who will believe (John 3:16-17). Peter touches on this as well when he reminds us of God's patience and **"...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance..."** (2 Peter 3:9). Unfortunately, the self-righteous Jew, basing his righteousness on adherence to the Law, or the self-righteous Gentile who thinks he's "good enough" through his works, does not see the fact that God's, **"...forbearance, and longsuffering..."** is intended to give mankind ample time to recognize the need for full repentance for their sin. In other words, judgment will surely come but after God patiently offers redemption and salvation to the world. Paul will continue to stress this key point to both the Jew, who felt they were righteous through adherence to the Law (which in reality they could not keep), and the Gentile, who sought righteousness through their own good works or religion, because in explaining what salvation is, he needs to explain what salvation is not. Paul made the same case to the church at Corinth where he said, **"...For Jews request a sign, [the Law] and Greeks seek after wisdom [moral law]; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness..."** (1 Corinthians 1:21-23) The gospel was a stumbling block to Jews because they believed they were certainly justified by the Law, and it was foolishness to non-Jews who felt they were probably good enough to merit an eternity with God. Interestingly, this same dichotomy still exists today - after two thousand years of the gospel message being preached. Both for Jews, who still feel they are somehow justified by the simple fact they are Jews, or modern Gentiles who believe they can probably work their way, earn their way or somehow be religious enough to find their way to heaven.

So Paul will continue to craft the message of Romans around this vital truth, **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ..."** (Romans 3:23). He does this to help his readers understand the fact they cannot find redemption through the Law or through their own efforts. So he warns them, **"5. But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God..."** In other

words, their self-righteousness will harden their hearts to the truth and therefore guarantee future punishment on the future day of judgment when, **"...I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God."** (Revelation 20:12)

Verse 2:6-11

In verses 6-11 Paul uses phrases that are often quoted but terribly misunderstood. On the surface, and as some misrepresent, these verses could be interpreted to indicate salvation by works - particularly terms like: **"...according to his deeds..."**, **"...patient continuance in doing good..."** and **"...to everyone who works what is good..."**. Taken alone, that's certainly what they appear to say, but when taken in the overall context of Paul's letter and his focus on redemption by grace, it is clear that is not what Paul meant. Paul will clarify this later in his letter when he states, **"...And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work..."** (Romans 11:6). Or said another way, if we can be saved by works, then there is no reason for grace, and by extension, no reason for the cross. But in these verses Paul is separating those who are saved through faith in Christ, from those who are seeking salvation through their own efforts --- their own **"...deeds..."**, **"...doing good..."** and **"...works..."**. His point is "if" you could be good enough, or "if" you could make yourself righteous enough, or "if" you could truly adhere to every element of the Law, then your deeds would be sufficient and you wouldn't need grace or the cross. But Paul will show that cannot be true, **"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh..."** (Romans 8:3) Here he is basically saying the Law cannot make us righteous because **"...through the flesh..."** we cannot adhere to the Law. Therefore, Jesus came, in the flesh (but sinless) to condemn sin on the cross. An act that our own works could not do. Paul stressed this same point to the church at Galatia when he said, **"For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."** (Galatians 3:21-23). Here again he stresses the point that the Law cannot bring justification and eternal life, but by the measure of scripture (God's judgment standard) we all sin and must be justified through Jesus.

But key to understanding this in context is the statement, **"...who 'will render to each one according to his deeds'..."**. (quoting Psalm 62:12). The key word here is **"...deeds..."**. Their own deeds. The Bible is clear throughout that man cannot be saved by his own **"...deeds..."**. Or another way of thinking about it, fifty lifetimes of good works on our part could never atone for just one sin committed against an all holy God. That's why God covered Adam's sin with a blood sacrifice (Genesis 3:21), why Abraham believed God would provide the sacrificial lamb (Genesis 22:8), why a spotless lamb at

Passover represented the atonement for sin (Exodus 12:5), and why Christ, the Lamb of God, the Son in flesh, came to earth as a propitiation of our sin. (Hebrews 9:15 / 10:10). Here in Romans Paul is making the case that no one can get to heaven through their own merit - either by the Law (Jews) or by their own morality or efforts (non-Jews). That's why he speaks to the, **"...righteous judgment of God, who *“will render to each one according to his deeds”***. That means God has already judged the saved through the work of Christ on the cross - which are His deeds, not ours, - but will judge unrepentant man by his own deeds. We see this clearly in Revelation 20, at the Great White Throne Judgement when each lost person will be judged and sentenced based on their own works, **"...Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."** (Revelation 20:11-15) This is the final judgment of those who died throughout history without accepting God's redemptive grace. Pay careful attention to how they are going to be judged, **"...and the dead were judged according to their works..."**. John repeats this twice for emphasis. These are the people Paul is talking about. Not the ones saved by grace, but the ones, **"...not found written in the [Lambs] Book of Life..."**. They will be judged according to their own deeds and works, which in themselves could never outweigh a single sin committed against God.

Verses 2:12-16

Paul then clarifies further who he is talking about and links judgment back to the Great White Throne when Jesus will judge the lost - those whose names were, **"...not found written in the Book of Life..."**. (Revelation 20:15)

The point in all of this is"

- We have all sinned against an all holy God,
- Nothing we could ever do on our own could ever atone for our sin,
- So God came as Christ to be our blood atonement,
- Judgment will one day come and everyone will be judged,
- Either by our acceptance of Christ's work on the cross Or by our own feeble efforts.

In essence, that is the gospel.

Lesson # 12 - Romans, Chapter 2 verses 17-29

Quick Recap:

To fully appreciate the Book of Romans we must remember the context in which Paul was writing. His intended readers lived in one of the most sinful cities in history with a population that consisted largely of Jews raised under the restrictions of Rabbinical Law, and Gentiles raised in a pagan culture of idolatry. Both groups could justify in their own minds the ability to achieve righteousness or immorality through their own works. Paul's attempt to discredit this notion was to help his readers understand the extent of their sin and the futility of relying on works-based forgiveness. Ironically, even though Paul's letter was written over two-thousand years ago it applies equally well to our hedonistic culture today.

Romans 2:17-29

Verses 2:17-20

Paul now turns his attention to his Jewish readers to help them understand their need for the gospel. In these verses he will address three areas that result in their self-righteousness:

- Their Abrahamic heritage,
- Their knowledge and guardianship of the Law
- Their religious rituals.

Paul points these out to help them understand that none of these are sufficient to bring salvation without faith in Christ. All of this is leading up to Paul's proclamation in chapter 3 that all have sinned and all fall short of God's perfect measure. To do this Paul first recognizes his readers Jewish identity but then emphasizes their arrogance and reliance on their religious heritage as their source of perceived righteousness. The fact they, ***"...rest on the law..."*** gives a sense of complacency. Sort of like when we warn someone not to, ***"...Rest on your laurels..."***. As recipients and followers of the Law they had convinced themselves the Law in itself was enough to ensure righteousness and everlasting life. A character flaw the prophet Micah spoke of when he said, ***"...Her [Israel's] heads [leaders] judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord, and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? No harm can come upon us.'" (Micah 3:11)***. John the Baptist also spoke of this false notion when He warned Israel's leaders to recognize their supreme arrogance, ***"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the***

wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." (Matthew 3:7-9) Here John the Baptist points to the attitude of Israel's leadership who based their righteousness on the fact, **"...We have Abraham as our father..."**, speaking of their Jewish heritage. A point John denounces by telling the Jewish leaders they need to repent of their sin. He then points out the foolishness of their historical attribution to Abraham by saying that God could raise up a rock as righteous as they are. Now Paul points to the fact they not only rest on their legacy, but also on their knowledge of God's Law. As those, **"...instructed out of the law.. "** they are also the teachers of the Law to, **"...the blind..."**, **"...those who are in darkness..."**, **"...the foolish..."** and **"...babes..."**. But his explanation isn't complimenting them as teachers - but is pointing out how they are leading Israel astray. Not only because they tend to be self-righteous but by their actions they teach self-righteousness rather than teaching the need for redemption of sin. Jesus pointed this out to Nicodemus (a Pharisee) when He asked, **"...Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"** (John 3:10). The point being, Nicodemus and the other Jewish leaders should have immediately recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah based on their knowledge of Old Testament prophecy. But sadly they didn't. Instead, they crucified Him for what they viewed as blasphemy. This legalistic blindness is why Jesus told the wicked Pharisees, **"You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."** (Matthew 23:24). Here He is making much the same point as Paul in that they were so focused on their legalistic restrictions (a gnat being the smallest of unclean animals to avoid) that they missed the big picture; the purpose of redemption through Christ. This is a sad commentary of the Jewish people who had originally been chosen to spread God's message of redemption to the world.

Verses 2:21-23

The Jews were hypocritical and viewed their heritage as the holders of God's commandments as somehow making them righteous even though it was impossible to adhere to those same commandments. Paul will later point out the blessings of Israel when he says, **"...Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the services of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came..."** (Romans 9:3-5) The Jews had it all - the law, the rituals, the land, the covenants, the promises of God's chosen people, and even the earthly birthright of the Messiah. But they let this go to their head and had become so self-righteous they failed to recognize the Messiah or heed His message. But even more fundamental to their error was the fact they based their righteousness on adherence to a Law they could not adhere to themselves, because, as Jesus said, **"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."** (James 2:10). Or, in other words, **"Break one and you've**

broken them all". This minor detail should have been obvious to them if for no other reason than through their knowledge of scripture, "...But to the wicked God says: ***"What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son."*** (Psalm 50:16-20). Both the Psalmist and Paul are pointing out the obvious; they did not practice what they preach (Matthew 23:3). Instead, they relied on adherence to the Law as their source of righteousness but then broke the Law, therefore negating any hope of redemption through works.

Verses 2:24

And as a result, the Jews bear false witness in front of their Gentile neighbors. Instead of sharing the message of the Messiah they see themselves as superior because of their Jewish heritage. The humble life Jesus lived out in front of them should have shown them how they should live and the message they should carry. But their self-righteous and superior attitude made them a stumbling block to those around them.

Verses 2:25-29

Paul then focuses on the third element of their confusion - religious rituals - and particularly circumcision. --- Circumcision was an outward sign of obedience to God for the Jewish people. Initially established to represent the covenant with Abraham it symbolized the cutting away of sin in our lives (Genesis 17 / Leviticus 12:3). But some Jews - a group called Judaizers - interpreted circumcision, and other Jewish customs, to be a component of salvation. In other words, they believed that in order to be a Christian you must first become a Jew, which meant you must be circumcised. We see this in Acts 15, ***"...Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question."*** (Acts 15:1-2). As a result of this dispute, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and church leaders - an event later called "The Jerusalem Council". There Paul made the case against non-Jewish converts having to comply with Mosaic Law but instead were saved through faith in Christ. The council agreed and their decision was eloquently defined by Peter who said, ***"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."*** (Acts 15:10-11). Here Peter expresses the same position Paul is giving to the church at Rome. The simple fact they were basing their righteousness on a set of rulings, ***"...neither our fathers nor we***

were able to bear..." The council sought to right this wrong by sending a letter to the churches explaining that salvation is through faith in Christ and not through the Mosaic Law or rituals, ***"...Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment..."*** (Acts 15:24 / see also Galatians 2:14)

So given that, here in his letter to the Romans Paul is clarifying the fact rituals do not bring salvation. Even circumcision, which was a direct link to their Abrahamic covenant. He explains this by saying, ***25. "For circumcision is indeed profitable (useful) if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision."*** Or said another way, if you were able to adhere to the Law (committing no sin) then circumcision would be a viable sign of your righteousness, but since we all sin and therefore all break the Law then circumcision has no role in redemption. It might be a sign of Jewish obedience, but that obedience in itself does not guarantee righteousness. So Paul further explains, ***26. "Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27. And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?"*** He's making a point that if a Gentile could adhere perfectly to the Law then his efforts would be considered righteous and would be counted as circumcision. But none can adhere to the Law, neither Jew or Gentile, so circumcision (as a religious ritual) does not bring righteousness.

Through this lengthy discussion in chapters 1 and 2 Paul has sought to establish a key point --- we all sin - and our sin cannot be redeemed through our own efforts. Even Jewish heritage, knowledge of the Law and practice of religious rituals are insufficient to outweigh our sin. Clearly establishing these ground rules enables Paul to now show why redemption through Christ is necessary.

Lesson #13 - Romans, Chapter 3 verses 1-20

Quick Recap:

In chapters 1 and 2 Paul established a firm foundation for explaining the gospel of Jesus. First he explains there is a trinitarian God whose existence is seen in His creation. Then he spends a great deal of time making the point that everyone sins - Jew and Gentile alike - and that sin brings righteous wrath. Paul gives examples of sin and points out the Gentile legacy of idolatry and the Jewish tendency to assume righteousness based on their Abrahamic heritage, as holders of the Law and as practitioners of religious festivals and rituals. Paul goes to great lengths to help the Gentiles understand the depravity of their sin and to help the Jews understand their observances are elements of obedience but are not a source of salvation. All of this is leading up to Paul's profound proclamation that all have sinned and need redemption through the Messiah.

Overview of Chapter 3

Here Paul starts with a very profound statement, "...because to them [Jews] were committed the oracles of God." (3:2). Whether it is Old Testament or New, the Jewish people have been entrusted with transcribing the inspired words of God that guide our faith. But in reminding them of this Paul brings out a zinger, "There is none righteous, [Jew or Gentile], no, not one;..." (3:10) Despite the law - Mosaic or moral conscience - no one can gain righteousness through their actions. But in pointing this out Paul explains the purpose of the law, that, "...by the law is the knowledge of sin." (3:20). This applies to either a Jew with the Rabbinical Law or Gentiles with a natural law. In both cases everyone has an internal awareness of right and wrong and therefore is guilty of committing sins against God. Paul then begins a discussion he will expand on throughout Romans and in several of his other epistles - and that is - salvation comes through faith alone and not by works or the Law, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified [saved] by faith apart from the deeds of the law." (3:28). This will begin a detailed discussion on justification (salvation) through faith in Christ alone. This truth was vitally important to Paul's Jewish readers in particular to help them understand that salvation never came from the Law. The Law enabled them to recognize their sin and therefore their need for redemption, but in and of itself did not save. Likewise, his Gentile readers, governed by the law of natural conscience, would also recognize their sin and the fact that nothing they could do themselves would result in redemption. This is all part of Paul's efforts to help all of them understand that redemption and salvation can come only through Jesus.

Romans 3:1-20

Verses 3:1-2

Here Paul further establishes his position that Jewish heritage and religious rituals do not bring salvation. But, in doing so he recognizes these things are an advantage in the sense they were given to Israel as part of their covenant relationship with God, even though in themselves they do not guarantee righteousness. Paul explains this by reminding his readers that Israel was given custodianship of God's **"...oracles..."**, His holy word ("*logos*" in Greek). To them this referred to the entire Old Testament that was inspired by God and given to Jewish writers and prophets. This revelation began with Moses - the author of the first five books of the Bible, the Torah - who said, **"1. Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. 2. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."** (Deuteronomy 4:1-3). These **"...statutes, judgements, word and commandments..."** represent the written word given to Israel. Starting with the five books of Moses and added to over time by God through various human writers and prophets, these **"...oracles..."** eventually became the canonical Old Testament (and later New Testament) we know today. Paul's underlying point is that having been given God's word Israel should have understood the Messianic promises and saw them fulfilled in Jesus. They all had a basic understanding that Abraham said God would provide a sacrificial Lamb (Genesis 22:8), which for generations had been represented by the sacrificial offering of the spotless Passover lamb (Exodus 12:5). Through this and the words of the prophets they should have been able to piece together the story of Jesus from the word's many references.

For example:

- Psalm 22 describes the suffering of the Messiah and includes the specific words Christ spoke on the cross, **"...My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** (Psalm 22:1) which is also recorded in Matthew 27:46.
- It also alludes to the reaction of the leaders, people and even the criminal crucified with Christ, **"...All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!." (Psalm 22:7-8).** We see this exact reaction in several passages in the New Testament:
 - **"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days,**

save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

- Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, **"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' "** (Matthew 27:39-43). In this case the chief priests, scribes and elders - students and teachers of God's prophetic word and seekers of the Messiah - said the exact same words scripture said they would. Didn't any of them realize that? **"And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God." The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."**
- **"...Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."** (Luke 23:35&39)
- And what scribe, leader or observant Jew would not have remembered the Psalmist proclaiming, **"For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."** (Psalm 22:16-18)
- Did these words not ring true in their hearts as they observed the Roman soldiers nailing Jesus through His hand and feet, describing in detail the process of crucifixion before it was even invented?
- And did they not understand what they were seeing when they watched the soldiers as they, **"...divided His garments and cast lots."** (Luke 23:34)?
- Did they not recognize the prophetic words in Isaiah 53 that described the Lamb being beaten and killed for our transgressions?
- Did they not remember the words of Micah who proclaimed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem? (Micah 5)
- Did they not realize as the Roman centurion did, **"...So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"**" (Matthew 27:54)
- Did the Pharisees not stop to consider who Jesus is when they heard John the Baptist say, **"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29).

But probably most reflective of all prophetic pointers to Jesus is provided in the story of His walk along the Road to Emmaus. When even followers of Christ began to doubt

who He is. For this I repeat here a portion of Lesson #5. --- *"Here we see Jesus after He had risen from the tomb. As He walked along the road to Emmaus He came upon two men who were probably both Jewish and Christian. They were disturbed because Jesus had been crucified and they had lost hope in Him as the Messiah. **"...He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?'"** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"..."* (Luke 24:25-27) Did you notice how Jesus taught them who He is? He didn't perform miracles or call legions of angels from heaven to prove His divinity. Instead, *"...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself..."*. He used Old Testament scripture - here described as *"...Moses..."*, the first five books of the Bible and *"...all the Prophets..."* - to show them the Messianic prophecies, *"...concerning himself..."*. And when that happened their eyes were opened and they made the mental connection between the ancient Messianic prophecies and the carpenter from Nazareth! That revelation is why they found their, *"...hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"...*. All Jesus did to open the Scriptures was to show them evidence in the Old Testament that He is truly the Son of God.

But sadly, Israel's heart did not burn and they failed to recognize their beloved Messiah even though, *"...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* (2 Timothy 3:15) Here, in a different setting, Paul is reminding Timothy that scripture had always pointed to the Messiah Jesus as the source of salvation. Similarly Jesus was also very clear about His true identity and reminded the Jews of the futility of seeking eternal life through the Law, thereby making it clear salvation must come from Christ alone, *"You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."* (John 5:39-40)

He further emphasized this truth in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. --- When the rich man in hell asked Abraham to send someone to witness to his living brothers Abraham answered, *"...They have Moses and the prophets [the Old Testament]; let*

them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead...’ (Luke 16:29-31). In other words, the Law and the scriptures were all they needed to understand who the Messiah was. But they ignored that and became blinded fools. Even when Jesus Himself rose from the dead.

The point is, the Jews were entrusted with God's inspired words and should have been able to link clear Messianic prophecy with the man Jesus. But they didn't, and as a result they totally missed the advantage of being the curators of God's Word.

Verses 3:3-8

Paul's message was undoubtedly hard for the legalistic Jew to accept. His notion that salvation comes through faith and the acceptance of Christ and not through their Abrahamic heritage or the Law, was a full-on strike in the face of their rabbinical teaching. So Paul anticipated some pushback and here presents an argument explaining their unrighteousness is sin that cannot be redeemed through their religious actions. He ***“...speak(s) as a man...”***, in other words making a logical argument, by asking a rhetorical question: If some Jews were unbelievers would that nullify God's promise to all Jews? To answer his own question he quotes from Psalm 41 and 116 to remind them that all men are liars and sinners and that God's word is truth. He then addresses their anticipated question about God's wrath - clearing up any misunderstanding that God's wrath is unjustified because our sin is what brings out His grace. Paul will further clarify this in chapter 5 when he says, ***“Moreover the law entered [was provided] that the offense [sin] might abound [be recognized]. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** (Romans 5:20-21). Here he clarifies again that the Law exists to help us recognize our sin, and through the recognition of sin comes the gift of grace, a gift that comes only through Christ Jesus. So Paul, again anticipating their rebuttal asks, ***7. “For if the truth of God has increased through my lie [my sin] to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?”*** Here he is trying to answer a question that may be on the mind of a legalistic Jew who might feel God's will is enabled through the action of forgiving their sin, therefore their sin might have a divine purpose. Paul makes it clear, over and over, that everyone, including the most righteous Jew will be judged because we all sin and that sin cannot be redeemed by the Law that was given to man to point out his sin. Moreover, their sin is disobedience against God, not some misdirected way of allowing God to exercise His grace. This is a truth beautifully expressed hundreds of years before in Isaiah 55:6-7. A text expressing salvation through forsaking our unrighteousness and seeking a relationship with the Lord Himself, ***“Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his***

way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

To us as modern-day Gentile believers this may seem like a circular argument over something that should be so obvious. But to a Jew who believed in righteousness through heritage and the Law this was a profound revelation. Yet there is a contemporary application as well. How many denominations today believe in salvation through observation of "holy" ordinances, substitutional prayer or infant baptism. And how many people believe they will "go to a better place" simply because they are a good person, or they go to church or own a Bible? They believe their religion or works will somehow result in enough righteousness to get them through the gate. Paul's argument to the first century Jew is an argument needed just as much today as it was then. Understanding the basis of his position not only helps us better understand the core doctrine of salvation but will help us as we witness to others who see through the same veil of confusion.

Verses 3:9

So, Paul asks, are Jews with their Law and oracles better than others? No. Because they, like Gentiles, still sin. Here Paul reinforces that fact by pointing to a truth he has been building up to since chapter 1. That is, all have sin and none are righteous on their own. - None. Neither Jew nor Gentile. None are without sin and none can earn righteousness, even through their heritage, the Law, religious rituals or their own works.

Verses 3:10-18

Here Paul presents the root of his argument in full force, ***"...There is none righteous..."***. To do this he returns to the familiar Old Testament and paraphrases portions of several Psalms and part of Isaiah 59 to clearly illustrate examples of Israel's transgressions. He presents these, ***"...As it is written..."***, - taken directly from the same scripture they feel brings them righteousness. Here he points to the root of their issue: **11. "There is none righteous, no, not one..."** (see Psalm 14:1) - All have sinned, Jew and Gentile alike because, 12a. ***"They have all turned aside..."*** (see Psalm 14:3a) relying on their own religious efforts but not on God's grace. **12b. "They have together become unprofitable..."** (see Psalm 14:3b) In that there is no saving benefit in their elements of obedience and pointing out, **12c. "There is none who does good, no, not one..."** (see Psalm 14:3c) Paul repeats this again for emphasis, and then he lists examples of their true character:

- 13a. ***"Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit..."*** (see Psalm 5:9)
- 13b. ***"The poison of asps is under their lips..."*** (see Psalm 140:3)

- 14. **"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness..."** (see Psalm 10:7)
- 15. **"Their feet are swift to shed blood..."** (Isaiah 59:7-8)
- 16. **"Destruction and misery are in their ways..."** (Isaiah 59:7-8)
- And as a result, 17. **"...the way of peace they have not known."** (Isaiah 59:7-8)
- Because, 18. **"There is no fear of God before their eyes."** (Psalm 36:1)

This is tough love on Paul's part but it is necessary to help his readers understand the scriptural documentation of their sin in God's eyes. This is a profound revelation intended to help them understand the depth of their sin and their need for true redemption. The point **"...There is none who understands..."** speaks to the fact their knowledge of scripture in itself does not bring righteousness. Likewise, the fact, **"There is none who seeks after God."** Illustrates that none are righteous unto ourselves. Because, **"They have all turned aside..."** in our sin which is our turning away from God. Then Paul reminds them again that nothing we do earns righteousness because our efforts **"...become unprofitable..."** due to the fact, **"There is none who does good, no, not one."** He then lists sin after sin leading to, **"...Destruction and misery..."** because, **"...There is no fear of God before their eyes."** This is the sad fact that man's efforts of self-righteousness disregards the grace of God. But this is just as true today as it was when Paul wrote it.

Verses 3:19-20

Paul brings it all together in these two key verses: **"...we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."** The Law does not save. It serves as a vehicle to help our hearts recognize the things we do that God considers sin. Those under the Law - whether Mosaic or natural - have no excuse because they know what sin is, our self-righteous words are meaningless and are all guilty before an all holy God. **"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."** - This is the hard truth we must all recognize; that our **"...deeds..."**, or works of our own doing, will never justify us in God's eyes.

This is the core of Paul's epistle and the need for his letter to Rome. --- Neither Jew nor Gentile can be justified and redeemed of their sin, no matter how righteous they may be, through religion or extraordinary efforts of their own. They must be justified by the grace of God through the promised Messiah. This was a tough pill for many to accept then, and maybe an even tougher pill today.

But that is the beauty of this letter.

Lesson # 14 - Romans, Chapter 3 verses 21-31

Quick Recap:

Up to this point in his letter Paul has made a very compelling argument that sin presents the need for redemption and salvation. He did this to help the legalistic Jews understand they are not saved by their heritage or the Law, and that Gentiles are not saved by their good works. Paul summarized his focus in a single profound verse, **"...There is none righteous, no, not one;..."** (Romans 3:10). This statement is profound because it proclaims that neither self-righteous Jews nor religious Gentiles are righteous in the eyes of an all holy God. He followed this later in chapter 3 by presenting a rhetorical argument that anticipated potential pushback from his listeners. An argument that would further help them understand their need for Jesus.

Now Paul moves his message along by explaining how God's gift of righteousness through Christ is necessary because, "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

Romans 3:21-31

Verses 3:21-31

Near the beginning of his letter Paul made a proclamation that is as profound today as it was in the first century, **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"** (Romans 1:16-17). Here Paul goes beyond a superficial understanding of the gospel message to ensure his readers understand that the gospel, **"...is the power of God to salvation..."**. The gospel is not a fairytale nor meaningless religious rhetoric from the mind of man. It is literally **"...the power..."** of an Almighty God to bring salvation to rebellious sinners. The underlying point being, how could the feeble efforts of man obtain righteousness if the source of salvation requires, **"...the power of God..."**? To answer this Paul goes a step further to declare the **"...power of God..."** revealed in His righteousness is available to Jew and Gentile alike through faith. Not faith in a gospel of legalistic Jewish observances or faith in a gospel of extraordinary human efforts, but faith in the, **"...gospel of Christ..."**, the message of the promised Messiah.

Now Paul will build on this position that no one is righteous in themselves by providing one of the Bible's most beautiful expressions of salvation. The gist of which every Christian should seek to clearly understand. He begins by clarifying that, **"...the righteousness of God..."** is not a result of the Law but is clearly, **"...revealed..."** and

"...witnessed [testified to] **by the Law and the Prophets,..."** In other words, as he has been saying, the truth of God's **"...righteousness..."** has been made clear through His word, which includes the commands of God in the Law and the clear Messianic prophecies of a sacrificial Redeemer. His Jewish readers should have already known this through the prophets. Isaiah for example spoke of righteousness as a gift from God, **"Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the Lord, have created it."** (Isaiah 45:8) The premise that righteousness and salvation comes from God, our Creator, through faith in Jesus, is further amplified in Hebrews, **"...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."** (Hebrews 12:2). This is the point Paul is trying to make by explaining that, **"... the righteousness of God..."** is obtainable, **"...through faith in Jesus Christ..."**, and is available, **"...to all and on all who believe..."**, **"...for there is no difference;..."** between Jew or Gentile - it is available to everyone.

Paul then puts an exclamation point on his argument by proclaiming, **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."**. That single statement, **"...for all have sinned..."** is one of the most difficult truths for sinful mankind to agree with. Whether first century Jew or Gentile, or modern day man, humans typically view themselves in a very good light, and assume they are either religious enough to earn God's righteousness, or are somehow good enough to avoid being the recipient of wrath from a God of love. But what they miss is the standard by which their human efforts are measured, and the fact that the most extraordinary efforts of mankind cannot counterbalance the consequences of just one sin. Why is that? Because man's efforts to mitigate his own sins are weighed against, **"...the glory of God..."**. The glory of an all holy God who simply by being an all holy God cannot accept sin or the feeble efforts of man to redeem their own sin. What mankind fails to recognize is that our own efforts to obtain righteousness are measured against God's standard of divine perfection, which means, **"...all have sinned and fall short..."**. The reality of this statement is so difficult for mankind to accept about themselves, but without an acceptance of their failure mankind will never understand the need for the gift of imparted righteousness.

But there is a way to be redeemed, and now Paul brings it all together to explain that righteousness can be obtained so that even the most sinful human can be saved and, **"...justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,..."**. Up to this point Paul has made a compelling argument that all mankind sins and even our best efforts at redemption will fail. Yet, the righteousness we seek can be obtained **"...freely ..."**, without efforts of our own, through faith in Christ Jesus. This is the same thing Jesus Himself said when He proclaimed, **"...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one** [Jew or Gentile] **comes to the Father** [for righteousness] **except through Me."**

(John 14:6) Now, in the context of Paul's explanation the words of Jesus make so much sense. Because of our sin, we cannot get to the Father and His gifts of righteousness and salvation, unless we do so through faith in the work of Christ on the cross. That is the core essence of the gospel - the "Good News" of grace. A truth Peter further clarifies by explaining, **"...Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved..."** (Acts 4:12). There is no other but Jesus.

- He is the narrow gate through which we must enter (Matthew 7:13-14).
- He is the door open to the sheep (John 10:7).
- He is the light of the world and the bread of life who brings salvation to mankind. (John 3:17 / 6:35 / 8:12).

Building on this point Paul makes the same claim that Peter does by clarifying that sinful man is saved by the free gift of God's grace. Free, because as God proclaimed through Isaiah, **"...Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money..."** (Isaiah 55:1). Those who thirst for the Lord may receive the water of life for free. It requires no money (payment) on our part because our payment - by works - is worthless, so our debt has to be paid by Christ. For as God said through the writer of Hebrews, **"...so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many..."** (Hebrews 9:27), so that this righteousness comes only one way, **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is Jesus, **"...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed."** (1 Peter 2:24)

So let's dwell on that thought for a moment: We were spiritually healed by wounds placed on the body of God by the hand of man – for our sin. That is why salvation by grace is so profound.

And that is the root of the gospel message Paul wanted to impart on his readers:

- All mankind sins,
- And with sin you cannot enter God's eternal kingdom,
- But God offers a free gift of grace and righteousness through Jesus,
- Who had no sin,
- But took our sin on Himself,
- And did on the cross what none of us could ever do through efforts of our own.

This is the gift that, **"...God set forth as a propitiation by His [Jesus] blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness..."**. Here the term, **"...propitiation..."**, "Hilatron" in Greek, means, **"...A sin offering by which the wrath of God may be appeased..."**. What better word to describe the sacrifice of Jesus. The same word in Hebrew, "Hakkapporet" is used to describe the mercy seat in the Holy of

Holies (see Exodus 25:20-21). A term Strong's Concordance defines as, "...the well-known cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim on the annual day of atonement (this rite signifying that the life of the people, the loss of which they had merited by their sins, was offered to God in the blood as the life of the victim, and that God by this ceremony was appeased and their sins were expiated); hence, the lid of expiation, the propitiatory." --- By using this term Paul's readers could mentally align the practice of sprinkling lamb's blood on the mercy seat, with the shedding of the Lamb's blood on the cross. In both cases the blood sacrifice was a **"...propitiation..."**, an offering, for the sin of man, through the sinless life and sacrificial death of Jesus who was able, **"...to demonstrate His righteousness..."** that could then be imparted on mankind through faith.

This faith, through God's gift of righteousness brings about *"justification"*. A term used by Paul over thirty times in this letter to describe salvation. The original Greek, *"Dikaioo"*, simply means, *"to approve"*, *"to make righteous"* or to *"declare righteousness"*. Paul will explain this over and over again that our righteousness comes through our justification that comes by faith alone in Christ alone, **"...because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."** God's power through the gospel to forgive our sins shows His righteousness so that we might be justified - made righteous and pardoned of our sin - by the only One who can be the Justifier. But this is only applied to those who have faith in the sacrificial work of Christ, who is, **"...an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."** (1 John 2:1-2 / John 3:17)

This, in essence is, **"...the power of God to salvation for everyone..."**.

Does this all make sense to us? Sure it does. But does it make sense to a lost person who bases their salvation on church attendance or religious activities? Or what about a lost person who feels they are "a good guy" and will somehow merit a ticket to heaven? Paul's message is timeless. It is just as applicable today as it was in the first century, and maybe more so because our enemy has had two-thousand more years to make man feel eternally secure in his own efforts - without Jesus.

So given this, Paul asks the question, **"Where is boasting then?"** Or, on what can we boast about our righteousness? We can't boast about ourselves, either by the Law or our own works. Instead, we boast in the works of Christ, **"...by the law of faith."** It is in faith alone (not works) in Christ alone (not of ourselves) that we may boast. Paul declares this same truth to the church at Ephesus when he said, **"...For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**

not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) We cannot boast because we have nothing ourselves to boast about. Instead, we boast (testify) of our faith in the work of Jesus, because, ***"...we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law..."***. Whether Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, they can be saved through faith in Christ. But Paul then clarifies that this does not make the Law void - because the Law points to Christ and the Law provides an unattainable measure of obedience - but that our faith in Christ becomes a law in itself. For as Jesus said, ***"...Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."*** (Matthew 5:17). In Christ is the fulfillment of the Law because He was the only One who ever achieved its perfection, but also, through His sacrificial offering of Himself He also fulfilled all the prophets had spoken about Him.

Lesson # 15 - Romans, Chapter 4 verses 1-12

Overview of Chapter 4:

Now in chapter 4 Paul uses familiar scripture to give testimony of David and to tell the story of Abraham's faith. David was a credible source for his readers because he is considered the greatest earthly king of Israel. Abraham was also credible because he is viewed as the father of the Jewish people. But Abraham is also a blessing to all nations, which means - to the surprise of many Jews - the Gentiles are covered by the same salvation doctrine as they are (Genesis 12:3). Given that, what better example than Abraham to illustrate faith-based salvation to people who viewed their heritage in Abraham or their good works as their source of righteousness.

Paul's argument presented here is based on the premise that Abraham lived before the Law was given to Moses and therefore could not have been saved by obedience [works] to the Law. Instead, **"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."** (Romans 4:3 / Genesis 15:6 / Galatians 3:6). Here Paul uses the word **"...believed..."** to describe Abraham's faith in what God said, and the word **"...righteousness..."** to describe what was **"...accounted..."** [credited] to him as a result of his faith. By helping his readers understand that Abraham was saved by faith in what God said in His promises, before there was a Law or fully defined gospel, shows that Christianity is not a new concept but is an ancient truth. It also shows that justification through the Law was not God's intended plan. Going a little deeper, even the most ardently legalistic Jew would have to admit that Abraham somehow knew that God would provide a sacrifice for sin (Genesis 22:8). He probably didn't understand the meaning of the cross, but he certainly knew that sin was only redeemed by God through blood; and understanding that was the faith of Abraham for imparted righteousness. Adam and Eve learned the same truth when an animal was killed to cover their sin (Genesis 3:21). Just as Abel knew when he offered the firstborn of his flock to God (Genesis 4:4). And just as the Israelites in Egypt knew at the first Passover when they sacrificed the spotless lamb to atone for their sin (Exodus 12). Using this logic Paul will continue to illustrate the truth that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not through the Law or through works, **"...It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."** (Romans 4:24b-25)

Quick Recap:

Up to this point Paul has helped his readers understand the truth that salvation comes through faith in Christ and not by works. As either legalistic Jews or ex-pagan Gentiles

using the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, many of them believed their eternity would come through religious practices or by simply being good enough --- much like most people believe today. Paul made a compelling argument to show they are wrong by first helping them understand that everyone sins and falls short of God's perfect standard. Based on this he then made the case that salvation - "justification" - comes only through the grace of God by faith in the work of Christ on the cross because our own efforts to earn redemption would be totally inadequate in God's eyes. Paul provides a solid scriptural basis for understanding that Jesus is in fact the promised Messiah and the only source of righteousness. But knowing there will always be skeptics Paul will now use real examples from revered Jewish patriarchs to illustrate how they came to righteousness. In some cases before the Law even existed. This would be critically important for the Jews to understand because many felt their Abrahamic heritage gave them an advantage over others. A notion Paul continues to dismantle.

Romans 4:1-12

Verses 4:1-5

Here Paul begins to reveal a truth every Jew and Christian Gentile should have already known - that Abraham, the one to whom the Jews credited for their righteous heritage, was saved before there was the written Law. Jesus talked about this when the Jewish leadership cited their relationship to Abraham as a source of righteousness, ***"They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' But Jesus corrected them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.'***" (John 8:39) In other words, if they are truly Jews they would understand that ***"...the works of Abraham..."*** were not efforts to gain self-righteousness, but was Abraham's faith in the promises of God. So given the premise that Abraham was saved by faith rather than his own works done in, ***"...the flesh..."***, Paul then challenges his readers to think logically by asking themselves: Why would God credit adherence to the Law as the source of His grace if Abraham would not have been qualified because righteousness was credited to him before the Law existed? It would seem most Jews would have known about this and realized that generations of God fearing people came to the Lord before the Law was written. But apparently they didn't, so Paul takes his position a step further, ***"...if Abraham was justified [saved] by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God..."***. Paul has already clarified we cannot boast of our own works for salvation because our works are wholly inadequate when measured against God's perfect standard. Therefore, if Abraham boasted of his own efforts done in, ***"...the flesh..."***, it would have been meaningless, ***"...before God..."***, because his efforts would not achieve God's perfect standard. So, then Paul tells them what they should have already known. Abraham was saved because he, ***"...believed God..."*** and as a result of his faith, salvation ***"...was accounted to him for righteousness."*** This is key to an understanding of salvation and is an argument Paul

also presented to the church at Galatia by further emphasizing the same faith that saved Abraham is also offered to the non-Jewish Gentiles, **"...Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you [the Spirit is given to us at salvation] and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"** Just as Abraham **"believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."** This would be earth shattering to a Jew who believed they were, **"...sons of Abraham..."**, by heritage. But now Paul says they are only sons if they come to salvation in faith and not through religion. Paul then proclaims that, **"...Scripture [God's word], foreseeing [ahead of time] that God would justify [save] the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand [before the Law], saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham."** (Galatians 3:5-9). This is an amazing passage. Not only does it say we are saved by faith, but it says Scripture (God's words), **"...preached [proclaimed] the gospel to Abraham beforehand,..."**, so that all people may be saved by believing in God's sacrificial grace as Abraham did. Putting that in context, it says that God's word testified to the gospel of sacrificial atonement before the Law even existed. This brings so much depth to the story of Abraham and Issac and indicates how Abraham knew God would provide a sacrificial Lamb. Abraham's faith that God's promises are true is why righteousness was credited to him. He simply believed what God said. This helps us make the connection that the story of Abraham's salvation is one of faith for all people because, **"...the gospel..."** was preached to Abraham before there was the Law offered to all who would believe. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Now, let's backtrack a bit to understand Paul's position from an historical context:

The Law - This is a broad term for the commandments and precepts of God given to Moses around 1450 BC. They came to Moses and the people of Israel as the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5) plus multiple other regulations which were embedded in the first five books of divinely inspired Hebrew text - Genesis through Deuteronomy. This constituted the "Law" and were the rules by which believers would live and Israel would function as a nation. But within the text were many forward-looking prophetic passages, such as the promised Seed (Genesis 3:15), the lamb provided to Abraham (Genesis 22), and the Passover lamb (Exodus 12). These were all part of a long series of Messianic prophecies pointing to Jesus. In fact, Paul tells us in Galatians 3:8 that these prophecies were in fact, **"...the gospel..."** through which, **"...all the nations shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:3) The Jews and Gentile readers of God's word should have known this. As we've already discussed, they should have recognized the Messianic prophecies found throughout the Old Testament, often called - *"The Law and the Prophets"* - with the addition of the prophetic books. Jesus spoke of this many times, even citing the specific scriptural basis the Jews applied to their perceived righteousness, **"...For if you believed Moses [the Law], you would believe Me; for he**

wrote about Me." (John 5:46). That is exactly what Paul was trying to get his readers to understand. They believed **"...Moses..."** (speaking of the scriptures) and applied it to themselves as righteousness, yet Moses wrote about Jesus. This is the same fact Jesus revealed to the doubting disciples on the Road to Emmaus when He said, **"...And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets** [basically the entire Old Testament] **, He expounded** [explained] **to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."** (Luke 24:27). That's amazing. Jesus was explaining the fact the Old Testament spoke about Him - the Messiah. The fact that the Law and the Prophets spoke of Jesus is cited throughout the Old Testament and validated in the New Testament.

So let's discuss just a few of the dozens of examples:

- They should have remembered the words of God to Moses about their disobedience? Words that sound remarkably like Jesus. **"Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?"** (Numbers 14:11)
- In his first sermon after Jesus' ascension Peter quoted the prophets and then proclaimed that Jesus was the man the prophets spoke of, **"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death..."** (Acts 2:22-24) Here Peter speaks about the **"...foreknowledge..."** of God, about Jesus, who was **"...attested** [presented / proven] **by God to you..."**. This speaks to the truth of Christ that would have been proclaimed through the prophecy they knew so well.
- Matthew tells of the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter, James and John saw Jesus in His glory. They were amazed to see both Moses and Elijah - both revered prophets and one the bringer of the Law - But as they marveled at the prophets and Peter offered to make a tent (tabernacle) for each of them, God interrupted him and, **"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only."** (Matthew 17:5-8) Note the command, **"...Hear Him!..."**. As if God was reminding the disciples that Jesus, not the prophets, is supreme.

- When Peter healed the lame man he used the opportunity to tell the onlookers that the God of Abraham had glorified Jesus, and through the prophets validated the Messiah would suffer and be raised from the dead. ***"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."*** (Acts 3:13-15)
- Before Stephen was stoned he preached to his executioners and Jewish leaders and walked them through a history lesson of Old Testament prophecy, (an event Saul/Paul witnessed) ending with the proclamation that they had killed the Messiah, ***"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers..."*** (Acts 7:51-52)
- Later, Paul himself, after he was saved, ***"...confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ."*** (Acts 9:22). He proved who the Messiah was through the same scripture the Jews were so familiar with.

Everywhere Paul went he presented truth from the scriptures showing that Jesus was the Messiah, ***"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, [Old Testament] explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas."*** (Acts 17:1-4)

Likewise Peter, also speaking of salvation through grace, made the same connection Paul did, that scripture clearly shows Jesus is the Messiah, ***"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. Therefore gird***

up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 1:10-13). This is an amazing passage of scripture that clearly explains the prophets were inspired by Jesus to write about Him. Also, note that they, ***"...inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,..."***. They studied the scripture for the prophecies of grace, inspired by the, ***"...Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."*** The Spirit gave them a testimony about the Messiah's suffering that ***"...would follow..."*** in the future. Jesus confirmed this to the doubters on the road to Emmaus when He said, ***"...O foolish ones, slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"*** (Luke 24:25-26). They should have known this from very familiar scripture like Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 that speak clearly of the Messiah's suffering. Paul had a similar message for the church at Galatia, explaining to them that the Law was for recognition of sin but that righteousness comes from Christ, ***"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed [Jesus, Genesis 3:15/ 12:7 / 22:18] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."*** (Galatians 3:18-23)

The writer of Hebrews made this same connection, ***"...For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."*** (Hebrews 4:2-3) The key point here is ***"...them..."***, the Jewish people had the gospel preached to them. But they did not hear it because they did not have the faith of Abraham in God's promise.

At the beginning of his Roman letter Paul gave a hint in his opening statements of what his message would be about. ***"...the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, [Old Testament] concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God..."*** (Romans 1:2-4) The point of all this and Paul's point in his letter to the Romans is the fact the Old Testament - the Law and the Hebrew scriptures - point to Jesus as the Messiah. He wanted them to realize the truth of what Jesus proclaimed to the wicked Pharisees, ***"Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*** (John 8:58), reflecting back to a day they should have all been familiar with. When the Lord told Moses, ***"And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" And***

He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " (Exodus 3:14). Yet the legalistic Jews still relied on their lineage to Abraham and the Law as a source for their own righteousness. The case Paul was making in all this is that Abraham and the Law could not be a basis of justification because the Law didn't even exist at the time of Abraham. Historically, Abraham lived about 2050 BC which was several hundred years before the Law was given to Moses. That means Abraham came to justification through faith in God's promise and not through observance of the Law - a Law that did not even exist at the time. So, by this point in the debate a legalistic Jew or similarly believing Gentile would have to make a decision; either Abraham was not saved, or he was saved by some other means than the Law. That is the exact point Paul is trying to make: **"...Abraham believed God, [not did works] and it was accounted to him for righteousness."**

In Genesis 12:1 God told Abram (later Abraham) to leave his home in Ur and travel to Canaan - modern day Israel. Abram complied and as a result God promised to bless all people of the world through Abram. God then made a covenant with Abram and declared, **"...Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."** // **"...And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."** (Genesis 15:1&6). This is the point Paul is making. Abram did not gain righteousness through adherence to the Law because the Law did not exist. Instead, he was made righteous because he believed in the Lord and knew it was through Him, and not his own works, that he had been given an, **"...exceedingly great reward..."** because, **"...he believed in the Lord..."** which in turn imparted on him God's righteousness. Paul's point is, Abram did not receive righteousness for anything he did himself but because he believed in what the Lord said. This faith was later tested as a lesson for us and as a prophecy of the coming Messiah. God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Abraham was obedient and took Isaac to Mount Moriah, traditionally thought to be the future location of Jerusalem where two-thousand years later another only Son would be sacrificed for the sins of the world. When they started on the journey to the top of the mountain Isaac asked his father if they had brought a sacrifice. To which Abraham replied prophetically, **"...My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."** This is a story all observant Jews would have known. Coupled with the truth of Abraham's salvation by faith and the fact God would provide His own sacrificial Lamb on Mount Moriah, they should have been able to make the connection to Jesus. Paul then takes it a step further by reminding them why this is so important. He clarifies that, **"...to him who works, [tries to obtain grace through their own efforts], the wages [their efforts] are not counted as grace but as debt."** In other words, our attempts to work our way to righteousness does not earn anything but in a sense piles up even more unpaid debt. **"...But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,..."**. This links the story back to Abraham's grace through faith. Unlike the worker who keeps building up more debt through fruitless efforts, the one who does

not lean on their own efforts but instead, **"...believes on Him who justifies the ungodly..."**, Jesus, to him, **"...his faith is accounted for righteousness..."**. Just as God had said of Abraham, **"...And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."** (Genesis 15:6), so too can the believing Jew or Gentile be saved by their faith in Christ.

But there's another key point we must remember: When Paul brought the message of grace through faith to the church at Colosse he made a profound statement we need to think about, **"...I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."** (Galatians 2:21). Let's think about that for a moment. If mankind could somehow be religious enough or good enough to earn salvation then there was no reason for God to come to earth in flesh and die on the cross. But even if He did, His death would have been for nothing. Instead, an all holy God put on the flesh of man, lived the example of a perfect life, took the sin of the world on Himself and let people He created hang Him on a tree He created and buried Him in an earth He created. All so He can defeat our sin, leave it in the grave and offer us eternal life with Him. (John 1:1-14 / John 3:17) All of that would have been in vain if Abraham or us could simply earn our own righteousness.

Verses 4:6-8

Paul then interjects a supporting argument using another revered patriarch, king David and gives two Old Testament examples to show God's gift of righteousness is not related to their own efforts. Paul quotes from Psalm 32, written by David to express the burden of his own sin. **7. "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; 8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."** David continues in self-reflection of his own sin. Not from a position of religious piety or personal works but from a position of crying out to God for forgiveness through His grace, **"...I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."** (Psalm 32:5) Here David speaks of his sins being **"...forgiven..."** and **"...covered..."** by God. Not forgiven by his own works. The term used here for **"...blessed..."** in the Greek, *"Makarismos"* means *"long extended"* or *"receiving eternal benefits from God."*, indicating God's eternal blessing [salvation] is covered by God through the forgiveness of sin.

Verses 4:9-12

Paul then asks questions to show God's forgiveness is not for the Jew alone. In doing so He uses terms the Jews would clearly recognize, **"9. Does this blessedness [imparted righteousness] then come upon the circumcised only [Jews], or upon the uncircumcised also [non-Jew]? For we say that faith [not works] was accounted to**

Abraham for righteousness. 10. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." Paul begins to pull all these examples together to help explain salvation by grace. The forgiveness David talked about is available to both Jews and Gentiles because it is not a product of the Law or works. This is the same forgiveness offered to Abraham and credited to him through his faith. Paul stresses this further by clarifying the fact Abraham was saved before he was circumcised (see Genesis 17). In fact, even before circumcision was given to the Jews as a sign of their obedience to God. Paul emphasizes that Abraham, **"...received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised,..."**. In other words, Abraham was saved by faith before being given the **"...sign of circumcision..."** as a **"...seal of the righteousness of the faith..."** which occurred, **"...while still uncircumcised..."**. Another way for us to understand this is through the observance of Baptism. We are not baptized as an element of salvation, but are baptized after we are saved as a sign or visible proclamation of our faith in Christ. Here Paul makes a similar analogy by showing that Abraham was saved by faith before there was a Law and before the practice of circumcision, so that neither could be the source of his righteousness. Righteousness came only from his faith in the works and promises of God.

Paul then goes a step further and clarifies the same faith that saved Abraham apart from the Law or circumcision was offered to the Gentiles as well so, **"...that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, [non-Jews] that righteousness might be imputed to them also, 12. and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, [Jews] but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised."** This is a great closing statement to tie all of this together. Abraham, to whom Jews credited their righteousness was saved based on his faith in the words of God before the Law or circumcision existed. And...this same salvation was offered to the Gentiles - the whole world - who had neither the Jewish Law nor circumcision.

So let's discuss the application of all of this to us.

I am amazed by the extent Paul had to go to in order to convince "knowledgeable" and religious people they had misinterpreted God's word. The Jews and Gentile believers in Hebrew scripture were engrossed in God's word but for fifteen hundred years they had totally misinterpreted clear Messianic prophecy, to the point when the Messiah came, as promised, they completely missed Him. Paul is writing here about 30 years after Jesus was crucified, several years after the gospels of Matthew and Mark were written and after Paul had written his epistles to the churches at Galatia, Thessalonica and Corinth. In other words, not only did Paul's readers have the entire Old Testament sourced Messianic prophecies but they may have also had two of the

gospels and several of Paul's circular letters. Given that, it is amazing that Paul has to spend multiple chapters convincing his readers they are sinners who cannot be saved by their own works. But...there is a reason for their blindness - they were focused on themselves and not on Jesus. Paul explains this to the church at Corinth by once again referencing scripture they all knew, **"...unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."** (2 Corinthians 3:12-16). Here Paul speaks of Moses, who when in the presence of God would reflect God's radiance. But when Moses returned to the people he would put a veil over his face so the people would not see the glory fade. (Exodus 34:33-35) The point being, the people's hearts were hardened by unbelief, (Hebrews 3:7-16) and as we saw through the disciples on the road to Emmaus it was only after Jesus revealed prophecy to them did their hearts finally burn. (Luke 24:27). But Jesus, is, **"...the Light, that all through him might believe..." / "...to become children of God. To those who believe in his name..."** (John 1:7&12). And that is why Paul takes the time to help his readers see that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah so that, **"...when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."**

But God's word is timeless and Paul's writings are just as applicable today as they were in the first century. In fact, the world today has the entire words of God, all of the gospels and two thousand years of scholarship and commentary, yet, Israel is still in denial, there are whole denominations who believe in works-based salvation, others have watered down the truth to fit our prosperity focused society, and sadly, there are well-meaning Christians who believe the Old Testament is not relevant to the church today. In doing so they have made the veil even more difficult to see through.

This is why we, like Paul, need to be torch-bearers of the truth so that the veil of confusion is removed through faith in Christ Jesus.

Lesson # 16 - Romans, Chapter 4 verses 13-25

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 4 Paul continued to build his case for salvation by faith. He had already explained that all have sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard, and as a result, could never be religious enough or good enough to earn God's gift of righteousness. Paul then uses the example of Abraham to show that salvation by works was never possible because, **"...what does the Scripture say? *'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'*"** (Romans 4:3), meaning that Abraham was saved by faith (believing God) hundreds of years before the Law was written. Likewise, Paul also emphasized that circumcision - long believed to be a special sign of righteousness - was simply obedience to God, and that in reality, circumcision as it relates to salvation was of the heart [faith] not of the body. Paul then throws in a real show-stopper when he declares that Jews have no salvation advantage through their heritage, the Law or circumcision because God made righteousness by faith available to Gentiles as well.

Now Paul continues to expand on the same theme.

Romans 4:13-25

Verses 4:13-14

Paul emphasizes again that Abraham's righteousness was not through the Law (works) but through faith in God's promise of redemption through a Messiah - **"...the heir of the world..."**, who through Abraham's example of faith illustrated God's promise, **"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:3). This was clear indication that, **"...only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."** (Galatians 3:7) Not only to Jews by their Law but to anyone by their faith in God's promises. Paul explained the same truth to the Galatians and showed that, **"...Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify [save] the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, [before the Law] saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham."** (Galatians 3:8).

By this point in his narrative it might seem like Paul keeps repeating this same idea over and over. That's true, but he had a good reason for doing so. Paul's teaching was refuting a traditional belief that righteousness could be obtained through adherence to the Mosaic Law or through religious practices. Instead, he preached that righteousness came through simple faith in the Messianic promises of God fulfilled in the life, death

and resurrection of the poor homeless carpenter from Nazareth - named Jesus - the Messiah - who is in fact God. This was a tough sell for a legalistic Jew and maybe more so for a pagan Gentile. But Paul wanted them to clearly understand this key element of the Christian doctrine, that, **"...God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."** (Galatians 4:4-5). In other words, it was the Son who brought salvation, not the Law. The Law itself could not save because adherence to the Law required human works which will not qualify. Instead, the only work that brings righteousness was done by Jesus on the cross because no other work but His would be sufficient.

This makes sense, right? So why does Paul keep repeating it? Well, put yourself in their shoes and think for just a moment how profoundly incredible that must have sounded to a Jew raised under strict legalistic teaching or to an ex-pagan Gentile who was new to the Judo-Christian faith. But then think about how the same concept falls on deaf ears today. That's because most people, if they believe in God at all, are still under the illusion they can get to him through some type of religious experience or by simply being "good enough". Unfortunately the blindness caused by focusing on their own efforts to earn righteousness prevents them from accepting the unearned gift of God's grace. That's what Paul wants them to understand.

To reinforce this point Paul poses a hypothetical statement, **"14. For if those who are of the law [Jews] are heirs, [of Law-based righteousness] faith is made void and the promise made of no effect..."** Simply said, if the Law could bring righteousness then a Messiah was not needed. If the Law could bring salvation, then as Paul told the Galatians, **"...for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."** (Galatians 2:21) Wow, **"...in vain..."**, that sounds so odd in relation to Christ's sacrifice, but what Paul is saying is profound – if you could earn righteousness on your own then the work of the Messiah was a waste.

So given that, what was the Law for?

Verses 4:15

The Law is intended to teach us what sin is. As Paul explained to the Galatians, **"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."** (Galatians 3:24-25) Here Paul uses an interesting word, **"...schoolmaster..."** or *"paidagogos"* in Greek, which has some interesting translations, including:

- *"A child under development by strict instruction",*

- *"A legally appointed overseer, authorized to train a child by administering discipline, chastisement, and instruction, doing what was necessary to promote development."*
- *"Relative to the role of the Law, especially the necessary foundation and technicalities needed to establish the doctrines of salvation, grace, faith, etc."*

All of these translations bring greater depth to the use of the word relative to God's intended use of the Law. As our **"...schoolmaster..."** the Law teaches us, trains us, develops us and chastises us with the standards by which mankind knows right from wrong. And it is through this understanding of sin and our recognized need for redemption that we are, **"...justified [saved] by faith..."** through the instruction of the Law but not by the Law itself. Whether Jew with the Mosaic Law or Gentile with the natural law of conscience, the Law is the measure by which man's thoughts, words and actions are evaluated.

Imagine for a moment there were no "laws" and man had no conscience, and it was up to every individual to determine what they believe is right or wrong. For mankind in our fallen state that would result in rampant evil and total chaos. So to guide man through life God gave us a sense of rules to help govern our actions. He initiated His first "law" with Adam and Eve by giving them a single command not to eat from a specific tree (Genesis 2:17). In reality God could have given them a wide range of different commandments to follow but He only gave them one - avoid the tree. But His commandment was not to simply avoid a particular fruit, but was given to test man's obedience to God. And just as God knew he would, mankind failed, and as a result God provided an opportunity for grace and forgiveness; setting a pattern by which man's redemption would come through the work of grace and not through any effort of man. So over time God provided more than the one commandment. Not only to set a standard for obedience but also to establish rules for managing our life by helping us understand what constitutes sin in God's eyes. The Mosaic Law was provided to the Jewish people to govern both individual and corporate actions. But He also gave non-Jews a "law" [remember, Abraham was not a Jew] through an internal understanding of morality that over the centuries helped man generally understand what was expected. Eventually, all mankind was offered "laws" and rules for living through God's written word. Paul's point here in Romans is simply to help his readers understand that the Law teaches us about sin but is not in itself a source of righteousness. But more importantly, to help us understand that, **"...after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster..."**, because the Law has done its job by helping us understand our need for redemption, and as such, we are under grace.

But there is another interesting thing about the Law we need to understand — it cannot be fulfilled. Theoretically Adam and Eve could have fulfilled the single law they were given by simply walking away from the tree and avoided its temptation, but the

Mosaic Law was different in that it could not be completely fulfilled. In other words, no one other than Jesus was capable of fully "keeping the law". That's because we all fail and fall short of God's standard. Meaning that, **"...whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all..."** (James 2:10). Jesus illustrates this important principle in the story of the rich young ruler recorded in Matthew 19:16-22.

Let's look at the conversation:

- The rich young man approached Jesus and asked:
"Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"
- To which Jesus replied,
"...if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." (the Law).
- **"Which ones?"** the young man asked.
- Jesus said, **"'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "**
- To this the young man confidently replied, **"All these things I have kept from my youth..."**
- But to be sure he was good enough he asked, **"...What do I still lack?"**
- **"Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...' '...and come, follow Me.'"**
- **"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."**

Now let's summarize what we just read to see what we can learn from the young rich man:

- The young man wanted to know what **"...good thing..."** (works) he could do to achieve salvation.
- He assumed that doing a **"...good thing..."** would be good enough.
- He also felt he had been successful in keeping the Law his entire life...
- But, in case he was mistaken he quickly asked, **"...What do I still lack?"**
- This shows he was interested in what Jesus thought but remained focused on what can **"...I..."** do.

- In His response Jesus summarized the gospel in just three words, **"...come, follow Me."**
- But the rich young man put his earthly possessions over the promise of, **"...treasure in heaven..."** (eternity with Jesus) and walked away from the Lord's offer of free grace.
- In doing so he broke the Law he thought he was keeping, and tragically failed to accept the grace of God being offered.

So the young man went away sorrowful because he had been unable to fulfill all of the commandments, which means he failed them all. But how did he fail? Because he coveted his earthly possessions and valued them over his relationship with Jesus. In doing so he essentially violated the first and tenth commandments, **"You shall have no other gods before Me"** and **"You shall not covet..."**, (Deuteronomy 5:7 & 21). There are a number of lessons to be learned from this conversation, including our reliance on material things, but the point Jesus was trying to make wasn't for the young man to give away his belongings. Jesus wanted him to understand the impossibility of keeping the Law and to accept the offer to follow Him. The young man's failure was his focus on works-based salvation which he felt was possible through adherence to the Law. That's why he asked, **"...what good thing shall I do..."**, focusing on **"...I..."** and **"...do..."**. He was looking for something he could do - a **"...good thing..."** - a work - rather than looking to what the Messiah could do. In doing so he missed the whole point of Christ's request. Jesus was offering a free gift of grace that did not require works, and frankly, it did not require him to pay for it with his possessions, because, the Lord had already said in scripture, **"...Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money..."** (Isaiah 55:1). Instead, Jesus wanted the young man to put faith in Him above his wealth, but the man coveted his wealth because it had become his idol - the earthly "god" he put before the Holy God. Paul will address this example in chapter 7 when he explains, **"...I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Romans 7:7)**

The rich man's story might sound hard to believe but unfortunately the same scenario still plays out every single day through people who hope to be good enough or religious enough to earn some credit with God.

Verses 4:16

So Paul reminds us again (as he will over and over) that our salvation is through faith and not from works. Faith **"...according to..."** (results from) the gift of God's grace. Further he reiterates this offer is made to all people (John 3:16-17). Not just the Jews, **"...who are of the law..."** but also to the Gentiles who have **"...the faith of Abraham..."** because like Abraham they had faith in God, without the Law. This is a

subtle way of reminding the Jews they must come to salvation the same way as the pagan Gentiles - through simple faith in Christ, **"...For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."** (Romans 10:12) and because **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** (Galatians 3:28)

Verses 4:17-18

Here Paul takes his reader back to Genesis 17 to reinforce the origins of Abraham's faith in God's promise, **"...you shall be a father of many nations."** (Genesis 17:5) He wanted them to remember that Abraham had faith in God's words before there was a lot of tangible evidence to have faith in. Abraham lived before there was any scripture, or the written Law, or a temple, or a Levitical priest, and even before the nation of Israel existed, and certainly before there was a cross. But when God promised, **"...I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you..."**, Abraham believed Him. (Genesis 17:6) And when God said He would provide a sacrifice for the offering, Abraham believed what He said. (Genesis 22:8).

Verses 4:19-22

When God said the elderly Sarah would bear him a son in her old age, Abraham believed that too. (Genesis 17:19) This was a reminder that, **"...God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did..."** (Romans 4:17). Initially both Abraham and Sarah doubted (as we all do at times) that God would provide his old wife a son. Yet despite their doubt and the impracticality and physical limitations of Sarah's age, Abraham **"...did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced [uncompromising faith] that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."** Abraham's righteousness was the result of his faith. His belief that what God said was true, because as we know, **"...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** (Hebrews 11:1). Abraham was credited with believing God's as-yet unfulfilled promises. He believed in who God is and that whatever He said is true. The writer of Hebrews expresses this so clearly, **"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good**

as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. (Hebrews 11:10-12)

God promised to bring life from the, ***"...deadness of Sarah's womb..."***. From a womb with no life remaining God brought forth life who would fulfill His covenant promise. In much the same way God brought forth Jesus from the deadness of the tomb to fulfill His promise of eternal life. Although Abraham would probably not understand the prophetic implications, he would clearly see and believe that God had the power to raise life from what was dead. This, coupled with the fact he believed, ***"...God will provide for Himself the lamb..."*** (Genesis 22:8) is a clear Messianic promise of the death and resurrection of Christ. This is why Paul could say in Galatians 3:8, that scripture was, ***"...preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand..."***. Long before there was a gospel message of the cross Abraham would have known there was a message of redemption. And it was in that truth he believed. - Thank you Lord!

Verses 4:23-25

In closing this chapter Paul clarifies the promises made to Abraham, by which he was credited for righteousness, are available, ***"...also for us..."***. Then Paul provides a short but very clear explanation of the gospel.

Explaining that:

- Righteousness is, ***"...imputed [credited] to us..."***
- ***"...who believe..."***,
- ***"...in Him..."***
- ***"...who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead..."*** (resurrected)
- ***"...who was delivered up..."*** (betrayed and crucified)
- ***"...because of our offenses..."*** (sin)
- For, ***"...our justification..."*** (salvation)

Lesson # 17 - Romans, Chapter 5 verses 1-5

Quick Recap:

In chapter 4 Paul continued to build his case for salvation through faith in Christ. In doing so he discounted the traditional belief that righteousness could come through adherence to the Law or through our own religious efforts. Instead, he stressed the truth that, **"...by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8) To prove his point he used the example of Abraham, the symbolic father of the Hebrew people, to show that even he was justified by his faith in the promises of God long before the Law was even written. Further, Paul explained that circumcision was a sign of obedience and not a source of righteousness. But possibly the most difficult concept for the legalistic Jew to accept was the fact pagan Gentiles are saved the same way they must be saved - by simple faith in the life, death and resurrection of a poor carpenter from Nazareth - Jesus - the promised Messiah.

Introduction to Chapter 5:

Now, within the context of salvation by faith and not by works, Paul presents another iconic element of doctrinal truth, **"But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8) This is one of the most fundamental truths of our justification to God - through our faith in the Lord Jesus - who came to earth in flesh and paid the price for our sin. But this fact should not have been a new revelation to the Jews. They knew full well that Adam's sin was covered in blood, that Abel provided his first-fruit blood offering, that God provided a lamb for Abraham, and that sin was atoned for by the sacrifice of a spotless Passover lamb. Then why didn't they understand that the man whom John the Baptist called **"...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!..."** (John 1:29) is the promised Messiah? A man whose birth was prophesied by Micah (Micah 5:2) and whose death was foretold by the Psalmist and Isaiah (Psalm 22 / Isaiah 53:5). They should have known this, as Paul will emphasize now when he points back to Adam, who brought sin into the world, but was also the first to benefit from redemption through a blood sacrifice provided by God. Both Jewish and non-Jewish readers of Hebrew scripture should have recognized this truth - that salvation is not by works, nor is it by the Law, nor by religious observances. It is made possible only through God's, **"...abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ."** (Romans 5:17)

Now, let's look beyond Abraham to further evidence of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

Romans 5:1-5

By this point in his letter Paul has completed a lengthy discourse on Abraham in order to illustrate that salvation comes through faith in Christ and not through works. Yet sadly, two-thousand years after Paul's inspired message to Rome, millions of people still believe you can somehow "do" enough good things to counterbalance your sin, or that you can gain righteousness through religion. This has resulted in generations of people calling themselves "Christians" even though they have essentially removed Christ from the picture and replaced Him with indulgences, prosperity gospels, progressive theology, religious activities or grossly manipulated scripture adjusted to fit their false doctrine.

Now in the next section of his letter Paul continues to combat this error by characterizing several key elements of our faith:

- We are justified (saved) by the free grace of God through our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus,
- And through our justification in Christ we are at peace with God and are no longer His enemy,
- We sustain this peace because we stand in God's grace, and not by continuous efforts of our own works,
- And through that grace we have eternal hope and assurance in our salvation,
- This grace and hope is with us even in our sufferings and tribulation which further builds our testimony and the strength of our faith,
- And through our strengthened faith in Christ Jesus God the Father is glorified, which gives us joy in every situation,
- Not because any of this is earned, but because it is through the gift of grace that while we were wretched sinners Christ died for us.

Paul will explain these points as an outflow of our salvation by faith, but in doing so we see another fact we can take away from all this – the assurance that our salvation is eternal and cannot be lost. Sadly, there are those who believe we can lose our salvation. They are generally the same people who believe you can "earn" salvation through works or religion, so logically, they believe it takes more work or more religion to maintain their salvation if they fail. But losing your salvation would in essence mean we would somehow become un-justified from God's unearned grace. But how would that even be possible?

- How could we ever lose what God so freely gave, "**...while we were still sinners...**"?
- How could we lose by our bad efforts what we could not earn by our good efforts?

- Why would God justify our souls through redemption of sin we had not yet committed, but undo our redemption if we commit another sin?

I find it tragic that so many people believe – and some denominations teach -- God would take something away from us that was paid for by Jesus on the cross. They discount the fact He paid our ransom in full so that, **"...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."**

(Ephesians 1:7). This is not a temporary forgiveness, or temporary grace, but is permanent because, **"...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23) Our acceptance of Christ's sacrifice is eternal and our righteousness results in the forgiveness of all sin: past, present and future. That's because His sacrifice was not a down payment, or a lease that can be retracted. It was Jesus, who, **"...Himself purged our sins..."** to enable the application of God's grace through our faith (Hebrews 1:3). Therefore, our salvation is permanent because it comes through faith in the permanent work of Christ who died for us even though we did not earn it to begin with.

So if Jesus died for our sins long before we ever committed the first one then how could additional sin negate what He had already forgiven? That would mean He forgave us up to a certain point, but didn't forgive us for everything. If that were true we would have to be resaved whenever we sin, which would indicate the cross was not enough and would have to be repeated over and over. But the Bible is very clear that Christ died once to defeat all sin, of all mankind, for all time, and He does not need to die again for every new sin. Likewise, we do not need to be saved over and over when we fail. Paul will clarify this further in chapter 6 when he says, **"...knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God."** (Romans 6:9-10) Pay attention to two key points in this verse, Jesus, **"...having been raised from the dead, dies no more..."**. Jesus was crucified and resurrected once, and that was sufficient to overcome all death and sin, because Jesus **"...died to sin once for all..."**. And His one death was sufficient to cover all sin, past, present and future, **"...once for all..."**. Christ only died once, and was only resurrected once, because once was all that was required to purge our sin and apply God's grace.

So let's dig a little deeper into the root of this discussion:

In the Old Testament sin was forgiven through a blood offering to God. The high priest officiated these offerings on a regular basis but the forgiveness was limited and temporary and had to be repeated to show atonement for the priest's own sin as well as the sin of the people (Leviticus 8-9). That's because both the priest and the sacrifice were imperfect and insufficient to gain permanent forgiveness. (See Exodus 29 /

Hebrews 9) But Jesus - God in flesh - came as both the perfect Priest and the perfect sacrifice for our sin. He is the Lamb of God who came as a Great High Priest who did not have to atone for His own sin, because He had none. Therefore His sacrifice was totally applied to us. ***"For such a High Priest [Jesus] was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, [perfect] and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."*** (Hebrews 7:26-27) Unlike the Levitical priest who had to offer daily sacrifice for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, Jesus, our Great High Priest sacrificed Himself in perfection, ***"...once for all..."***, for the permanent atonement of those who accept God's offering. ***"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation."*** (Hebrews 9:11) Jesus is the perfect tabernacle. Not the man-made tent of meeting where human priests sacrificed to God (see Exodus 27:21), but He is the door through which, and by His divine sacrifice, we can come into a relationship with God. That's because His justifying sacrifice was, ***"...Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience [sin nature] from dead works [sin] to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator [between us and the Father] of the new covenant, [of grace] by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."*** (Hebrews 9:13-15). Here the author of Hebrews speaks of ***"...inheritance..."*** which is a gift passed down from the Father. But not just any gift, it is a gift of, ***"...eternal inheritance..."***, often called *"The doctrine of adoption"* of which Paul speaks to in several places.

But before we go any further let's dig a little deeper into the idea of inheritance and adoption so we can put all of this in context:

Adoption in the ancient world was not exactly the same process we think of today. Modern adoption is generally focused on children. Often to rescue them from a bad situation and place them in a loving home. But adoption in the Roman world was often very different and included adopting adults to be heirs of a family. So when Paul used the Greek term adoption, *"huiothesia"*, his early readers would understand that to mean a person was being brought in to become part of a family and then be given an inheritance. Paul will explain this later in Romans when he says, ***"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [to salvation] these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage [sin] again to fear, but you received the Spirit of***

adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ... (Romans 8:14-17). This is an amazing passage of scripture that speaks not only of our salvation, but the fact that our justification to God makes us **“...children of God...”**. This is talking about our spiritual adoption that brings us into the family of God, as heirs to God, but also as **“...joint heirs...”** with Jesus. And as full heirs we are able to call God, **“...Abba Father...”**. In Aramaic, the term **“...Abba...”** clearly illustrates the unique relationship we have with our Almighty Creator. It is defined as, *“a term of tender endearment by a beloved child – affectionate, a dependent relationship, like the titles “daddy” or “papa.”*. But it is also a term that indicates our desire to be obedient to our Father. Jesus used this term in the garden when He prayed to God the Father just prior to His crucifixion, **“And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”** (Mark 14:36). And Paul used the term again to encourage the believers in Galatia, **“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father! Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”** (Galatians 4:6-7). Is this the cry of a temporary relationship? No. It is an endearment greeting from the heart of those of us who belong to the Lord and seek to be obedient to His will. How sad it must be for those who believe they can lose their salvation and be removed from this type of love.

But how does this spiritual adoption work? Very simply, **“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. [sin] But when the fullness of the time had come, [God's appointed time] God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [as a Jew] to redeem those who were under the law, [Mosaic or conscience] that we might receive the adoption as sons.”** (Galatians 4:3-5) The story of adoption is the story of the gospel, because through our faith in Christ we become children of God and full, permanent, heirs to His kingdom. This is our, **“...inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...”** (1 Peter 1:4) But how is that even possible? Because, **“...having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”** (Titus 3:7).

Here Paul ties it all together:

- Our salvation,
- Through grace,
- Makes us sons and heirs to God,
- And gives us the assurance of eternal life that cannot be taken away or lost.

Do you see the connection here to Paul's message about our permanent justification through faith? The Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated over and over because

they were a sign of obedience and pointed to the need for blood atonement, but they were imperfect and not the source of permanent righteousness. But Jesus, as the Holy Lamb, and by His death, brought atonement, **"...eternal redemption..."** and **".. eternal inheritance..."** because, **"...Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many."** (Hebrews 9:28). **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit."** (1 Peter 3:18) And our salvation is a permanent gift, **"...Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption..."** (Hebrews 9:12). This **"...eternal redemption..."** is only possible, **"...because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 2:7). Paul speaks here of salvation for eternity. Not salvation that has to be earned over and over again. It is permanent because God has made us, **"...alive together with Christ..."** so we can, **"...sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."**. For how long? Until we sin again? Until we fail? No!, for, **"...the ages to come..."**. This is a future promise of the permanent salvation we receive through grace.

Peter expands this truth even further when he proclaims that God has, **"...begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."** (1 Peter 1:3-6). Here Peter also speaks of our **"...inheritance..."** as in a gift to a child. A gift that is permanent, **"...incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away..."**. It does not fade or go away because we have a place **"...reserved in heaven..."**, that is, **"...kept by the power of God through faith..."**. Our salvation is not dependent on future works to maintain it, no more than it required works to obtain it in the first place. Once we're saved our justification is, **"...kept..."**, retained, by the power of God, **"...through faith..."**. If that were not true and our salvation could be lost then what reason would we have to, **"...greatly rejoice..."**? We can rejoice because of the words of our Lord, **"...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."** (John 10:27-28)

Thank you Jesus.

Now, given that context let's take our time and thoughtfully work through this beautiful passage:

Verse 5:1

In its original form the book of Romans would have been written as a letter with no chapter and verse designations. These were progressively added between the 13th to 16th centuries to help segregate the text for easier study and reference. So here the word **"...Therefore..."** lets us know this passage is a continuation of the prior text in chapter 4. It is a term that in Greek can mean **"...so, then..."**, or summing-up and telling us the results of chapters 3 and 4.

Up to this point Paul's primary message is that justification comes through faith in God's promises, and specifically through a promised Messiah, and not by works, **"...having been justified by faith..."**. But as we have seen this is not a new debate. Even during Paul's ministry he fought the same issues with a highly legalistic group called the Judaizers who taught that salvation came through faith plus works. Basically, they believed faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation unless you add constant personal effort, adherence to the Law and observance of Jewish rituals and feasts - in effect, becoming a Jew in order to become a Christian. This was the basis for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) which resulted in a letter to Gentile believers in the early church clarifying the fact that works are unnecessary. I thought about this several years ago when I attended a Catholic funeral. Just prior to observing communion the priest announced we could not participate in communion unless we were Catholic. I wonder if he ever thought about the fact Jesus was not Catholic? Or the fact that at the first communion with Jesus that no one in the room was Catholic? Or, the fact nowhere in the Bible does it restrict communion to being Catholic? To me this illustrated a non-Biblical legalistic rule of the same type imposed by the Judaizers. - So sad.

Now in this next section of his letter Paul will continue to refute these ideas and further expound on the benefits of our justification by faith and specifically the assurance that our salvation is secure because, **"...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."**. Here Paul speaks to the ultimate joy of our Christ-based salvation - peace with God - as an outcome of our faith. As hard as it might be to believe, prior to accepting Christ we were enemies of God and subject to His holy wrath. As Paul will clarify later in this letter, **"...For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."** (Romans 5:10) We were enemies of God through our unrepentant sin, and as such, **"...were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works..."** (Colossians 1:21). But through our faith in Christ we become, **"...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of**

darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10). Now in Christ we are at peace with God. Which means, we not only have eternal life with Him but we also don't have to seek righteousness through our own frustrating and fruitless efforts. Instead, we can stand confident in His grace and, **"...and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."** (Romans 5:2) A hope that comes to us only through Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who promises, **"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."** (John 14:27). This truth of Jesus as the source of our peace permeates God's word:

- **"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** (Isaiah 9:6)
- **"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all."** (2 Thessalonians 3:16)
- **"So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."** (John 20:21)

Amen!

Verse 5:2

Used here, the word **"...access..."**, *"prosagoge"* in Greek, can mean *"bring to"*, *"approach"* or *"admission"*. In other words, through Christ we are brought to and have admission to God's kingdom by His grace. As believers we have that access now through our relationship with Jesus, but from an eternal perspective we, **"...shall see His face, and His name shall be on their [our] foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they [we] shall reign forever and ever."** (Revelation 22:4-5). The access we have through Jesus is the grace of God, applied eternally, not temporarily to those with faith in Jesus. It is God's grace that enables our forgiveness so we can, **"...stand, and rejoice in hope..."**. To **"...stand..."**, *"histekamen"* in Greek, also indicates permanence because it can mean to *"set-up"* or *"establish"*, as in the fact we are already being established in our eternal home with the Lord. Paul speaks of this at the Rapture when he says we, **"...shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord..."**. Key to this is the term, **"...shall always be..."**, yet another promise of eternal salvation. That is why Paul could add another promise of permanence at the end of this verse, **"...Therefore comfort one another with these words."** (2 Thessalonians 4:17-18). These words would not be comforting if we had to worry about losing God's grace every time we failed.

It is this same grace that allows us to, **"...come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."** (Hebrews 4:16) because, **"...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace..."** (Ephesians 1:7). This is not a temporary stand in temporary grace, but we are firmly rooted by our faith in Christ, **"...after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Here we see a clear understanding of our path to eternal life:

- We **"...heard the word of truth, the gospel..."**
- **"...of your salvation..."**
- **"...having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise..."**
 - Note, we are **"...sealed..."** by God. This word in Greek, *"esphragisthete"* means, *"to set a seal upon"*, *"with a signet ring"*, *"to attest ownership"*. What more beautiful description of a permanent relationship could there be.
- With a, **"...the guarantee..."**,
 - This is *"arrabon"* in Greek, *"a payment"*, *"given in advance"* and *"paid in full"*
- For, **"...of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."**
 - We are a purchased possession, a *"peripoiesis"*, which indicates *"ownership"* and *"preservation"*.

All of this taken together paints such a beautiful picture of God's children, redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, and standing firm in the eternal promise of grace.

Hallelujah

Verses 5:3-5

And if that were not enough Paul continues, **"And not only that..."** by reminding us that our Lord walks with us through every trial. In doing so He gives us hope, through His love, poured out on the cross, so that even in our suffering we can glorify Him. There are so many verses that speak to our perseverance in Christ. Verses that remind us that even on the toughest days in life our Lord walks every storm with us.

Here are just a few to warm our hearts and give us fierce faith.

- ***"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-4)***
- ***"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)***
- ***"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." (Romans 8:18-19)***
- ***"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 1:28)***
- ***"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)***
- ***"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..." (Ephesians 6:14-17)***
- ***"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)***
- ***"The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1)***
- ***"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion." (Proverbs 28:1)***
- ***"But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you***

walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior..."
(Isaiah 43:1-3a)

- ***"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*** (Isaiah 41:10)
- ***"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."*** (Ephesians 6:10-11)
- ***"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."*** (Habakkuk 3:17-18)
- ***"I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!"***
(Psalm 27:13-14)
- ***"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."*** (Psalm 56:3)

These are not the promises of temporary grace, nor promises made to then be taken away. No. These are the promises of a God whose grace cannot be earned, but once it is gained by faith, cannot be lost. How could anyone believe that a God who gives us a gift we could never earn would take it back so that we would have to earn it again? There would be no joy or hope in that. So be firm in your faith and in our Lord's eternal promise.

Lesson # 18 - Romans, Chapter 5 verses 6-11

Quick Recap:

After using the example of Abraham to explain justification by faith, Paul stresses the character and outgrowth of our salvation. His explanation also gives us assurance of our salvations' eternal benefits. We see this in several key points he made:

- First, we are *justified* (saved) by the free grace of God through our faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - the Messianic Son of God in flesh,
- Through our justification in Christ we are at *peace with God* and are no longer His enemy,
- We sustain this peace, and our salvation because we *stand in God's grace* but not through continuous efforts of our own works,
- It is God's grace that gives us *eternal hope* and assurance in our salvation,
- And with this hope we can endure *our sufferings and tribulation* as each trial builds our testimony and strengthens our faith,
- And through our strengthened faith in Christ Jesus, God is glorified, which *gives us joy* in every situation,
- But none of this is earned by anything we do. It comes through the gift of grace, via the cross, *to any wretched sinner who will accept by faith.*

Paul explains these points to illustrate the result of our salvation by faith, but through these same truths we also gain assurance that our salvation is eternal and cannot be lost. Now in the second part of chapter 5 Paul's message leads to another fundamental element of our faith, **"...in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us..."**. This is basic to the doctrine of salvation by faith - that Christ died for us **"...while we were still sinners..."**, and not while we were doing good deeds. In doing so Jesus did something the Law or religion could never do. His death on the cross gives us the foundation for salvation through His efforts, but not as a reward for our efforts. **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Now, let's dig into this wonderful truth:

Romans 5:6-11

Verse 5:6

Here Paul speaks to our lost condition when we were **"...without strength..."**. This doesn't mean we were physically weak, but means we had no spiritual strength to save ourselves so Jesus came as the Messiah to pay the price for our sin. It also means we are powerless to do anything that would outweigh the consequence of our own sin and

earn redemption. As Paul told the Ephesians, **"...you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins..."** (Ephesians 2:1). Jesus didn't die on the cross to reward good people with good works or good religion. He came and died for people in the bondage of sin because He knew our good works would not count. That's why Paul clarifies that Jesus, **"...died for the ungodly..."**. He died for the lost. Not for those who felt they could gain righteousness by efforts of their own. No. Jesus died so that those who recognize our own sinful condition and accept His sacrifice as our only way to salvation are made righteous. The fact Paul includes the qualifier, **"...in due time..."** speaks to God's supreme authority. Christ's coming was not haphazard. It was carefully planned just as God wanted it to happen. Paul explained this to the church at Galatia, **"Even so we, when we were children, [weak and unsaved] were in bondage under the elements of the world. [in sin] But when the fullness of the time had come, [God's predetermined timeline) God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, [Mosaic or moral] that we might receive the adoption as sons."** (Galatians 4:3-5) All of this may sound logical to us who are believers, but think about the millions of people - including many who are "religious" - who are seeking salvation through works, prosperity, rituals or aberrant gospels. This is the enemy's most devious and successful ploy; to convince people there are many ways to God. That's why Paul goes to such great length to refute this notion from multiple angles. Just as he explained through the example of Abraham who was justified through trusting the promises of God. But that promise was not just for Abraham, **"...but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up [crucified] because of our offenses, [sin] and was raised [resurrected] because of our justification."** (Romans 4:23-25) Jesus - God in flesh - died, **"...because of our offenses..."** and was resurrected, **"...raised because of our justification."** That's why it is our faith in His death and resurrection that brings us salvation.

Verses 5:7-8

To illustrate God's incredible love, Paul provides a hypothetical situation. With the exception of family members most people would not give their life for another person. Even if that person were **"...righteous..."** or **"...good..."**; but in our lost condition we were neither. We were lost, sinful and wicked enemies of God. Yet, **"...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** We need to get our head around that. From our fall in the garden, through our disobedience across the centuries, mankind has continually rebelled against God. But our rebellion did not deter His love for us. So when Christ came to earth He came as a sacrifice even though, **"...we were still sinners..."**. Mankind was not righteous or good or somehow earning redemption. We were sinners with no hope until, **"...Christ died for us..."**. But He didn't die for the worthy, the religious, or the righteous. He died for those who have no other hope but Him. As He said, **"Greater love has no one than**

this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13) This is a love we can scarcely imagine; the death of a just man to bring life to sinners, **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God..."** (1 Peter 3:18). This was how **"...God demonstrates His own love toward us..."**. A love none of us deserves or could ever earn.

Verse 5:9

This love, the love of God, that is so difficult to define, not only brings our undeserved salvation but removes our deserved punishment. That's because, **"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."** (John 3:36) The wrath of God is the just punishment for those who reject His free offer of grace. Sadly, that includes those who seek righteousness through "religion" or their own good works. Had those efforts been sufficient God would not have had to give His only Son as a payment for our sin. (John 3:16-17) to justify us, **"...by His blood..."**. For it is Jesus, and Jesus alone who was, **"...raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."** (1 Thessalonians 1:10) And this too is our promise of the Rapture, **"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..."** (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

Verse 5:10

Verse 10 summarizes Paul's contrasting of reconciliation and wrath:

- In our lost state we were enemies of God,
- But then we were reconciled - forgiven and redeemed - through the sacrificial death of the Messiah - Jesus,
- And we were further reconciled - made righteous - through His resurrection and life.

It's sometimes hard for us to understand how we could ever be enemies of a loving God. But we have to remember, God's love cannot condone sin, which means in our lost condition He cannot include us in His kingdom. But God will pursue us and offer His love to us through grace, but to benefit from that love for eternity we have to accept the sacrifice of Jesus as the only path to redemption.

To help us better understand this I think of God's warning to Israel. Near the end of his life, **"...Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel..."**. His message is often called "The Song of Moses". In it he recounts the steadfastness of God but also chronicles the apostate failure of the people. Then prior to providing his final blessing in Deuteronomy, Moses first provides a description of the wrath that will come. A wrath we

see in the future when they will eventually **"...look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son..."**. (Zechariah 12:10)

- **"Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you. And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. And He said: 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no faith. They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains. 'I will heap disasters on them; I will spend My arrows on them. They shall be wasted with hunger, Devoured by pestilence and bitter destruction; I will also send against them the teeth of beasts, With the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword shall destroy outside; There shall be terror within For the young man and virgin, The nursing child with the man of gray hairs. I would have said, 'I will dash them in pieces, I will make the memory of them to cease from among men...',"(Deuteronomy 32:18-26)**

Although this was written to Israel we know from our study of Revelation it also describes a wrath that will come upon all who reject the Lord. This is tough love from an all holy God who is love. A God who was willing to pay the ultimate price for our souls, **"...while we were still sinners..."**, but we must be willing to accept His payment. The Psalmist reminds us that, **"God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day."** (Psalm 7:11) Yet, **"...we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."** Here Paul reiterates again that we are **"...reconciled..."**, redeemed, through the crucifixion of Christ, but our complete salvation comes through **"...His life..."**, which includes His resurrection. That's why Paul said, **"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified..."** (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). That is key to understanding salvation. There is no reason to teach the Law, or rituals, or any human effort as a source of righteousness. That's why we preach the gospel of Jesus boiled down to two words, **"...Christ crucified..."**.

Verse 5:11

Paul continues, **"...and not only that..."**, adding another reminder that our reconciliation and salvation is reason for pure joy. And not just any joy, but the action of joy, seen through rejoicing, **"...in God through our Lord Jesus..."**! Given that, I think this is a great time for us to read several passages of scripture that bring us to a point of rejoicing in our reconciliation through our Lord:

- ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" — "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Portions of Romans 8:35-39)***
- ***"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:37-40)***
- ***"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:3-6)***
- ***"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1-2)***
- ***"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15)***
- ***"Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." (Deuteronomy 31:6 / Hebrews 13:5)***
- ***"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)***

- ***"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you."***
(Joshua 1:5)
- ***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you."*** (Isaiah 43:2)

I pray you are blessed by these promises of our Lord.

Lesson # 19 - Romans, Chapter 5 verses 12-21

Quick Recap:

In the second part of chapter 5 Paul expands on a key tenet of our salvation by faith, **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8). This is a point most people fail to recognize. God didn't demonstrate His love for the religious, or for those who do good works, or those who seek salvation through prosperity. God demonstrates His love to the ungodly - the wretched and unredeemed sinner (Romans 5:6). He did this by dying for our sin, **"...while we were still sinners..."**, not while we were trying to earn our way to heaven. By explaining this critical doctrine, Paul stressed that our reconciliation to God comes through Christ, **"...having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."** (Romans 5:9) This is critically important for us to understand because prior to our salvation we were enemies of God, but once justified, **"...we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, [by His crucifixion] much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. [through His resurrection]"** (Romans 5:10). This is the essence of the gospel.

Now in the last part of this chapter Paul will use an even more ancient example of salvation by grace to provide a prophetic view of the promised Messiah.

And with that, let's complete chapter 5:

Romans 5:12-21

Verse 5:12

If the only sin ever committed was Adam's then a blood sacrifice would still have been required. Why? Because God cannot tolerate sin. Not even one. Not even a single bite of fruit. Whether it was one sin or a billion they would have represented the rejection of God's perfect will and would have marred His perfect creation. The sin of Adam, the **"...one man..."** brought sin into the world, and through that first sin the curse of death **"...entered the world..."**. But how did one man's sin translate to sin for everyone? Because everyone - from then until now - were begat by Adam. He was the prototype and as such was the representative for all mankind. Initially Adam and Eve were created without sin and without the nature to sin (Genesis 1:27-28), but God gave man a single commandment to show his obedience, and at the same time, God allowed temptation to enter the world so that man would have to make a choice. Either be obedient to God and enjoy an eternal relationship with Him, or be disobedient to God, destroy that relationship and suffer the consequences. God did not cause man to sin. Adam and Eve could have simply walked away from the tree of temptation but they

didn't. They allowed satan to cause them to question God's words and as a result man fell away from God's will (Genesis 3:1-6). And when he did, the perfect man made in God's perfect image was permanently marred. And not only him, but every human after him was given the imputed sin nature of Adam. Frankly, Adam's sin could have been the end of the story. God could have simply destroyed Adam and Eve and started over with a new couple. But He didn't. Instead, He offered a free gift of forgiveness and grace to His failed creation and applied that grace through the blood sacrifice of a substitutionary death. (Genesis 3:21). Even so, the offspring of Adam would not be the perfect creation of God. They too would be marred by association. So Adam's rebellion against God resulted in the curse of **"...death through sin..."**, to all mankind because from that day forward all men would eventually die because all men would inherit a "sin nature" from Adam that was, **"...spread to all men..."**.

After Adam's sin God did not give mankind the option of being born in perfection. We are born into the nature of Adam's failure (Psalm 51:5). A sinful being whose only hope is through accepting the sacrificial gift of God's grace. Yet, as we will see, the birth of a second perfect "Man" was also in God's plan. A "Man" who was God in flesh, who unlike Adam would not fail and not sin, but would instead become the willing sacrificial atonement that man needs for redemption.

Verses 5:13-14

Here Paul anticipates questions from his readers about the punishment for sin prior to the Law. He had already spent considerable time explaining that salvation cannot come through the Law, but that the Law is what helps us recognize our sin and our need for forgiveness. He also explained that even without the written Law, mankind, **"...who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts..."** (Romans 2:13-15) In other words, during the time between Adam and Moses - when the Law was written - mankind still had a conscience of right and wrong. Paul used this logic to help them understand that prior to the written Law sin was still in the world. This would help explain to those familiar with God's commandments why the curse of death existed before the Law was written. In reality there had always been a natural "law", because God had given man a commandment that must be followed, coupled with the freewill to make that decision. Initially man was made perfect and had no sin nature so he naturally did not desire to sin. Yet, once tempted and sin was the result, death was the consequence. It didn't require the Mosaic Law for Adam to be obedient or disobedient. All he had to do was follow the command he was given by God. Therefore, sin, from the perspective of the Law, was not imputed (charged to one's account) – by the Law because the written Law did not exist. Instead God told man not to eat of a specific tree, but he did anyway and as a result, **"...death reigned from Adam to Moses..."**. Death became the curse of sin because of Adam's failure to keep God's commandment and his single failure was enough to bring the curse of death upon

all mankind through their imputed sin nature. Even before there was a Mosaic Law. How do we know that? Because **"Nevertheless death reigned..."** Even before the written Law was written **"...death reigned..."**. It was ever present, in all men, as the curse of Adam and it reigned supreme over all mankind through, **"...the likeness of the transgression of Adam..."**. Because after Adam we all have a sinful nature like him.

Paul then tells us that Adam, **"...is a type of Him who was to come..."**. This is obviously a future view **"...to come..."** but who is he talking about? It's Jesus. As Paul will later clarify, **"...For the wages of sin [through Adam] is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23)

Verse 5:15

The **"...free gift..."** of God's grace is diametrically opposite the consequence of Adam's sin. Adam's sin resulted in death, but Christ's death resulted in life. This is the root of Paul's gospel discussion. That even though God applied Adam's sin to all mankind, He also offered the free gift of redemption through Christ, **"...to save the world through him."** (John 3:17) Here in verse 15 Paul uses the term **"...many..."** to describe all of mankind, because everyone will eventually die as a result of Adam's single act of rebellion. Some might ask. "Is that fair?" Well, it is from God's perspective. He created a perfect world populated by perfect people and gave them a perfect eternity if they would simply adhere to a single Law. But they didn't. They sided with the enemy and in doing so rebelled against God. For that failure God initiated the sentence of eternal death but at the same time He provided a method for eternal life. God couldn't simply ignore sin and hope it went away. Instead, He acknowledged man's propensity to sin and offered a way out. This is what Paul means by, **"...much more the grace of God [redemption] and the gift by the grace [in the crucifixion] of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded [was freely offered] to many. [to mankind]."**

Verse 5:16

Paul then provides a list of comparisons to highlight the differences between the sin of man in the garden and the work of Christ on the cross. Adam's single sin brought judgment and condemnation (death and hell) to all mankind. But the sins of a believer were judged on the cross because, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."** (Romans 8:1) In other words:

- One man sinned,
- So all mankind became sinners,
- With a sentence of death,
- But Jesus came as the Son of Man,
- To pay the price for man's sin,
- So that mankind may live.

Verse 5:17

Through Adam's sin all of mankind inherited the curse of death (Genesis 3:17), because, **"...the wages of sin is death..."** (Romans 6:23) But as believers in Christ we, **"...will reign in life..."**. Christ not only reigns over us. He also reigns in us and through us that we might have spiritual victory over sin and its consequences. In this way the Lord, who reigns supreme over all things works in us, **"...that he who began a good work in you [justification] will carry it on to completion [sanctification] until the day of Christ Jesus. [Glorification]."** (Philippians 1:6).

- Through our faith in Jesus Christ every believer will reign in eternal life with the Lord. **"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."** (Revelation 20:4-5) —
- The result is, **"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."** (1 Peter 2:9-10)
- Because, **"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him."** (2 Timothy 2:12)
- How? Because Jesus is, **"...worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."** (Revelation 5:9-10)

Verse 5:18

Here Paul repeats the same basic truth again (see verse 16). Through one man's rebellion against God all mankind has inherited a rebellious nature and eternal damnation. But through the sacrificial gift of Jesus, the Lamb of God, all men are offered a free gift of eternal life through salvation.

Verse 5:19

Here Paul further emphasizes the direct connection between Adam's initial sin that brought universal sin and death, and Christ's final sacrifice that provided the source for achieving the original righteousness. We see the same truth in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, ***"For since by man (Adam) came death, by Man (Jesus) also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."*** (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Verse 5:20

There was sin before there was a Law that defined sin. As we have discussed, God initially made man perfect yet He also allowed a source of temptation to exist. As a result, man committed sin, and once that first perfect man was marred, so all men would be marred. God gave Adam one "Law" that must be followed in order to live. But God also gave man a moral code to inherently know right from wrong. Cain knew it was wrong to kill Abel (Genesis 4:7), just as Abram knew it was right to follow God's calling, (Genesis 12:4). But when God's chosen people Israel came together as a nation they would need a little more corporate instruction. So God gave them the Mosaic Law. The ten primary commandments plus a number of other rules for living. And since Israel was to be God's messenger to the world, the rules that God made governing life became universal. But the knowledge of sin through the Law meant mankind knew when they were disobedient. Despite that knowledge men rebelled and sin increased (abounded). But God, in His infinite love, provided grace over grace so no matter how frequent or how evil the sin, God would provide grace sufficient to cover it all.

Verse 5:21

So, the final verdict is this; sin brings death and death reigns supreme in every person who does not come to redemption through God's grace. But, God's grace will reign supreme and bring salvation through Jesus who gives us eternal life with God. — That seems so simple and logical, yet, the majority of the world will never accept it.

Lesson # 20 , Romans - Chapter 6 verses 1-11

Quick Recap:

In chapter 5 Paul presented another key element of doctrinal truth, **"But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8). This is a point so many people fail to grasp. Jesus didn't die for those who work hard to earn their way to heaven. Nor for those who try to be religious enough to be righteous. And certainly not for those who hope for a seat at the table just because they have been "good enough" to get by. No. Jesus died for sinners. He died for mankind, with Adam's inherited sin-nature, who are broken by their sin and seek redemption through Christ Jesus. He died for those of us who realize there is nothing we could ever do to make it to heaven on our own. – He **"...died for the ungodly..."** (Romans 5:6) He died for all sinners and will redeem those who believe in Him.

Introduction to Chapter 6

Nearly every chapter of Romans includes an iconic verse most Christians have heard and chapter 6 is no exception. Here Paul continues his deep-dive into salvation by reminding us that, **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (6:23) Paul uses this chapter to continue his discussion of sin and salvation by focusing on several key points:

- As believers we have died to sin, through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, so that sin is no longer our focus. (Romans 6:1-7)
- Christ died once and was raised to eternal glory. In doing so He defeated death for eternity and since we - as believers - have had our sin die with Him we too will be raised to eternal life. (Romans 6:8-10)
- Through the death of our sin we can now focus on a life lived for Jesus as a new person. (Romans 6:12)
- And none of this is due to our own works or observance of the Law because, **"...sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but grace..."** (Romans 6:14)

This will continue as the central theme of Paul's writings – the fact salvation comes through God's grace, provided to man by Christ on the cross. No work, or religion or adherence to any law could ever erase the blight of even one single sin. It can only be erased by the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb, and that is only possible because of God's amazing grace.

In this portion of his letter Paul will focus on a reality of our justification - that as believers, we have died in Christ and partake in the power of His resurrection.

Thank You Jesus!

Romans 6:1-11

Verses 6:1-2

Having been a legalistic Pharisee himself and now a Christian convert, Paul could anticipate questions his Jewish or Gentile audience might have. He included several of these in his letter with a detailed explanation because he knew he would not be there in person to defend his position. Frankly, the question he poses here is a logical one, **"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"** Traditionally Jews believed they were made righteous through their lineage to Abraham and by adherence to the Law. This led to strict and often oppressive obedience to hundreds of both scripturally-based and rabbinically-impressed rules. They believed God's mercy was earned by their efforts to keep these Laws and sustained by their constant adherence to the Law. Likewise, from a Gentile perspective, non-Jews believed (as many do today) they could be justified by their works and sustained by even more works. Both groups, if they were now believers, would also know that all of their sins are forgiven - even the ones they had not yet committed.

So now Paul will bring clarity to a question that might be on their minds: Since their sins are already forgiven can they sin even more? To set the stage Paul has already shown that salvation doesn't come through adherence to the Law but through belief in the Messianically prophesied sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. (Psalm 22 / Isaiah 53). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that Jesus died once, for all sin, (Hebrews 9:28) so that works-upon-works was not required to maintain salvation because all sin - past, present and future - was defeated on the cross by God's grace. So...knowing all of this, they might assume that given the fact our future sins are already forgiven, and since sin results in even more of God's grace being applied, it would stand to reason we can **"...continue in sin that grace may abound..."**. In other words, Paul knew they might think; since God's grace forgave all sin, and any new sin results in more of God's grace, then we should be able to sin all we want knowing they have already been forgiven - right? No! And not only no, but, **"...Certainly not!"** For emphasis Paul uses the Greek term, *"me'-genoito"* which means *"Never may it be!"* He uses this term fourteen times in his epistles as a statement of strong disagreement, and he uses it here to emphatically discount any notion that the forgiveness of future sin could mean we can sin even more. Paul had already posed a similar rhetorical question earlier in his letter in a slightly different way, **"And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come...?' (Romans 3:8)**. So why does he repeat it again here? Because he wants us to understand that as believers we have, **"...died to sin..."**, and as such we should have no desire to

continue in sin and, "...**live any longer in it.**" That means we can view future sin as pre-forgiven, but at the same time we should abhor our future sin because it too played a part in putting our King on the cross. Furthermore, when Christ went to the cross He did so bearing all of our sin, so that our sin was in-effect crucified with Him. As Paul explained to the Galatians, **"...I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** (Galatians 2:20) Here Paul introduces an often-overlooked element of our faith -- by accepting Jesus and His work on the cross on our behalf, we also accept that our old sin-nature was crucified with Him so that we may live as a new creation, remade in the glorified image of Jesus. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Corinthians 5:17) What an amazing statement, **"...all things have become new..."**. Our life is new. Our eternity is new. Even our view of sin is new. Which means we would never want to intentionally sin just because it is already forgiven. Instead, we should be broken by our sin because our Savior died for each of our transgressions - even the ones we have not yet committed (stop and think about that). Also, the very thought of being **"...in Christ..."** is profound. Paul uses this term 164 times in his epistles because it clarifies who we are as believers. It's more than just believing in Jesus. It is the fact we are **"...in Christ..."**. Not "with" or "about" Christ, but **"...in..."** Him. We are a part of Christ, so that in Him we are made new. **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). That's why it is through our belief in the righteous works of Jesus that we're made righteous in God's eyes.

Now Paul will tell us why this is so important.

Verse 6:3

Here Paul is not talking about water baptism, although baptism is symbolic of what he is talking about. Instead, the term he's using would be like saying, **"A baptism in fire"** to describe a profound event. He does this to help us understand that to give our life to Christ means God put the sins of our former self -- the Adam-like sinner -- on Jesus who went to His death for us. **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** (Galatians 3:27). That means, our sins were with Christ on the cross, and through our faith in the work of Christ we receive the gift of that redemption. This is what Paul means when he says we are spiritually **"...baptized..."** with Christ **"...into His death..."**, and as a result, we should have no desire to sin just because our sins have already been forgiven. That's because our salvation is more than just believing who Christ is. Just as He put on our sin, we **"...put on..."** Jesus like a garment that covers us and presents us to the Father in a different way. This helps us understand the relationship we have with Jesus that Paul will stress again in chapter 13 when he implores us to, **"...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the**

flesh, to fulfill its lusts." (Romans 13:14) Here again he tells us to **"...put on..."** Jesus so that we can, **"...put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."** (Colossians 3:9b-10). This further emphasizes our lost condition, as **"...the old man with his deeds..."** - who was focused on his own works [**"...deeds..."**], versus our new self, **"...renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."**, who should now be focused on Jesus. As Peter said, **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:38) This does not mean we are saved through baptism, but by being **"...baptized into Christ..."** we are in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the event of salvation effectively crucified our sinful nature, **"...in Christ..."** and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we're made new and righteous in God's eyes.

Thank You Jesus!

Verses 6:4-5

To further explain this point Paul uses verses 4 and 5 to summarize the reality of the true gospel:

- We all sin,
- But through our redemption our sin is forgiven,
- Because our sin nature was crucified with Christ, (Verses 2-3)
- And buried with His burial, (Verse 4)
- And defeated through His resurrection as we are raised to life. (Verses 4-5)
- And united with Christ as we are remade in the likeness of His righteousness. (Verse 5)

These steps are represented by water baptism which publicly illustrates our process of spiritually going through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That's important because prior to our salvation we were spiritually **"...dead indeed to sin..."**, (Romans 6:11), but through our faith in the works of Christ on the cross our sin was crucified with Him and died the death He died. And as a result of being raised with Christ - although still with a sin nature - we should be prompted to **"...walk in newness of life..."** as we strive to, **"...be in the likeness of His resurrection..."**. Which is in the likeness of the glorified Jesus. This is the mindset we need to be in. That having been spiritually raised with Christ we should be walking in an attitude to please our heavenly Father whose grace enabled us to be raised to eternal life. Jesus explains the reality of this transformation by contrasting the attitude of our old nature with the new, **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For**

where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) Paul explained the same principle to the church at Colossi, ***"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."*** (Colossians 3:1-4) That is an absolutely amazing passage of scripture. Our salvation comes through an acceptance of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, when we are saved we are, ***"...hidden with Christ in God..."***, and are raised ***"...with Christ..."*** as righteous and justified children of God. Because of this we should be focused on ***"...things above..."***; heavenly things, not earthly things. As Paul explains in Colossians 3 we should be setting our mind on things above rather than focusing on the sinful things below, ***"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."*** (Colossians 3:5-10) Peter also spoke of this transition, ***"...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*** (1 Peter 1:14-16) As believers, dead to flesh and raised in Christ we become God's children, ***"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..."*** (John 1:12).

Step back for just a moment to soak in the wonder of the fact that we are, ***"...children of God..."***, and as such, ***"...you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus..."*** (Galatians 3:26)

Thank you Jesus!

Verses 6:6-7

I love the fact Paul describes our justified state as a ***"...new man..."***, ***"...who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him..."*** (Colossians 3:10) . We're not just forgiven but are made new in Jesus. That's because our ***"...old man..."***, the sinful lost soul we used to be was ***"...crucified with Him..."*** through our faith. As a result we are no longer, ***"...slaves of sin..."*** because, ***"...our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."*** (2 Corinthians 4:16). This transformation is what God said through Ezekiel, ***"...I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh."***

(Ezekiel 11:19) Paul explains this even further to the Ephesians, **"...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."** (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Verses 6:8

Verses 6:8

How encouraging is this! Our old self, the sinful lost soul with Adam's inherited nature is transformed by our salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ to live with Him for eternity. **"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."** (1 John 5:11). Our eternal life, the new man, is not through any effort of our own but through Jesus. Because, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9) Paul stresses the same point to Timothy, **"This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him."** (2 Timothy 2:11). This is a truth we should think about every day. As believers in Christ we no longer just live, but we live, **"...in His Son..."**, as we, **"...live with Him..."**. And as such, we have an amazing opportunity to show the world that Jesus lives as they watch how we live. When we do this the world will see, **"...this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life..."**. (1 John 1:9a).

Verses 6:9-11

We talked about this verse in Lesson #17, but it's an important discussion so let's discuss it again:

- Jesus **"...having been raised from the dead, dies no more..."**,
 - Jesus was only crucified and resurrected once, and that was sufficient to overcome all death and sin,
- Jesus **"...died to sin once for all..."**,
 - His one death was sufficient to cover all sin, past, present and future, **"...once for all..."**, for everyone who will call on Him. (John 3:17)
- Christ only died once, and was only resurrected once, because once was all that was required to purge our sin and apply God's grace.

Digging a little deeper we understand, in the Old Testament sin was atoned through a blood offering to God. The high priest officiated these offerings on a regular basis but the forgiveness was limited and temporary and had to be repeated to show atonement for the priest's own sin as well as the sin of the people (Leviticus 8-9). That's because both the priest and the sacrifice were imperfect and insufficient to gain permanent

forgiveness. (See Exodus 29 / Hebrews 9) But Jesus - God in flesh - came as both the perfect Priest and the perfect sacrifice for our sin. He is the spotless Lamb of God who came as a High Priest that did not have to atone for His own sin, because He had none. Therefore His sacrifice was totally applied to us. ***"For such a High Priest [Jesus] was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, [perfect] and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."*** (Hebrews 7:26-27) Unlike the Levitical priest who had to offer daily sacrifice for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, Jesus, our Great High Priest sacrificed Himself in perfection, ***"...once for all..."***, for the permanent atonement of those who accept God's offering. ***"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation."*** (Hebrews 9:11). Jesus is the perfect tabernacle. Not the man-made tent of meeting where human priests repeatedly sacrificed to God (Exodus 27:21), but He is the door through which, by His divine sacrifice, we can come into a relationship with God. That's because His justifying sacrifice was, ***"...Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience [sin nature] from dead works [sin] to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator [between us and the Father] of the new covenant, [of grace] by means of death, [and resurrection] for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."*** (Hebrews 9:12-15). Here the author of Hebrews speaks of ***"...inheritance..."*** which is a gift passed down from the Father. But not just any gift, it is a gift of, ***"...eternal inheritance..."***, that makes us the children of God.

Lesson # 21 - Romans - Chapter 6 verses 12-23

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 6 Paul's discussion reinforces a key tenet of our faith that we'll see later in this chapter, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (6:23) This will continue to be the main focus of Paul's message of salvation by grace.

In summary:

- We all sin,
- And sin brings eternal death,
- But Jesus brings eternal life,
- Yet our sin cannot be redeemed by any effort of our own,
- Instead, redemption comes only through faith in God's grace,
- As applied to our sin by the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah, on the cross,
- And confirmed by His resurrection to life,
- Which is a gift of salvation we can either accept or reject.

Paul will continue to deep-dive this discussion over and over to help non-believers recognize their need for redemption, but also to help believers understand that:

- We too have died to sin, through the crucifixion of Jesus,
- And as believers we are raised to life through His resurrection,
- And since we - as believers - have had our sin die with Him we too will be raised to eternal life in Him,
- Because Christ died once and was raised to eternal glory,
- And in doing so He defeated death for eternity,
- And since we are redeemed by faith in Jesus we have cast off the "old man", plagued by Adam's sin-nature, and put on our "new man" made righteous in Christ's nature.
- So that sin is no longer our focus.
- And we can now focus on a life lived for Jesus as a new person in Him.

Now Paul will take these truths and apply them to our lives...

Romans 6:12-23

Verses 6:12-14

The term **"...Therefore..."** at the beginning of verse 12 indicates a continuation of Paul's prior thoughts in verses 10 and 11, **"10. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Here Paul reminds us that our sin was in essence crucified with Christ, and that our acceptance of His sacrifice brings grace to us and makes us, **"...alive to God in Christ Jesus..."**. For as Paul explained to the church at Galatia, **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..."** (Galatians 2:20 / Romans 6:6) As such, we are a new creation, "born again" in the righteousness of God's grace, **"...renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."** (Ephesians 4:22-24), and through our salvation we are, **"...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people..."** (1 Peter 2:9), because, **"...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2 Corinthians 5:17). And with that renewal we begin the process of "sanctification" - growing in our faith - until the day we are raptured and glorified in Christ when the **"...corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality..."** (1 Corinthians 15:54).

That is so cool.

Now in verse 12 Paul talks about our **"...mortal body..."** as an **"...instrument..."** that can be used for either sin or for righteousness. As obedient believers we are to **"...present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, [the new man] and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."** (Verse 13) There are a lot of truths to glean from this passage but for our discussion I like to go off on a little bit of a tangent and focus on Paul's use of the word **"...instrument..."** as it applies to our lives. Generally we think of this verse as speaking of our physical body, which can be used as a tool of sin. Paul said of himself, **"...For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells..."** — **".. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** (Romans 7:18 & 24). This is true because it is our mortal bodies (which includes our mind, voice, heart and limbs) that enable us to sin by either thought, word or deed. But Paul reminds us that we can fight the temptation of sin because, **"...sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."** (Verse 14).

So given that truth, let's look at this passage from a slightly different angle and consider our role as an, **"...instrument..."** of God. When Paul was writing this passage I wonder if the Lord inspired him to think about the comment He made to Ananias, **"...But**

the Lord said to him [Ananias], **“Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.”** (Acts 9:15) Here Jesus spoke of Paul in a way we need to think about ourselves – He called him a **“...vessel...”**, which in the Greek, “skeuos”, is a word with several meanings. Of course, it can mean, “a container to be filled and used” but it can also mean, “an instrument by which anything can be done” or even “a household utensil”. In other words, a tool. Similarly, the word Paul uses here for **“...instrument...”** is “hopla” which in Greek can mean, “a tool for preparing”, “an implement, particularly in warfare”. In other words, both a **“...vessel...”** and an **“...instrument...”** are implements that can be used by its owner to accomplish a task. Much like the role of a believer in Christ - who are like tools in the hands of the Master Craftsman - the Carpenter (Mark 6:3). So that in His will we are used to accomplish His work, build His kingdom or fight against His enemies. In my mind I find this to be an interesting connection.

On top of that, the word **“...carpenter...”** has been interpreted by historians as a worker in wood or stone, and given the type of building materials used in first-century Israel I suppose either could be accurate. In Greek the root word for **“...carpenter...”**, “tekton” can also be interpreted in a broader sense to mean, “a craftsman, an artisan, or a begetter”. In other words, one who designs, creates and builds. So given that expanded meaning how could this apply to Jesus' decision to live on earth as a **“...carpenter...”** — a builder?

Well, let's think about it this way:

- John tells us, **“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”** (John 1:3) - So...Jesus "made" all things.
- Paul further confirmed the Lord designed and created all things, **“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”** (Colossians 1:16)
- Paul expands on this thought as it applies to us, **“For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”** (1 Corinthians 3:9-11)
- Abraham understood this because he had faith in, **“...looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** (Hebrews 11:10)

- To which Paul also spoke, ***"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."*** (2 Corinthians 5:1)
- And as the Psalmist wrote, which was later quoted by Mark, ***"Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.'" (Mark 12:10 / Psalm 118:22 / Matthew 21:42)***
- And as Peter proclaimed, ***"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone..." (1 Peter 2:4-7)***
- Isaiah clearly understood God's role as a divine Craftsman, ***But now, O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand."*** (Isaiah 64:8)
- To which the Psalmist clarified, ***"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."*** (Psalm 95:6)
- And Jesus, the Master Builder said of the gospel, ***"...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*** (Matthew 16:18)

Clearly, Jesus is the Designer, Creator and the Builder of all things, and as His ***"...instruments..."*** we are tools in the hands of the Master Craftsman. But just as a carpenter does not build with bare hands, and instead needs a hammer or saw or another specialized tool for a particular task, so too Jesus uses us as His tools...

- We are the hands and feet who, ***"...preach the gospel of peace..."*** (Romans 10:15 / Isaiah 52:7)
- We are commanded to, ***"...Go therefore and make disciples..."*** (Matthew 28:19)

- And we aspire to, ***"...let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, And establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands."*** (Psalm 90:17)
- Because we understand, ***"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*** (Ephesians 2:10)

Being an ***"...instrument..."*** of Christ is a role we must embrace every day. Always ready for use, always sharp and always alert to His movement in our hearts. And if we're obedient to His call He will use the gifts He's given us so that we may participate in His work.

Just like He used:

- The staff in the hands of Moses (Exodus 4:2-5),
- The sling in the hands of David (1 Samuel 17:50),
- The roving feet of Paul, (Romans 10:15),
- The words of the prophets (Amos 3:7),
- And the pen of John (Revelation 1:19).

So what tool are you?

Verses 6:15-19

In verse 13 Paul alerts us that our mortal bodies can be used as, ***"...instruments of unrighteousness to sin..."*** or ***"...as instruments of righteousness to God..."***. Whichever occurs is up to us. Now in verse 15 Paul returns to the same basic question he asked in verse 1, ***"...Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?..."***. Of course the answer to his rhetorical question is the same as before; an emphatic, ***"Certainly not!"***. As those who have been saved by grace and who have become tools in the Master Craftsman's hands, we are to be obedient with our actions, ***"...leading to righteousness..."***. Otherwise, Paul warns, ***"...I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin..."*** (Romans 7:23). But we must fight these temptations, ***"...not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection..."*** (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

But why is this so important? Because, ***"...whoever commits sin is a slave to sin..."*** (John 8:34), and because we still have a sin nature which presents a battle we must fight every day. A battle to become a slave of Jesus - as a tool to be used - instead of a slave to sin.

So in that light, what is the Lord's greatest tool in our lives? Our testimony. The person we exhibit on stage before the world. I've heard it said that a believer's most precious possession is our testimony. That would make sense because it is our lifestyle the world sees when they watch us, and it is our testimony that proclaims the reality of Jesus. But unfortunately, a believer's most powerful weapon is our ability to destroy our testimony. ***"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."*** (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) Here, as in Romans 6 Paul is speaking about our testimony. Our lives lived for Christ because we, ***"...obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [salvation by faith] to which you were delivered. 18. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness..."***. So now, as believers we, ***"...present [testify] your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness."*** And when we do that the world will see how real Jesus really is. That's why it's so vitally important to guard our testimony every minute of every day.

Verses 6:20-23

Here Paul speaks of two key elements - freedom and fruit. Now freedom can present itself in two ways. First, when we were lost we were ***"...free in regard to righteousness..."***. In other words, our sin created a freedom of depravity which produced no fruit except shame. Or, once saved we can have freedom ***"...from sin..."***, as, ***"...slaves of God..."*** which produces the pure fruit of our faith that is, ***"...holiness, and the end, everlasting life..."***. In either case we are a slave, "doulos" in Greek. And as a slave we are either obedient to sin or a slave obedient to God's love and will. Even Jesus, our Lord, modeled the life of a slave who, ***"...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."*** (Philippians 2:7) because He was, ***"...purchased with His own blood..."***, who, ***"...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many..."*** so that we too were, ***"...bought at a price..."*** for the redemption of our sin. (Acts 20:28 / Matthew 20:28 / 1 Corinthians 6:20).

Paul then concludes this beautiful chapter with both a promise and a warning, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** This is the simple message of God's grace we need to share with the world. Sin comes with consequences but faith comes with reward.

Lesson # 22 - Romans, Chapter 7 verses 1-6

Quick Recap:

In chapter 6 Paul makes a compelling case leading up to a core doctrinal truth, - **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23) He builds up to this truth by explaining that through our salvation we have essentially **"...died to sin..."** through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Verse 2). Our acceptance of Jesus and His sacrifice is the core of salvation because, **"...our old man was crucified with Him..."** so that we are no longer, **"...slaves of sin..."** (Verse 6). As a result, we become **"...instruments..."** or tools in the hands of the Master Builder - the Carpenter from Nazareth. (Verse 12). Paul then speaks of us now being, **"...slaves of righteousness..."** and **"...slaves of God..."** (Verses 19 & 22). Obedient servants bought and paid for by the most precious of all payments - the blood of the Lamb of God.

Introduction to Chapter 7

Paul now digs a little deeper to expose the true meaning of the Law and how, once saved, we are no longer bound to it. That's because our salvation comes from recognizing our sin and then seeking redemption through the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. In this way, **"...you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ..."** (Romans 7:4). Prior to salvation our lives were controlled by sin, but after we're saved we are no longer slaves to sin but instead, we are slaves of God and **"...should bear fruit for God."** (Verse 7:4). Further, Paul continues to stress the real purpose of the Law, which was not to save, but to point to our need for a Savior. How? Simply because. **"...I would not have known sin except through the law."** (Verse 7:7). He then talks about the struggles we still have with sin. As believers we are forgiven but our sin nature still abounds. He describes this battle in verses 14-25. A battle we all face everyday. To the point Paul proclaimed, **"O wretched man that I am!"** (Verse 7:24). And yet, **"I thank God - through Jesus Christ our Lord."** (Verse 7:25)

Now, let's discuss this in more detail.

Romans 7:1-6

Verse 7:1

Paul begins with **"...Or..."**, pointing back to his previous discussion about our position of being a slave to sin, which leads to death, or as a slave to God, which leads to eternal life. (Romans 6:20-23). Now Paul expands on this, **"...to those who know**

the law...". This could be directed to his Jewish readers but maybe not. Earlier in his letter Paul had already clarified that the law can be either the Jewish written "Law" given first to Moses for nationalist Israel, or the natural "law" of man's conscience that is given to everyone so that they are, **"...a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness..."** (Romans 2:14-15). Now in chapter 7 Paul will use the term "law" twenty-three more times to further illustrate the role of the law to us as a believer. He begins by reminding us that the law has dominion - *"kyrievel"* - "jurisdiction" - over us as long as we're in our unglorified earthly body. That's because it is the "law" that makes our sin known to us, **"...for by the law is the knowledge of sin..."** (Romans 3:20). Even after we are saved we still sin, so the law is still a reminder, but once we are redeemed in Christ we are no longer condemned by the law but are instead led by the Holy Spirit. Earlier Paul had also clarified that, **"...the wages of sin [pointed out by the law] is death, but the gift of God [through our salvation] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:23). That's because the wages for our sin were paid by Christ on the cross, and our acceptance of Christ as our Savior allows us to receive God's gift of grace. In this sense the law continues to exist but to the saved person it no longer brings the penalty of death because, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."**. (Romans 8:1). The law is still a reminder of what obedience looks like, but our focus is now on serving our Lord and King through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

It is to this condition Paul now speaks.

Verses 7:2-3

Let's be careful not read more into this passage than Paul intended. He is not talking about marriage or divorce. He is simply using a common, real-life example of human bonding to illustrate the application of our life bound to the "law". He uses this example so that anyone can understand and relate to his explanation of how the law and Christ apply to our faith. To do this he speaks to the relationship between a husband and wife whose union is governed by a civil "law". A law that is intended to rule their marriage until death. This "law" would include behavioral expectations, limitations and boundaries they should adhere to for as long as they live.(Genesis 2:24). As long as they are alive they should comply with the law, but when one or the other passes-away the law no longer has jurisdiction over the surviving person. Likewise, both the Mosaic and natural law given to mankind provides God's expectations, limitations and boundaries for life. As a believer we are drawn by the Holy Spirit to live within these expectations - which results in obedience and eternal life. But a non-believer rebels and violates the limitations and boundaries set by God - which results in sin and eternal death. Yet, as believers who are redeemed from our sin, we are also freed from the consequences of the law because we are now alive in Christ. In the broadest sense we can view Paul's example like the "Bride of Christ, who is, **"...arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright..."**;

and made clean because Christ, **"...gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church,"** (Revelation 19:8 / Ephesians 5:25-27). Through this cleansing in Christ, our former self, the "old man" has died so that we are, **"...dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 6:11). And as such, we are no longer condemned by the law because, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." – "...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."** (Romans 8:1&4). That **"...righteous requirement..."** Paul will speak to later, is our faith in Christ which now separates us from the consequences of the law.

Verse 7:4

Paul further clarifies the marriage example by making it clear that we, as believers, are, **"...dead to the law..."** through the physical sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and have become His betrothed bride and are now, **"...married to another..."** (2 Corinthians 11:2). He doesn't say the law is dead, but that we **"...have become dead..."** to the consequences of the law because of our relationship with Jesus. In other words, our joining with Christ through salvation has separated us from the law and placed us in Him so that we are no longer condemned by the law. Given that truth Paul can now speak to a key outpouring of our union with Christ, our **"...fruit..."**, which is essentially our personal testimony. This is the outpouring of the Spirit, in us and through us, by which the world may see the impact of Jesus in our lives. Paul discussed this in detail with the Galatians where he highlights examples of the fruit seen when our redeemed lives are under the governance of the Holy Spirit, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."** (Galatians 5:22-25). This **"...walk..."** is the character of our testimony. The living proclamation of Jesus to the world seen through the actions of our faith. It is our faith **"...lived out..."** as the Holy Spirit works in and through us to make Christ known. This is what Paul meant when he employed us to, **"...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** (Romans 12:1-2). This is our testimony. The fruit **"...we should bear..."**. A personal living sacrifice as an offering to our living and resurrected Jesus who gave the ultimate sacrifice for us. It is then through our actions — often more powerful than our words — that proves the reality of Jesus to a skeptical world. This fruit is possible because we are constantly being, **"...transformed by the renewing of your mind..."**. A process of renewal enabled by the Holy Spirit through our study of God's

word. It is through our time in His word that we gain strength to fight against our inherent sin nature when, ***"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."*** (Psalm 119:11). So that we can, ***"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*** (Colossians 3:16). What a beautiful thing that is.

Verses 7:5-6

Here Paul is speaking in the past tense, ***"...when we were..."*** to describe our pre-redeemed condition of sin. The "...old man..." with Adam's inherent sin nature. (Romans 5:12 / 6:5-6). The word Paul uses for ***"...flesh..."***, "sarki" in Greek can have a number of meanings depending on its use. It can represent physical flesh, as in Luke 24:39, ***"...for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have..."***, or a mental flesh as in John 1:13 describing, ***"...the will of the flesh..."***. Here Paul uses the word to describe our sinful self, ***"...when we were in the flesh..."***. Using the term to represent the carnal condition we were in prior to being saved. Peter spoke of this same condition by reminding us, ***"...that he no longer should live in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God..."***. (1 Peter 4:2). This defines the state of being in sin when we were ***"...in the flesh..."***, the unredeemed lost. The old man. A life represented by, ***"...fruit to death..."*** rather than the fruit of a redeemed life. A life that lives in, ***"...works of the flesh..."*** that, ***"...will not inherit the kingdom of God."*** (Galatians 5:19&21). ***"But now [as believers] we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."*** Here Paul further expands on the idea of the "old man", ***"...having died..."*** and being replaced by the "...new man..." ***"...in the newness of the Spirit..."***, who has been ***"...renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."*** (Ephesians 4:23-24). This constant renewing of our mind through obedience, prayer and being in God's word is what is meant by ***"Walking in the Spirit"***.

Lesson # 23 - Romans, Chapter 7 verses 7-12

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 7 Paul used the example of a human marriage bond to illustrate how we are joined and then separated from the "law" through our relationship with Jesus. The law provides expectations and boundaries much like a wedding vow, but when one of the couple passes away these restrictions no longer apply. Similarly, when our "old man", with its inherent sin nature is redeemed and replaced with the "new man" the law no longer has consequences for us because our life is now in Christ. (Romans 6:6 / Ephesians 2:15 & 4:24). This relationship results in our personal testimony. Which is the fruit we exhibit to the world by walking in the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

Romans 7:7-12

Now in the next section of chapter 7 Paul will raise another rhetorical question about the law that is very similar to the questions he posed in chapter 6 (Romans 6:1 / 6:15). Here Paul will use his own testimony to talk about sin and its recognition through the law.

Verse 7:7

In chapter 6 Paul asked two questions about sin:

- 6:1 ***"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!"***
- 6:15 ***"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!"***

Now in chapter 7 Paul adds a third question in the same vein. ***"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not!"*** As we previously discussed in chapter 6 Paul poses a number of rhetorical questions throughout his letter. He did that because he was not physically in Rome to personally answer any questions they might have. Yet having been both a legalistic Jew and a converted Christian he was uniquely qualified to anticipate the questions of both groups. And of course, God knew the exact questions they would ask so He inspired Paul to use them to clarify several topics.

His questions build on each other to make three points:

- Verse 6:1 - Just because we're saved doesn't mean we should sin more so that more of God's grace would be applied.

- Verse 6:15 - And, we should not sin just because we know our future sins are no longer governed by the law.
- Verse 7:7 - Because, the law in itself is not sin, but the law helps us recognize our sins by comparing our life to God's perfect standard.

In each case Paul used an emphatic response as his answer, **"...Certainly not!..."**. He uses the Greek phrase "me'-genoito", that as we have already learned means "Never may it be!". A term with great negative emphasis he uses 14 times in his epistles. Here as before, he uses it as a statement of strong disagreement to discount any notion that the law causes sin. To the contrary, the law is holy and is intended to make our sin known to us, **"...I would not have known sin except through the law"**., because, **"...by the law is the knowledge of sin..."** (Romans 7:7 / 3:20). In other words, without the Mosaic or natural law mankind would not be able to identify sin – the difference between God's view of right and wrong – so God gave us a set of standards to help us know the difference. Yet Paul knew there would still be those who felt they were religious enough or good enough to offset their sin by earning righteousness through adherence to the law. So Paul hits them right between the eyes with an example of a sin we have all committed — coveting. **"...For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."**

This is the tenth and final commandment, but unlike the others coveting requires no physical action. It is a sin of attitude, of desires, self-importance, and self-righteousness. When we think too highly of ourselves or of the things we desire in life we covet. We discussed this same verse earlier in chapter 4, so at the risk of repeating myself I want us to talk about the pinnacle story of coveting. To do that, here is an excerpt from lesson # 16 on chapter 4 to review again.

*"...In other words, no one other than Jesus was capable of fully "keeping the law". That's because we all fail and fall short of God's standard. Meaning that, **"...whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all..."** (James 2:10). Jesus illustrates this important principle in the story of the rich young man recorded in Matthew 19:16-22.*

Let's look at the conversation:

- *The young rich man approached Jesus and asked:*
"Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"
- *To which Jesus replied,*
"...if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." (the Law).

- **"Which ones?"** the young man asked.
- Jesus said, **"You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "**
- To this the young man confidently replied, **"All these things I have kept from my youth..."**
- But to be sure he was good enough he asked, **"...What do I still lack?"**
- **"Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...' '...and come, follow Me.'"**
- **"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."**

Now let's summarize what we just read to see what we can learn from the young rich man:

- The young man wanted to know what **"...good thing..."** (works) he could do to achieve salvation.
- He assumed that doing a **"...good thing..."** would be good enough.
- He also felt he had been successful in keeping the Law his entire life...
- But, in case he was mistaken he quickly asked, **"...What do I still lack?"**
- This shows he was interested in what Jesus thought but remained focused on what can **"...I..."** do.
- In His response Jesus summarized the gospel in just three words, **"...come, follow Me."**
- But the rich young man put his earthly possessions over the promise of, **"...treasure in heaven..."** (eternity with Jesus) and walked away from the Lord's offer of free grace.
- In doing so he broke the Law he thought he was keeping, and tragically failed to accept the grace of God being offered.

So the young man went away sorrowful because he had been unable to fulfill all of the commandments, which means he failed them all. But how did he fail? Because he coveted his earthly possessions and valued them over his relationship with Jesus. In doing so he essentially violated the first and tenth commandments, **"You shall have no other gods before Me"** and **"You shall not covet..."**, (Deuteronomy 5:7&21). There are a number of lessons to be learned from this conversation, including our

reliance on material things, but the point Jesus was trying to make wasn't for the young man to give away his belongings. Jesus wanted him to understand the impossibility of keeping the Law and to accept the offer to follow Him. The young man's failure was his focus on works-based salvation which he felt was possible through adherence to the Law. That's why he asked, **"...what good thing shall I do..."**, focusing on **"...I..."** and **"...do..."**. He was looking for something he could do - a **"...good thing..."** - a work - rather than looking to what the Messiah could do. In doing so he missed the whole point of Christ's request. Jesus was offering a free gift of grace that did not require works, and frankly, it did not require him to pay for it with his possessions, because, the Lord had already said in scripture, **"...Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money..."** (Isaiah 55:1). Instead, Jesus wanted the young man to put faith in Him above his wealth, but the man coveted his wealth because it had become his idol - the earthly "god" he put before the Holy God. Paul will address this example in chapter 7 when he explains, **"...I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" (Romans 7:7)** The rich man's story might sound hard to believe but unfortunately the same scenario still plays out every single day.

But was this the only example of coveting that should have been known to Paul's readers? Not at all.

- What about Lot who selected the choice land that later proved to be so evil, **"...and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord."** (Genesis 13:12-13)
- Or Jacob who tricked his father in order to acquire his brother's blessing, **"...Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing."** (Genesis 27:35)
- Or Achan who stole the plunder of Ai even though God had warned them not to, **"And Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.'" (Joshua 7:20-21)**
- Or David who coveted Bathsheba, another man's wife, **"Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. " (2 Samuel 11:2)**

- Or Judas who was willing to exchange Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. ***"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him."*** (Matthew 26:14-16)
- Or satan who coveted the throne of God, ***"For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation.. On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'"*** (Isaiah 14:13-14)

In each case we see how these individuals put something in their lives ahead of their faith in God and in doing so they coveted the thing they desired most. Now in his letter to the church in Roman the Lord inspired Paul to highlight the sin of coveting because He knew it was a sin we all commit. Even the most self-righteous and legalistic Jew would have to admit that his pride of adhering to the Law was in itself coveting. Likewise, the non-Jew who felt his own efforts were good enough to achieve righteousness would realize he was coveting just by thinking he could earn his way to heaven. So here, when Paul says, ***"For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'"*** he is speaking in the first-person and using his own testimony to make the point that even he had sinned in this way. In doing so he is not only admitting his own inability to achieve the requirements of the law, but he is essentially saying:

- *"Look at yourself in the mirror. Do you see your own efforts to adhere to the Law or your desire to achieve righteousness on your own? Then what you really see is your own covetousness. And now that you recognize you covet, you recognize your sin, and you recognize the law cannot be kept. So...logically salvation must come some other way."*

Their self-righteous covetousness broke the law, and therefore condemned them by the law with eternal death - the ***"...wages of sin..."*** - unless that sin is redeemed by grace, through Jesus (Romans 6:23). Paul's point here is the same point Jesus made to the young ruler. Even if you could somehow achieve the other nine commandments, number ten - coveting - cannot be kept, which means earning righteousness through the law is impossible.

Paul explains this same truth with a similar question posed to the church at Galatia, ***"Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."*** (Galatians 3:21-25). Here Paul effectively summarizes the book of Romans. The law cannot be against God's promises because the law is holy. It is God's standard given to mankind when man proved we cannot discern right from wrong on our own. But the law in itself cannot grant life because the law, like a schoolmaster, only teaches us about sin by pointing out the things that bring spiritual death. Yet, to those who believe in the work of Christ we gain righteousness through Him so that, ***"...we might be justified by faith..."***.

Verses 7:8-9

We've often heard it said that our best testimony is to tell others how Jesus changed our life. That's essentially what Paul is doing here. He uses words like ***"...me..."*** and ***"...I..."*** to make his explanation personal and transparent in order to give it credibility. Remember, Paul had been a legalistic Pharisee. Trained at the feet of Gamaliel he became, ***"A Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law."*** (Philippians 3:5). An expert in the law's requirements, he was now a converted Christian which gave him a testimony of one who had made the drastic transition from adherence to the Law to faith in Christ Jesus. To help explain this Paul uses the word ***"...opportunity..."***, which in Greek, *"aphormen"* means *"An occasion or starting point."* This would help his readers understand the commandments - the moral standard of God - is the starting point that caused him to recognize his sin, and without the law his sin would have been unrecognizable. The commandments give us the opportunity to recognize our sin and its consequences because it is the knowledge of the law that brings clarity to our sin and with it the recognition that sin brings death. Sadly, Paul uses a statement here that so accurately describes the attitude of most lost people today, ***"...I was alive..."***. Prior to the true recognition of their sin most people feel they are probably living well by being *"...good enough..."*, and therefore feel good about their eternal condition – in other words they *"feel alive"*. But when ***"...the commandment came..."***, and with it the knowledge and realization of their own sin they begin to grasp the severe consequences, ***"...and I died..."***. That's because unrepentant sin fulfills God's promise to mankind, ***"...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die..."*** (Genesis 2:17).

Verses 7:10-11

Of this passage Matthew Henry said, *"Paul had the law in his head and in his hands, but not in his heart."* – Prior to his salvation Paul was an expert in the law and thought his attempt at adherence would, **"...bring life..."**. But once Paul realized it was impossible for man to achieve righteousness on his own he realized the law would instead **"...bring death..."**. For with knowledge of the law - either Mosaic or natural - man should inherently know it is a standard set by God. But our enemy is cunning and will work in our minds to deceive us from the truth. Just as he did with Eve when he told her, **"...You will not surely die..."**, (Genesis 3:4) which was the exact opposite of what God had said. But that single lie was enough to convince Eve, **"...when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate."** (Genesis 2:6). Now Paul tells his readers the same thing happened to him. Because sin **"...deceived me, and by it killed me..."** just as it did with Eve.

Verse 7:12

After all of this discussion about the law Paul wants to clarify an important point - **"...the law is holy..."**. It is holy because they are the commandments of God and as such are **"...holy and just and good."** The "law", whether religious or conscience-based, is the standard set by God for His human creation to live by. Originally He only gave mankind one law, **"...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it..."**. This commandment was simple enough to achieve but in case they failed it came with a promised consequence, **"...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."** (Genesis 2:17) The legalistic Jews were well aware of this story, as were the early Christian believers. But somehow they felt they could achieve hundreds of Mosaic and Rabbinical laws, or live righteously enough even though the perfectly-created Adam could not achieve just one law. That's how deceiving the enemy was and still is today. Thousands of years after God told mankind that violating one rule resulted in death they somehow still feel their efforts to be religious enough or good enough will suffice. This delusion alone shows how powerful our enemy is. For just like Eve at the tree satan has billions of people believing they don't need God because they can probably make it on their own.

But the story of Adam and Eve reveals another truth Paul's readers should have understood. God had given Adam and Eve a "law". One rule they had to follow. But through temptation they broke the rule and in doing so they were exposed to knowledge that enabled them to see their sin, **"...She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked..."** (Genesis 3:7). Just as Paul said, **"...I would not have known sin except through the law"**, because, **"...by the law is the knowledge of sin..."** (Romans 7:7 / 3:20). The single law given to Adam and Eve, when broken revealed their sin and with

that recognition they knew they had sinned against God. The command not to eat from the tree did not cause sin, but once the sin was committed the commandment made it clear what they had done and Adam confessed, **"...I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself..."**. (Genesis 3:10). Once Adam realized what they had done they knew they had violated God's command, and he felt **"...naked..."**, ashamed and sinful. But then God revealed why, **"Who told you that you were naked?"** (Genesis 3:11). The "law" told them. The tree they ate from was, **"...the tree of the knowledge of good and evil..."** (Genesis 2:17). The tree of knowing right from wrong – the "law". And as such mankind, **"...became like one of Us, to know good and evil..."** (Genesis 3:22). The "law" given to Adam and Eve was clearly defined. As was the Mosaic Law. But the law also came with a consequence, and once broken brought the knowledge of what they had done. Because, **"...by the law is the knowledge of sin..."** (Romans 3:20). Paul's readers should have known that story well. The "law" was presented to Adam and Eve on a tree, and the Law was fulfilled by the Messiah, **"...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness..."** (1 Peter 2:24). It was the "law" fulfilled in Jesus who convicts our hearts of the sins we commit. That's why it is Jesus who must take our sins away.

Sadly, Eve doubted God's promise and gained what she thought she wanted – which turned out to be a forbidden fruit. Yet had she believed God she would have gained righteousness. And even though she would have given up the thing she coveted, in doing so she would have gained a life of redemption. Paul discussed this idea with the church at Philippi. Making the point that oftentimes the things we gain in this life are like Eve's fruit – useless in the eyes of God. But the things we gain through our faith in Jesus enables us to, **"...know Him and the power of His resurrection..."**. (Philippians 3:10)

So let's conclude this lesson by thinking on this:

- **"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."** (Philippians 3:7-11)

Lesson 24 - Romans, Chapter 7 verses 13-25

Quick Recap:

In the second section of chapter 7 Paul asked the third in a series of questions related to the law, **7. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet.".** (See Romans 6:1 / 6:15 / 7:7) The law is not sin, but it exposes sin. The law is God's commands, holy and just, that help us recognize the sin in our lives. Just as Adam and Eve, who knew they had sinned as soon as they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we too have the capacity to understand when we have violated the laws of God. But for Paul's readers who still believed they could be good enough or religious enough to earn righteousness he cites the tenth commandment as a sin everyone commits - **"You shall not covet.".** Coveting is unlike many of the other commandments in that it requires no physical action. It is a sin of attitude, of desire, self-importance, and self-righteousness. Even when we think too highly of ourselves or focus too intently on the things we desire in life, we covet. Why? Because the earthly things we love, including ourselves, can become our idols and thereby violate the first commandment. That's because coveting distracts us from loving, **"...the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all of your mind. This is the first and great commandment."** (Matthew 22:37-38). So Paul used this example of sin to explain a key point, **"...the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."** The law enables us to see our sin for what it is; a barrier to an eternal life with God. But the law cannot save. It is only through our redemption of sin in Jesus - made visible by the law - that saves our soul.

Now Paul will continue his discussion by posing yet another question related to the law in order to explore a battle we all face. The conflict between our "new man" and the lingering effects of our sin nature. Some contend this passage talks to the life of an unbeliever, but the use of **"...I..."** and **"...me..."** makes it clear that Paul is speaking to the struggles in a believer's life. Maybe even his own.

Romans 7:13-25

Verse 7:13

Here Paul poses another question he will answer again with the same emphatic response as before, **"me'-genoito"** - "Never may it be!". (See 6:1 / 6:15 / 7:7). The law in and of itself is good because they are the commandments of God and as such are holy and just (Romans 7:12). But the law is simply the measure by which our sin is made

known, that, **"...it might appear sin..."**, which unless redeemed is, **"...producing death..."**. And once our sin is visible and recognized, **"...through the commandment..."** [the law] we see it as **"...exceedingly sinful..."** because it was our sin that put our King on the cross. The law cannot change you, save you or set you free. But it can identify what needs to be changed so that you can recognize your need to be saved and be set free from the law's consequences by the grace of God.

Verses 7:14-25

Paul presents a circular back-and-forth discussion comparing the desires of our "new man" in Christ with our inherent sin nature of the "old man". Even as believers we still sin, ***If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar...*** (1 John 1:10), because God has said we all sin, ***"...There is no one who does good, No, not one..."*** (Psalm 14:3b / Romans 3:10). Once we establish that fact (a concept the legalistic Pharisees struggled with) we understand that our sin nature lingers in this life. That's because as we grow in the Lord we go through a spiritual maturing called ***"Sanctification"***, and no matter how hard we try, as long as we are still in our earthly body we will not achieve perfection. Therefore, sin still exists in us. This is illustrated by the fact that even as believers it is impossible for us to achieve the perfect standards set by God because, ***"...all have sinned and fall short..."***. (Romans 3:23). In fact, key to our spiritual growth in Christ is the realization of where we fall short. To the point even the most faithful Christian realizes how far we fall short of God's expectations when we compare our earthly efforts to the indescribable glory of an Almighty and all-holy God who took our sin upon Himself. It is a profound truth that brings us to our knees in remorse.

To make his point Paul contrasts the law, which ***"...is spiritual..."*** with his human nature that is ***"...carnal..."***. The use of the word ***"...spiritual..."*** speaks to the fact the law deals with our inner-man, our spirit, in revealing our sin to us. In a spiritual sense our "new man" wants to please God. Not to attain righteousness, but to show our love to our Lord that saved our wicked souls by His own sacrifice. In Deuteronomy 10 Moses described the law in more of a spiritual sense than as a set of rules to live by. There he tells us to, ***"...fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes..."***. (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). Here we see the commandments as an element of approaching God through our love for Him. Not to earn righteousness, but to show our obedience by fearing Him (being in awe of Him), walking with Him, loving Him and serving Him. Yet even the most fierce and obedient believer will fail to achieve ***"...all His ways..."*** or to love Him with all, ***"...of your heart and with all of your soul..."***.

So to describe his lingering old-man Paul also speaks of being ***"...carnal..."***; ***"sarkinos"*** in Greek which means ***"fleshly, earthy and perishable"***. This is the sin nature that still exists in our un-glorified bodies. Here Paul says ***"...I am carnal..."*** which

simply means "*I am human*", or, ***"...In the flesh..."*** (Romans 7:5). That is why we cannot fully achieve the law and be perfect because we are still mortal, no matter how much we don't want to be. The legalistic Jews and converted Gentiles should have understood this. They knew about Moses' murder, Jacob's deception, David's adultery and Peter's denial. These are all examples of ***"...carnal..."*** actions in great men of God. This is the struggle between our spiritual "new man" and the carnality of our persistent "old man". A conflict Paul describes to the Galatians, "***I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.***" (Galatians 5:16-18) In other words, the conflict between our old and new natures is not because of the law, but even as we walk in the Spirit the law will reveal the plague of our sinful nature.

To describe this Paul gives several examples of our conflict in verses 14-25:

- ***"For what I am doing, I do not understand...."***
- ***"For what I will to do, that I do not practice..."***
- ***"But what I hate, that I do..."***
- ***"For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find..."***
- ***"For the good that I will to do, I do not do..."***
- ***"But the evil I will not to do, that I practice..."***
- ***"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind..."***
- ***"And bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."***
- ***"...O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!..."***

Here Paul is simply describing the struggle between the "old man" and the new. A conflict that knows the tree is forbidden yet we find ourselves reaching for the fruit. It is the same thing we feel when we sin and the Holy Spirit convicts our heart and we mentally ask ourselves:

- "Why did I do that?"
- "Why did I act that way?"
- "Why did I get angry?"

- "Why did I respond that way?"
- "Where on earth did that thought come from?"

Sound familiar? It should, because that is the struggle every yet-to-be-perfected believer deals with. This is not a battle for the unbeliever because their thoughts and actions are controlled entirely by the "old man". It is only through conviction of the Holy Spirit and a recognition that our thoughts and actions are sin that we understand this battle and can come to Christ for redemption and freedom. That's why Paul says, **"If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good."** (Romans 7:16). Here he recognized the value in the law as the measure to help him understand his sin - the things his old-man does - that his new-man does not want to do. Because through the law he now knows it is wrong and can prayerfully fight the temptation.

Paul expresses this in a statement that is often misinterpreted, **"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."** This does not mean, as some would contend, that Paul does not accept responsibility for his sinful actions. He certainly does. But here Paul is simply presenting a comparison between his new-man in Christ, **"...I..."**, and his lingering old-man with the nature to commit, **"...sin that dwells in me..."**. He further clarified this thought to the church at Galatia, **"I have been crucified with Christ; [the old-man] it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; [the indwelt new-man] and the life which I now live in the flesh [our earthly body] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** (Galatians 2:20) In our own strength the old-man still exists, yet it is through our strength in Christ that enables the new-man to shine through. That's why Paul says, **"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells..."**. Yet, it is through Christ who indwells in us through the Holy Spirit that gives us the strength to fight against our sin until the time when, **"...this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality..."**, and that is how **"...Death is swallowed up in victory..."**. (1 Corinthians 15:53 & 54b)

The confidence Paul had is the same confidence we can have, **"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."** Here Paul gives us a believer's most powerful weapon - God's word:

- **"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."** (Psalm 1:2)
- **"And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love.. "** (Psalm 119:47)
- **"Let your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight..."**. (Psalm 119:77)

- ***"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*** (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

It is the law that helps us understand, ***"O wretched man that I am!"*** A term that in Greek describes a person in great strain and worn from battle. A battle of victory we can win through Christ. But also it is a reality of how wretched we are when even our most obedient efforts are compared to the holiness of our Lord. And with that realization Paul poses a closing rhetorical question, ***"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*** It is Jesus, and only Jesus. So we, ***"...thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!..."*** and even though, ***"...with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."*** We serve through Christ and we serve in victory.

To encourage us in our own fight let's conclude this lesson by reading what Paul said to the church at Ephesus - and to us:

- ***"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..."*** (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Thank You Lord.

Lesson # 25 - Romans - Chapter 8 verses 1-11

Quick Recap:

Paul began chapter 7 by explaining believers are no longer bound to the law. That's because even though our sin was made recognizable by the law, our sin has been redeemed through our faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. As a result we, **"...have become dead to the law through the body of Christ..."** (Romans 7:4).

To illustrate this point Paul used the example of a human marriage bond to show how we are joined and then separated from the "law" through our relationship with Jesus. The law provides expectations and boundaries much like a wedding vow, but in a human marriage when one of the couple passes away these restrictions no longer apply to the other. Similarly, when our "old man", with its inherent sin nature is crucified with Christ, we **"...become dead to the law..."** and our spirit becomes the "new man", redeemed in Jesus. (Romans 6:6 / Ephesians 2:15 & 4:24) When this happens the law still exists as our guide but no longer has consequences for us because our life is now in Christ.

But for Paul's readers who still held to the notion they could be good enough or religious enough to earn righteousness he cites the tenth commandment as a sin everyone commits - **"You shall not covet."** Coveting requires no physical action. It is a sin of attitude, desire, self-importance, and self-righteousness. Even when we think too highly of ourselves or focus too intently on the things we desire in life, we covet. That's because the earthly things we love, including ourselves, can become our idols and thereby violate the first commandment, **"...You shall have no other gods before Me..."** (Exodus 20:3). Coveting also distracts us from loving the Lord, **"...with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all of your mind."** (Matthew 22:37). So Paul used this example of a sin we all commit in order to explain a key point, **"...the commandment, [the law] which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."** This would help his readers understand they had all sinned and therefore the law brought death unless their sins were forgiven through faith in Jesus. Paul then closes out chapter 7 with the recognition of his own sin, **"...O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"**, but adds a proclamation that it is, **"... God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!..."** who is our Deliverer and the source of our redemption. (Romans 7:24).

Introduction to Chapter 8:

Paul begins chapter 8 with one of the most reassuring and strengthening verses in the entire Bible, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in**

Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1) --- What comforting words, ***"...no condemnation..."***, no blame, no shame and no eternal death. As believers in Jesus, the promised Messiah and the Son of God, we are no longer condemned by our sin. As we have learned through the stories of Adam, Abraham, David and so many other Old Testament examples and Messianic prophecies, ***"For what the law could not do [to save] in that it was weak through the flesh, [our sin] God did by sending his own Son [the atoning Lamb] in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of [our] sin..."***" (Romans 8:3). Now Paul's readers could put it all together. The lamb of Abraham, the first fruits of Abel, the spotless lamb in Egypt, the Passover, the atoning tabernacle sacrifices, the serpent on a pole, all point to the Messianic Lamb of God who came to offer a final sacrifice of atonement to all mankind.

Paul then begins to discuss our Christian life lived in Christ. He focuses on our hardships and challenges in life and the fact that, ***"...sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*** (Romans 8:18), and for this he offers encouragement, ***"...If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** (Romans 8:31), because, ***"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us..."***. (Romans 8:37) And if that were not enough, he then adds one of my favorite go-to verses. A promise I read often when the stresses of life try to overwhelm me, ***"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 8:38-39)

Thank You Lord Jesus - Hallelujah!

In chapter 7 Paul spoke about our battle with sin. Now he talks about our victory in Christ. May we all be encouraged by this wonderful chapter....

Romans 8:1-11

Verse 8:1

Up to this point in his letter Paul has slowly built a case for grace by focusing on several key elements of the gospel:

- There is an all holy God,
- There is sin,
- We are all sinners - because we all fall short of God's holy standard,
- Unredeemed sin results in God's wrath,
- So God gave man his "law", (both Mosaic and natural) providing His expectations,

- But we cannot fully achieve the law so it cannot bring righteousness,
- So escape from God's wrath comes only through faith in God's grace,
- Applied by the work of Christ on the cross,
- Nothing else will count. Neither religious piety nor our own diligent efforts can earn salvation,
- Because salvation comes only through faith in Jesus,
- But once saved by grace we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the law but are instead redeemed "in Christ".

Now Paul presents one of the most encouraging promises of our salvation – ***"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."***. Just wrap your head around that for a moment. As believers through our faith in the self-sacrifice of Jesus we are redeemed from our sin. That means there is no future punishment or condemnation for what we have done. No matter how vile and sinful you have ever been our sin hung on the cross with Jesus as a promise of forgiveness if we simply believe in what He did. That's amazing. My sins and your sins, have already been punished by being placed on Jesus who died for them in our place. (Romans 6:6) No other religion or belief system across time professes a God with such love for His wicked creation that He would take their sins on Himself and destroy them with His own death and resurrection. Or putting it a little more bluntly - *"My God died for me instead of punishing me with the death I deserved."* When you get your head around that fact no other doctrine, belief system or religion makes any sense.

Our faith in Jesus is critical because even though the law reveals our sin it does not forgive our sin, ***"...For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness [salvation] would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."*** (Galatians 3:21-22). That's the simplicity of the gospel Paul is trying to explain:

- We all sin,
- Our own efforts cannot remove our sin,
- But we are redeemed through our faith in Jesus and the cross who takes our sin away.

With that understanding, Paul then describes the character of believers as being, ***"...in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."*** Here Paul contrasts two "walks". A word that in Greek, *"peripatousin"* means *"To conduct life."* In other words, how we ***"...walk..."*** is how we live; how we conduct our life as a believer. Our walk is our testimony. Paul describes our walk through life as either according ***"...to the flesh..."*** or ***"...to the Spirit...."***. He's not talking about "walks" as an effort or "work" to gain salvation, but to represent the life and character of

either the flesh-led "old man" or the Spirit-led "new man". A comparison the Psalmist also made to illustrate the same contrast, **"For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."** (Psalm 1:6). The **"...way..."** the Psalmist talks about is like the **"...walk..."** Paul uses to describe our life. It is the difference reflected in our character that has nothing to do with being good or bad or religious, but whether or not our life is **"...in Christ..."** and **"...righteous..."** in the Holy Spirit. As Paul said to the Galatians, **"...walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh..."** (Galatians 5:16). This statement looks back to the admonishment of the Psalmist, **"...Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners..."**. (Psalm 1:1). Both of these speak of our testimony when the world sees the "new man" in us walking in the way of the Lord.

Verse 8:2

In chapter 8 Paul mentions the Holy Spirit 19 times. That's significant considering the whole chapter only has 39 verses. Paul's focus now shifts from a discussion about the law's influence on unredeemed man, to the Holy Spirit's influence over us as a believer. Given this focus, let's quickly review a few aspects of the Holy Spirit's role.

- The Holy Spirit is fully God and is equal to God the Father and God the Son in the Trinity
- He was present at creation as, **" the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."** (Genesis 1:2)
- Our salvation is celebrated in believer's baptism which is done, **"...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** (Matthew 28:19)
- As believers our spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit:
 - **"...do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God..."**. (1 Corinthians 6:19).
 - **"...His Spirit who dwells in you..."** (Romans 8:11).
 - **"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."** (Romans 8:16)

Our life **"...in Christ Jesus..."** puts us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And through His indwelling, the Spirit becomes our, **"...law of the Spirit of life..."**, which when we are alert and obedient is what allows us to **"...walk in the Spirit..."** as you often hear people say. And since the Spirit of God dwells within us, **"...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty..."**. (2 Corinthians 3:17). This is the freedom we have as believers. The **"...liberty..."** we have because the Holy Spirit frees us from the jurisdiction of the law and the consequences of God's wrath so that we can now proclaim, **"...There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."**, (V1)

Verses 8:3-4

This is the gospel in a nutshell. Here Paul helps his readers understand why the sacrifice of Jesus was required. He's already explained the fact God gave us the law (either Mosaic or natural conscience) to reveal our sin so we would understand our need for redemption. He's also told us redemption could not come from the law itself because we cannot adhere completely to the law because we all fall short in sin. So...it is only, **"...by Him [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified [saved] from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."** (Acts 13:39). Paul continues to clarify, **"...what the law could not do..."** was forgive our sins. It could help us recognize our sin but the law in and of itself could not save us. Why? Because the law, **"...was weak through the flesh..."**. The law could point out our sin, but the law had no divine power and we can do nothing in our own weak flesh through the law to earn redemption, because, **"...no one is justified by the law in the sight of God..."** (Galatians 3:11) Jesus tried to explain this to the blinded Jews when He said, **"...Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."** (Matthew 5: 17-18). The wicked Pharisees saw Jesus as a fraud trying to replace or modify the traditional Mosaic Law, but they failed to recognize He was actually fulfilling the law by living-out the law's requirements and by providing the promised atonement for their sin. Here Jesus spoke of the, **"...Law or the Prophets..."** -- which in essence is the entire Old Testament – to proclaim that He is the perfect Messianic fulfillment they are looking for. But their self-righteous focus on achieving the Law prevented them from seeing who He really is.

But is that any different than people do today? Every person who bases their hope of eternity on being "religious" or trying to be "good enough" through their own efforts, or seeking salvation through any other means is really saying they don't need Jesus. And when they do that they discount God's grace and the role of the Son's atoning sacrifice. As hard as they might try to attain righteousness on their own they are in reality ignoring the fact God the Father sent God the Son in the likeness of man so that He could be the Spotless Lamb sacrificed for our sin and therefore fulfill the prophetic law, **"...God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons..."**. (Galatians 4:4-5 / Philippians 2:7) Jesus came as a man, **"...yet without sin..."** (Hebrews 4:15 / Hebrews 5:1-9), and as such He **"...condemned sin in the flesh..."** by going to the cross so that, **"...our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with..."** (Romans 6:6). In this way, **"...the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us..."** through our faith in the work of Christ who took our sin to the cross. This is what enables us to, **"...not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit..."**. It's a tragic situation when someone ignores all of this and

tries to earn their salvation. That's the key message Paul is trying to explain — stop trying so hard to earn something you cannot earn, but have faith in the Lord who has already earned it for you. This is the same fact the apostle John explains very clearly, ***"He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe in God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."*** (1 John 5:10-11). Jesus' life on earth was intended to bear the ***"...the testimony..."*** of God's grace for forgiveness of sin, and the law was simply a vehicle to make the sin recognizable. But mankind, in his own self-righteousness, completely misses the point and in doing so, ***"...has made Him a liar,..."***. That's why God's wrath is just.

Before we conclude our discussion on walking, ***"...according to the Spirit..."*** I wanted to go off on a bit of a tangent to talk about a few verses that speak to me about our ***"...walk..."*** through life with Christ:

- ***"...For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*** (Ephesians 2:10) - This isn't talking about ***"...good works..."*** as a way to gain righteousness, but it speaks to tasks we are given in life after we are saved, and the way our life should be lived. It's fascinating to me that our Lord ***"...prepared..."*** these tasks ***"...beforehand..."***. In one sense that could speak to the way God orchestrates the way we should live through the Mosaic and natural "law". But to me, it could also mean these are tasks God plans for us to do in our life. Which also means He will equip us to do them by providing the opportunities, abilities and gifts required to do His will. But that also means we must be alert to His movement in our hearts as we seek to walk, ***"...according to the Spirit..."***. In the broadest sense this becomes our testimony because we, ***"walk [live life] in them..."***.
- ***"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*** (Psalm 90:12) - This is a Psalm of Moses that recognizes our days on earth are limited and numbered. But rather than viewing this negatively we should view it as an opportunity. In other words, it's like saying, *"Lord, I know my time on earth is relatively short so please teach me what You want me to do with the time You have given me."* This reminds me of a quote from Warren Weirsbe, *"One of our greatest sins is not allowing God to help us achieve our full potential as a Christian."* I think that's what Moses wanted to avoid in his ***"...walk..."*** and what we should avoid as well.
- ***"Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."*** (Psalm 139:16) - This verse has so many applications but for our study lets focus again on our days and how we walk through them. Here the Psalmist speaks of God's perfect knowledge about our lives. Even before we were born.

David expresses this beautifully by declaring, ***"O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."*** (Psalm 139:1-3). Our Lord knows us - has always known us - in the most minute details. But not only that, they are written down, ***"...in Your book..."*** and were, ***"...fashioned for me..."***. In other words, my limited days are not only numbered but are ***"...fashioned..."*** for us. A word that in Hebrew, "yussaru" can be interpreted, *"to form, to make, as clay and a potter"* (see Jeremiah 18:6). But it also means our days are not haphazard. They are given to us with intentionality and with purpose. Our days as a believer are not a meaningless string of uneventful twenty-four hour periods. They are intentionally given to us and numbered so that each day includes tasks that are ***"...fashioned..."*** [specifically made] for us. That's what God said to Israel through Jeremiah, that also speaks to our heart as well, ***"...For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*** (Jeremiah 29:11). Clearly, our days are ordained before we are born and before we spend a single one of them. So wrap your head around that; God, in His supreme omniscience knows every day we will live and He has intentionally made those days for us to serve and glorify Him. We may fail at times and when we do we might miss a divine opportunity, but if we are obedient and seek God in our lives then we will be better able to accomplish the tasks He gives us and ***"...walk, "...according to the Spirit..."***.

- ***"My times are in Your hand..."*** (Psalm 31:15a) - A beautiful song of David where he cries out to the Lord for strength and deliverance. Here he recognizes the sovereignty of God, even over the days of his life.
- ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** - (Psalm 119:105) - Why would we need a light on our path and our feet? Because the path we ***"...walk..."*** in this life can be dark and it may be difficult to know where to put our feet. If our path was well lit and our journey easy to follow then a light would not be needed. But in reality it's so easy to walk, ***"...according to the flesh..."*** and ignore the fact we are walking in the dark and will stumble, step in a rut, fall in a ditch, or worse yet, take the wrong road. But God's word is our lamp. It lightens the darkened path and shows us exactly where to put our feet so we can walk ***"...according to the Spirit..."***. But this is only possible when we are regularly in God's word and seeking Jesus through it, ***"...For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light..."*** (Proverbs 6:23). And the promise of Jesus brings it all together, ***"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*** (John 8:12)

I pray for your walk everyday.

Verses 8:5-10

Here Paul continues to describe the contrast between the old man and the new. Of those who are lost and whose lives are characterized by sin, **"...according to the flesh..."**, and those who are believers whose lives are characterized by our faith in Christ, **"...according to the Spirit..."**. Paul also expressed the same idea of being in Christ and living **"...according to the Spirit..."** in his letter to the church at Ephesus, **"...But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together..."** (Ephesians 2:4-6). This should have been clear to his readers, but to bring home the consequence of living **"...according to the flesh..."**, for those who, **"...walked according to the course of this world..."** (Ephesians 2:2), Paul makes a blunt statement to further reinforce the fact sin brings **"...death..."** but our salvation brings, **"...life and peace..."** — This is the supreme dichotomy in life - flesh and Spirit, death and life, war and peace. This is a point Paul made to the church at Colosse, and linked it to the same fact he's trying to make in Romans. The fact our salvation removes the requirements of the law for our judgment because our sins have already been judged on the cross, **"...And you, [old man] being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [Jesus] has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you [new man] all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross..."** (Colossians 2:13-14). I love the statement in this passage, **"...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us..."**. It reminds me of the fact that the stone tablets of the law originally given to Moses were divine handwriting, **"...written with the finger of God..."** (Exodus 31:18). This list of ten expectations became the Law which provides the written **"...requirements..."** documenting the debt we owe for our sin against God. A debt we cannot repay on our own, but a debt paid on our behalf by Jesus on the cross. And in doing so He wiped clean our sin which the Law had pointed out. Paul then adds a qualifier that, **"...7. Because the carnal mind [in sin] is enmity ["echthra" - hostility] against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."** The law is intended to help us recognize the sin in our life that needs redemption through God's grace. However, those who fail to recognize their sin are in effect, **"...not subject to the law..."** because they fail to recognize their actions – even good actions — are sins against God without the atonement of Christ. That's why Jesus will say to the self-righteous "doers" at judgment, **"...depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness..."** (Matthew 7:23). These people will present to Him all of the deeds and good works they have done in their lives but these will all be considered sin because they were done as a self-righteous substitute instead of simply believing in the righteous work of Jesus on the

cross. (Revelation 20:12) That's why the lost will be, **"...judged according to their own works..."**, (Revelation 20:12 / Matthew 7:21-23) and even if their **"...works..."** are good or even religious they will still, **"...fall short of the glory of God..."** (Romans 3:23), and therefore, **"...are like filthy rags..."** (Isaiah 64:6). That's why Paul says, **"...those who are in the flesh cannot please God..."**. Even their best works and most religious efforts **"...fall short..."** of the standard to which God judges (Romans 3:23). That's why it is the work of Jesus, and only the work of Jesus who can correct this condition and make us righteous in Him. And when that happens, **"...the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness."** A righteousness found only in our Lord Jesus.

Verse 8:11

Whether it is a first-century legalistic Jew or a modern day person focused on their own works or religion, man has overcomplicated how God intended to apply His gift of grace. Those who focus on church rituals and ceremonies, gaining prosperity or achieving righteousness in some other way are basing what they get on what they do. Even though their efforts may be honorable and "good", without Jesus their works and their eternity are dead. It's such a sad commentary on human life when so many, do so much, for so little. Yet, our belief in the work of Christ, **"...will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."**, so that our lives on earth may bear witness to the world that Jesus is real and their own efforts are not required.

Lesson # 26 - Romans, Chapter 8 verses 12-17

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 8 Paul provides one of the most reassuring verses in the entire Bible, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."** (Romans 8:1). For those of us who are believers in Christ this verse confirms the fact there is no future punishment for our sin because it has already been punished on the cross by Jesus. Paul follows this proclamation with a brief summary of the gospel to remind his readers how this freedom from condemnation is possible, **3. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [but without sin], on account of [our] sin: He condemned sin in the flesh [on the cross].** This helps us more clearly understand that the law itself could not forgive sin but through our belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus, **4. "...the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."** To help explain this he uses the word **"...walk..."**, as a way to describe the character of our life, lived in Christ, **"...according to the Spirit..."** that indwells every believer.

Paul now moves from discussing the contrast between living in sin and living in Christ to focus on the amazing outpouring of love from our heavenly Father.

I pray you are encouraged by this wonderful passage:

Romans 8:12-17

Verses 8:12-13

The word **"...Therefore..."** points back to Paul's prior discussion in verses 10 and 11. **10. "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."** (Refer also to Romans 6:7-17). There are so many great truths to be gleaned from these two verses but in summary Paul is simply saying that our mortal body is dying because of sin, but for those of us in Christ our bodies are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who brings us the **"...newness of life..."** (Romans 6:4) so we can walk **"...according to the Spirit..."** through our lives here on earth (Genesis 2:17 / Romans 8:1). And, from an eternal perspective, just as God **"...raised Christ from the dead..."** He will raise us as well and give our mortal bodies eternal life. **"...So also is the resurrection of the dead."**

The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.... (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)

Of course this verse in 1 Corinthians speaks of the Rapture when our mortal bodies will be joined with our righteous spirit and prepared for eternity with the Lord. But it also speaks to Paul's message here in Romans that, ***"...if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."*** What an amazing thought, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, lives within every believer and gives us new life. Not the sin driven existence of the "old man" but the vibrant, hopeful and faithful life of the "new man". From an eternal perspective our corrupt earthly bodies will one day be united with our indwelt spirit made righteous in Jesus and together made incorruptible for our eternity with the Lord. But even more, because we are already indwelt with God's Spirit at the time we're saved, we don't have to wait until we die to live in the image of Jesus. We can strive to live ***"...according to the Spirit..."*** today by consciously seeking His guidance as we ask Him to light the path on which we walk so that we may walk it according to His will. (Psalm 119:105).

Now in Romans Paul confirms that as a result of our salvation and the fact there is ***"...no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."*** (Romans 8:1) we owe no debt to sin or to the "old man" we once were. Sin has brought us nothing but pain and grief so we owe it nothing. Certainly we ***"...are debtors..."*** but we owe no debt to the flesh. Instead, we owe our life to Jesus who paid the debt for us on the cross. ***"...For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."*** (1 Corinthians 6:20 / Romans 7:4 / Romans 6:6 / Ephesians 2:15). When Paul describes those living, ***"...according to the flesh..."*** he is speaking of those who do not know Jesus as their Savior. For them, death means eternal separation from God, but for those of us who have put our faith in Christ alone we ***"...will live..."*** in the power of the Holy Spirit as we strive daily to, ***"...put to death the deeds of the body..."***, as we fight the temptation of sin in our lives. That doesn't mean we'll be sinless on earth (1 John 1:8). Only Christ could do that (Hebrews 4:15). But it means that our walk in the Spirit will give us the strength we need to push back on the enemy. That's why I love Paul's encouraging message in Ephesians 6:10-18. A passage I often go to for strength at a difficult time. There Paul reminds us that our fight is not ***"...against flesh and blood..."*** [humans], ***"...but against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places..."***, (Ephesians 6:12). So Paul explains how God prepares us, ***"...to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil..."*** (Ephesians 6:10), by putting on ***"...the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day..."*** (Ephesians 6:13).

The armor God gives us includes several defensive weapons:

- A belt for **"...girding your waist with truth..."** (Ephesians 6:14). The truth of the gospel that is always in our hearts.
- The **"...breastplate of righteousness..."** (Ephesians 6:14). The righteousness of our salvation through Christ who guards our heart.
- The boots that, **"...shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.. "** (Ephesians 6:15). Our testimony, through Christ that is shared wherever we go.
- The shield of faith, **"...with which you will be able to quench all of the fiery darts of the wicked one..."** (Ephesians 6:16) Our faith is our shield against **"...all..."** of the enemy's attacks.
- The **"...helmet of salvation..."** , (Ephesians 6:17) to guard our thoughts with truth.

But, the armor also includes one very important offensive weapon:

- And arguably the most important weapon of all, **"...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God..."** (Ephesians 6:17) Our greatest weapon against sin is the same weapon Jesus used against satan. His word - **"...every word that proceeds from the mouth of God..."** (Matthew 4:4) is ours to use in our own battles through life.

This is how we **"...put to death the deeds of the body..."**, and fight our sin nature with the power we receive from our salvation through the Holy Spirit and through the knowledge of God's word. As Paul reminded us earlier, **"...O wretched man that I am? Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** (Romans 7:24)

Who can deliver us?

Only one...

"...Jesus Christ our Lord!..." (Romans 7:24-25).

Thank You Jesus!

Verses 8:14-17

One of the most amazing outcomes of our salvation is the fact we have **"...received the Spirit of adoption..."** as **"...children of God..."**. And through that adoption the Lord will train us, teach us and strengthen us to bring the fullness of God into our lives. It is this **"...Spirit of adoption..."** that gives us the nature of an obedient child as we seek to bear the image of our Lord. But not one adopted as a young child, but adopted like an adult with the full benefit of our inheritance.

Back in Lesson #17 I used these same verses to help explain what is meant by our "inheritance". We've already discussed this but since it is such an important truth I'd like to use an excerpt from Lesson #17 to quickly review it again.

Excerpt from Lesson #17

"...Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience [sin nature] from dead works [sin] to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator [between us and the Father] of the new covenant, [of grace] by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (Hebrews 9:13-15). Here the author of Hebrews speaks of **"...inheritance..."** which is a gift passed down from the Father. But not just any gift, it is a gift of, **"...eternal inheritance..."**, often called "The doctrine of adoption" of which Paul speaks to in several places.

But before we go any further let's dig a little deeper into the idea of inheritance and adoption so we can put all of this in context:

Adoption in the ancient world was not exactly the same process we think of today. Modern adoption is generally focused on children. Often to rescue them from a bad situation and place them in a loving home. But adoption in the Roman world was often very different and included adopting adults to be heirs of a family. So when Paul used the Greek term adoption, "huiothesia", his early readers would understand that to mean a person was being brought in to become part of a family and then be given an inheritance. Paul will explain this later in Romans when he says, **"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [to salvation] these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage [sin] again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ..."** (Romans 8:14-17). This is an amazing passage of scripture that speaks not only of our salvation, but the fact that our justification to God makes us **"...children of God..."**. This is talking about our spiritual adoption that brings us into the family of God, as heirs to God, but also as **"...joint heirs..."** with Jesus. And as full heirs we are able to call God, **"...Abba Father..."**. In Aramaic, the term **"...Abba..."** clearly illustrates the unique relationship we have with our Almighty Creator. It is defined as, "a term of tender endearment by a beloved child – affectionate, a dependent relationship, like the titles "daddy" or "papa." But it is also a term that

indicates our desire to be obedient to our Father. Jesus used this term in the garden when He prayed to God the Father just prior to His crucifixion, **"And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'"** (Mark 14:36). And Paul used the term again to encourage the believers in Galatia, **"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father! Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.'"** (Galatians 4:6-7). Is this the cry of a temporary relationship? No. It is an endearment greeting from the heart of those of us who belong to the Lord and seek to be obedient to His will. How sad it must be for those who believe they can lose their salvation and be removed from this type of love.

But how does this spiritual adoption work? Very simply, **"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. [sin] But when the fullness of the time had come, [God's appointed time] God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [as a Jew] to redeem those who were under the law, [Mosaic or conscience] that we might receive the adoption as sons."** (Galatians 4:3-5) The story of adoption is the story of the gospel, because through our faith in Christ we become children of God and full, permanent, heirs to His kingdom. This is our, **"...inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you..."** (1 Peter 1:4) But how is that even possible? Because, **"...having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."** (Titus 3:7).

Here Paul ties it all together:

- Our salvation,
- Through grace,
- Makes us sons and heirs to God,
- And gives us the assurance of eternal life that cannot be taken away or lost.

Now to the Romans Paul clarifies again our relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, clarifying that, **"...16. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit..."** as He indwells within us, and in doing so confirms **"...that we are children of God, 17. and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ..."**. This is an incredibly profound statement. As believers in Jesus and His work on the cross we will inherit an eternity in God's kingdom where, **"...He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people..."** and, **"...he who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be His God and he shall be My son..."** (Revelation 21:3 & 7). As believers in Christ we inherit God's blessings as His child. Thus making us, **"...joint heirs with Christ..."**, which when you really think about it is amazingly difficult to grasp. But it is so true.

Yet, in our earthly body we may still suffer. Maybe through the weight of temptation, or the stress of persecution, or maybe just the trials and tribulations of our mortal life. But as we do, the indwelling Holy Spirit walks every step with us. As we've discussed before, God could have simply saved us and then made sure we were never sick again, or He could have made us wealthy, or took away all of the challenges of life. But if He did that then everyone would want to be saved so they can be healthy and rich and care free. They would not focus on Jesus, but on themselves. But that's not the way it is. The Lord allows us to go through the same difficulties in life everyone else does. Why? Because sharing Jesus with a testimony of health, wealth and happiness has limited credibility, but when the world sees you facing life's challenges with faith, love and perseverance it makes Jesus real to a lost world. That's why, ***"...if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."***

Lesson #27 - Romans, Chapter 8 verses 18-28

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 8 Paul provided us with one of the most reassuring verses in the entire Bible, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."** (Romans 8:1). What an amazing promise. As a result of our salvation there is no eternal punishment for our sin because the punishment we deserved has already been placed on Jesus. Paul follows this encouraging promise with a wonderful discussion about our inheritance as a child of God through **"...the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father...'"** (Romans 8:15). Through our salvation we become children of God in a relationship so personal we can call Him **"...Abba..."**, an Aramaic word that in English would translate to a term of endearment like "Daddy" or "Papa". This is the same term Jesus used in His garden prayer, **"And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'"** (Mark 14:36). Amazingly, this is a term we also get to use when we talk to our heavenly Father.

Now, with that amazing truth in our hearts let's continue with Chapter 8 and be encouraged even more.

Romans 8:18-28

Verse 8:18

It is so profound to me that when Jesus selected Paul to be an apostle He said of him, **"For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My namesake."** (Acts 9:16). Paul was the chosen instrument of Jesus to carry His gospel to a hostile Gentile world. A man who would travel thousands of miles in his ministry, a man who would write 13 epistles in the Bible, and a man who was arguably the most influential apostle of all time. But of this man Jesus said, **"...he must suffer..."**, **"...many things..."**, **"...for My namesake..."** Paul would suffer for simply proclaiming the name of Jesus. And yet, he persevered, he endured and fought the good fight. He traveled thousands of miles to preach the gospel. By foot, by ship and even in chains, Paul would carry the gospel to hostile cities across the Roman Empire, and all the while Acts 9:27 says he, **"...preached boldly..."**. In doing so he preached a message that infuriated both the legalistic Jews and the pagan Gentiles and brought great persecution upon himself. But even so, he preached so effectively that Acts 17:6 tells us his ministry, **"...turned the world upside down..."**, because he carried the message of salvation to a lost world and proved to them that the poor, homeless carpenter from Nazareth...is God.

Undoubtedly Paul was a man who understood suffering, and yet he reminds us here that **"...the sufferings of this present time [our earthly life] are not worthy to be**

compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." In other words, as believers we will go through trials and tribulations in life, but unlike the lost, we have the promise of an eternal future with the Lord when glory will be ***"...revealed in us..."*** and, ***"...God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*** (Revelation 21:4). Here in Romans Paul was given insight to the same future outcome Jesus would eventually show John in His end-times Revelation. For as Paul understood, ***"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*** (Philippians 3:20-21) Paul anticipated the time when we will be gathered together with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18), and our earthly body, ***"...sown in corruption, it is raised incorruptable.. "*** (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) because ***"...we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him..."*** (1 John 3:2). Think about that for just a moment. In our eternal state we ***"...shall be like Him..."***; like Jesus. We won't be divine like Jesus, who is God, but we will be perfected, glorified and without sin — forever. This is the time when we ***"...shall see His face, and His name shall be on their [our] foreheads..."*** (Revelation 22:4).

Thank You Jesus!

And yet, we don't have to wait for eternity to start being more ***"...like Him..."***. Although we will not be "glorified" and perfected until we reach heaven, as a believer on earth we are constantly being "sanctified". This is the condition of our life lived ***"...in Christ..."*** as our faith grows and we seek to serve the Lord and be obedient to His commands. Sanctification is what enables our personal testimony, lived in front of the lost world, so that they may see the witness of our lives. The apostle John describes this condition so beautifully, ***"...And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!..."*** (1 John 2:28-3:1). This describes the condition of sanctification for which Jesus asked the Father concerning His disciples, ***"...Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."*** (John 17:17-19). In Greek the term ***"...sanctify..."*** "hagiazō" means "To make holy", "to purify" or "to set apart".

This defines the process of our sanctification:

- Saved by grace,
- Made righteous through Christ,
- Becoming children of God,
- Indwelt by the Spirit,
- Growing in our faith,
- Obedient to God's will, a
- And set apart from the world.

As we seek to grow closer to our Savior, the Lord will mature us and strengthen us so we may be witnesses for Him. In this way He **"...shall be revealed in us..."** (verse 18) as our lives are sanctified and reflect Jesus to the world. Look carefully how Peter describes our life through the process of sanctification in 1 Peter 1:22-25, **"...Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."** (Wow!)

Here Peter outlines several elements of our growing faith and sanctification:

- **"...purified yourselves by obeying the truth..."** (faith in the truth of the gospel)
- **"...you have sincere love for each other..." / "...love one another deeply, from the heart..."** (by which the world sees the fruit of our salvation)
- **"...rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind..."** (as we resist the temptation of sin)
- **"...crave pure spiritual milk..."** (from God's word)
- **"...that by it you may grow up in your salvation..."** (as our faith grows and we are being strengthened and sanctified)
- **"...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house..."** (as we become the body of Christ)
- **"...to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ..."** (our sanctified life, lived for Christ, is a sacrifice and offering to His glory)

Peter isn't talking about good "works" to earn salvation, but is talking about the fruit of our lives and the character of being sanctified so that our witness - our personal testimony - reflects Jesus to the world. As such, Jude calls us, **"...those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ..."** (Jude 1). This is the condition which Jesus promises, **"...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."** (John 14:23). This is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit who **"...dwells in you..."** and will **"...give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you..."** (Romans 8:11) This is why protecting our personal testimony is so critical. Not only because the Holy Spirit indwells within us so that God will **"...make Our home..."** in us, but also because it is our life lived in Christ that shows the world that Jesus is real and that, **"...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** (Hebrews 10:10) This is a precursor to the glory we have been given (John 17:22) that will be revealed in **"...the redemption of our body..."** (Romans 8:23). But until the day comes when we are physically with our Lord we must live this life and face whatever comes our way and strive to show the lost world that our Savior is real and is walking every step with us. This is only possible through our faith in Christ as, **"...the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..."** (2 Corinthians 4:16b-17)

Thank You Jesus.

Verse 8:19-27

When man fell into sin the consequences of his failure were so far reaching it is almost beyond our comprehension. Sin resulted in a curse from God on satan, on woman, on man and on the earth (Genesis 3:15-18). In other words, the singular sin of Adam brought God's curse upon all creation for as long as creation exists. As a result, nothing in God's creation currently fulfills His intended purpose because it is marred by man's disobedience. Therefore God's creation **"...groans..."** as it **"...eagerly waits..."** for the day when **"...the revealing of the sons of God..."** (us) occurs and we are perfected and glorified in His eternal kingdom. And as we know from the Book of Revelation it is not only believers who will be transformed from the "old man" to the "new man" (Romans 6:6), but creation will also be remade when, **"...creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God..."**. This is when God will create the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem. (Revelation 20:11 / 21:1)

Until then, Paul points to three groans that result from sin:

- **"...the whole creation groans..."** (verse 22)

- God made a perfect creation and **"...saw that it was good..."** (Genesis 1:12)
- But man's sin marred God's perfect creation resulting in His universal curse.
- Here in verse 21 Paul uses the term **"...whole creation..."** to indicate that everything God created, from the farthest reaches of the universe to the smallest sub-atomic particles suffers from the sin of man.
- This curse will end when God says, **"Behold, I make all things new..."** (Revelation 21:5), and **"...there shall be no more curse..."** (Revelation 22:3). Then the decay of sin will be replaced by a new and perfect creation just as God originally intended it to be.
- But until that day, all creation groans.

- **"...we ourselves groan..."** (verse 23)
 - Likewise, when God created man He did so in His own image (Genesis 1:27)
 - Man was created without sin and given the opportunity to live in perfect communion with God. (Genesis 2:25)
 - But man failed the test of obedience and received the curse of death. (Genesis 2:17 / 3:6-7)
 - And because of our sin and disobedience to God, we groan.
 - Paul reminds us of this when he says, **"For we who are in this tent [our earthly body] groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life."** (2 Corinthians 5:4)
 - But until that day, we as believers will groan (Psalm 6:6) as we cry out in glorious anticipation, **"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"** (Revelation 22:20) because we already know, **"...our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body..."** (Philippians 3:20-21)

- **"...the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings..."** (verse 26)
 - The Holy Spirit indwells within us, but until eternity He dwells within an imperfect person.
 - But God, indwelling in us through the Holy Spirit is aware of our condition and our sin and feels the burden of our weakness.
 - So the Holy Spirit does more than just groan. He prays for us and **"...makes intercession..."** to God, with our groans and on our behalf, **26. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."**

27. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." I find this to be absolutely amazing. That an all holy God would pray for an unholy me and you and groan with us **"...in our weakness..."**.

- And until the day we enter God's heavenly presence we are already in God's presence because His Spirit has made His home in us. (John 14:23)

And from our groaning anticipation comes our promise of our eternity with the Lord. A promise the lost world does not have. Paul explains this **"...hope.. "** as our faith **24. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25. But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance."** To explain **"...hope..."** Paul uses the Greek word "elpis" which means, *"trust, confidence and an expectation of what is sure."* In other words, our **"...hope.. "** is not some ethereal wish, nor do we have hope in things we can physically see. Our hope is our faith; the truth in our hearts of **"...what we do not see..."**. We don't need an idol we can touch or an ideology we hope we can earn. Instead, our **"...hope..."** – our trust – is in our Savior and for the time being we **"...eagerly wait for..."** the day when we will be with Him. We can do this because we are assured that our, **"...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** (Hebrews 11:1). That is also why, **"...we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."** (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Verse 8:28

It's amazing how many times this verse goes through my mind. Even on the worst days I will think of this verse and try to think of two or three or a hundred **"...good..."** things that come from God. Maybe all I can think of at the time is my heartbeat or the ability to breathe, but I will find something to thank God for before I will take another step forward. But in doing so I remind myself that God says **"...all things work together for good..."**. He doesn't say all good things, but He says **"...all things..."**, which could be good or bad, **"...work together for good..."**. I think we often miss that point when we read this verse. We tend to think it means all things from God are good, but that's not what it says. It says, **"...all things work together for good..."**. So, how can **"...all things work together..."**, and how can their work be **"...good..."**. Well, let's

say you get sick, which is not good. But, God enabled the wisdom for someone to develop a medication that will heal you. In that case, your body working together with the medication that was enabled by God, healed you. And your healing resulted in praise and thanksgiving to God, which is good. And maybe, a lost person watching you go through this "bad" thing with strength and dignity realizes you have something they need. And so they come to Christ as a result of your life in-Christ lived out in front of them. And when that happens, **"...all things work together for good..."**.

So many times we've talked about the fact that nothing in our life will ever take God by surprise because **"...your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him..."** (Matthew 6:8). That means whatever happens today is already known by God, and if we approach it in a prayerful and obedient mindset it can **"...work together for good..."**. For example, maybe you're going through a trial, but you begin to realize the trial will strengthen you. Or maybe you're in a place you don't want to be, but you realize God put you there because someone needs the gospel. If we will try to look at our trials this way and be alert to how God is moving in our hearts then we will understand why we **"...are the called according to His purpose."**

Lesson # 28, The Book of Romans - Chapter 8 verses 29-30

Please note:

The topic of "election" in chapters 8 and 9 is hotly debated and unfortunately results in disunity amongst believers. In Lesson #1 I gave an introductory explanation of the major schools of thought on this topic and told you where my heart lands. To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is we can study these chapters without debate.

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson we talked about the trials endured by Paul and the fact he declared them to be unworthy of mentioning when compared to the glory we will receive in eternity. But until the time comes when we are glorified in heaven Paul describes our life in three groans:

- **"...the whole creation groans..."** (verse 22)
 - God made a perfect creation and **"...saw that it was good..."** (Genesis 1:12)
 - But man's sin marred God's perfect creation resulting in a universal curse on His **"...whole creation..."**.
 - This curse will end when God says, **"Behold, I make all things new..."** (Revelation 21:5), and **"...there shall be no more curse..."** (Revelation 22:3).
 - But until that day all creation groans in anticipation.
- **"...we ourselves groan..."** (verse 23)
 - When God created man He did so in His own image (Genesis 1:27)
 - Man was given an opportunity to live in perfect communion with God. (Genesis 2:25)
 - But man failed the test of obedience and received the curse of death. (Genesis 2:17 / 3:6-7)
 - Paul reminds us of this when he says, **"For we who are in this tent [our earthly body] groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life."** (2 Corinthians 5:4)
 - But until that day we groan and cry out in glorious anticipation, **"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"** (Revelation 22:20).
- **"...the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings..."** (verse 26)

- The Holy Spirit indwells within us, but He dwells within an imperfect person.
- So the Holy Spirit prays for us and **"...makes intercession..."** with our groans and on our behalf until the day we enter into His glory.

Paul closed that section with a reminder that **"...all things work together for good to those who love God..."** (verse 28). But as we discussed, this doesn't mean we will experience all **"...good..."** things. What it says is God can use **"...all things..."** working together in our lives for His glory because, **"...we are called according to His purpose..."**, and not our own. This is important for us to remember because God often works through the trials in our life to bring Him glory. And when He does, it is good.

Romans 8:29-30

Now in chapter 8 Paul introduces terms that have become one of the most hotly debated theological topics in the church – *"predestination"*. Here and in chapter 9 he also uses other terms like *"called"*, *"foreknew"* and *"elect"* that all result in further disagreement amongst scholars. Given that debate I have opted to devote an entire lesson to just verses 29-30. That way we can take the time we need for a meaningful discussion. But...I ask that we not use these verses as a platform for debate in class, but instead use our time to discuss the various positions so you can make an informed decision on your own. We could spend months on this topic, debating various schools of thought and still not come to an agreement. In fact, as Warren Wiersbe states, *"The mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility will never be realized in this life."* So given that, what I would like to do in our class is not allow this to become a point of contention or disagreement. Instead, I would prefer to give a fair assessment of the two primary theological positions and then tell you where my heart lands. That way you'll know where I stand (which I believe is Biblically supported) but also you'll be better equipped to make an informed decision about what you believe.

To do this I would like to go back to our first lesson in Romans to review what I included about these verses (with a few minor editorial updates). I included this discussion at the very beginning of our study so that anyone who might be waiting until chapter 8 to engage in a spirited debate would understand that a debate is not my intention.

So let's discuss this important but hotly debated passage:

Excerpt from Lesson # 1 (in italics)

Potential Area of Concern:

And therein lies an area of concern. Specific passages in the Book of Romans are difficult to understand and are therefore easily distorted. Paul's writings on salvation have become one of the most hotly debated topics in the church today. Namely, the contention between two views of salvation - "Reformed" versus "Traditional" theology. Both views believe we are saved by grace and not by works, but the disagreement comes from how each thinks God's grace is applied during the salvation process. Dozens of books, commentaries and video studies are available debating both sides of the issue. Unfortunately, that's because the issue is so polarizing it is becoming a source of disunity even within the conservative evangelical church. Both sides feel strongly that their opinion is Biblical, so proponents on both sides are eager for debate. That's the unfortunate part. I believe both sides agree on the fact we are truly saved by grace, they just can't agree on the approach God uses to apply His grace. So for the purpose of our study I would like to avoid this scriptural entanglement. Not because it's not important and worthy of study, but because it is one of the most polarizing theological topics in the church today and if we're not careful it will distract us from the rest of Romans. For that reason I would prefer we approach Romans with an open mind to both views so we don't divide over our individual positions. Particularly as we get to chapters 8 and 9 and study terms like "election" and "predestination." I want to avoid, at all costs, allowing our study of Romans to be a platform for debate. For if we all believe we are saved by God's grace and the atoning sacrifice of Christ, then let's praise Him for our salvation and not get in conflict over the method by how His grace is applied.

What I would like to do here is the same thing I do whenever we approach a debated topic. I will do my best to accurately explain both positions and then tell you where my heart lands. That way we can study Romans together and not worry about conflict over scripture.

To foster that agreement here's a very brief explanation of each position:

- *Reformed Theology:*

Commonly known as "Calvinism" after one of its early proponents, French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564). Reformists believe man is saved by first being regenerated by God so that he can accept the gift of grace. Calvinists do not believe man comes to God by his own freewill but that each person is preselected (elected) to either salvation or damnation. Those who God selects are regenerated and believe. Those who are not selected and intentionally regenerated cannot believe the gospel. Calvinism is often represented by the

acronym TULIP, which stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. Although portions of this theology are believed by both Reformists and Traditionalists, the key difference is a true Calvinist will believe the recipients of God's grace are intentionally elected and saved outside of their own will. This is confusing, so to make sure I don't misrepresent the Reformed view it's best to let Calvin speak for himself: "God preordained, for His own glory and the display of His attributes of mercy and justice, a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation."

- *Traditional Theology:*

Traditionalists also believe mankind is totally depraved by sin and therefore in need of a Savior. They also believe salvation comes through Christ alone and that man's heart is regenerated at the time of salvation - not before. But where they differ from Calvinists is that a Traditionalist believe God offers His grace to all so that whosoever believes might be saved. They believe God gives man the freewill to accept or deny Christ, and that all who accept are elected to salvation once they accept the gospel. Whereas the Calvinist believes God only saves the preselected few, the Traditionalist believes God offers grace to all and adopts all who will accept.

*As you can see, both Reformists and Traditionalists believe we are saved by grace through Christ alone. That is a critical point of alignment. But where we differ is significant. Reformists believe God preselects specific people to be saved and then regenerates their heart. In doing so they find His grace irresistible and cannot deny it. Traditionalists believe God offers His grace to all mankind, **"...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.."** (2 Peter 3:9), and by Jesus so, **"...that the world through Him might be saved.."** (John 3:17). In their view God offers grace to all, but then gives everyone the freewill to accept or reject His gift.*

*Personally, my heart lands in the latter camp - the Traditionalist view. While I understand the view of the Reformists and conform with some elements of their theology (for example, I believe we are all depraved without Christ), I believe God offers His gift of grace to all, that the sin of all mankind was defeated on the cross, and no sin was left unforgiven in the tomb. I believe it is then up to us to accept or reject the gift of grace through our faith in Christ Jesus. This is not for a pre-selected few but for all who will believe. For as the apostle John reminds us, **"... And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."** (1 John 2:2)*

And with that it is my hope that we can study Romans together without this becoming a point of contention.

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Hopefully this brief explanation gives you a general understanding of both major positions. But to provide a little more detail I want to give you a few additional comments from the commentaries of two well-known and respected Bible teachers. John MacArthur, who adheres to a Reformed platform and Warren Weisbe who takes a more Traditionalist view. I provide these opposing comments to ensure you have a few more details from both positions to help you in your own study.

Key John MacArthur Comments:

- In his commentary on Romans 8 MacArthur invokes the "Granville Sharp Grammatical Rule" to equate "Predetermination" and "Foreknowledge" as the same thing.
- He believes "foreknew" does not mean God, *"...knew who would come to Christ. Rather, it speaks of a predetermined choice to set His love on us..."*.
 - To support this he cites Acts 2:23 (Peter's sermon) which uses the statement, **"...determined purpose and foreknowledge of God..."**.
- He cites 1 Peter 1:1-2 and the statement, **"...elect according to the foreknowledge of God..."** as an indication that God pre-selected specific people He would save and those He would not.
 - Here he points out that the Greek for "elect" means "called out" or "to select". The same way God selected Israel as His chosen nation (Deuteronomy 7:6 / 14:2 / Psalm 105:43)
- He contends, *"...foreknowledge means that God planned before, not that He observed before. Thus, God pre-thought and predetermined each Christian's salvation."*
 - Supporting this position He cites:
 - Exodus 33:17 - **"...I know you by name..."**
 - Jeremiah 1:5 - **"...before you were born I sanctified you..."**
 - Amos 3:2 - **"...you only have I known..."**
 - Matthew 7:23 - **"...I never knew you; depart from Me..."**
 - Ephesians 1:4 - **"...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..."**
- Other verses he cites to support a Reformed position of "predestination" and "election" include:
 - 2 Timothy 2:10 - **"...I endure all things for the sake of the elect..."**
 - Matthew 24:22 - **"...but for the elect's sake..."**
 - Deuteronomy 7:6 - **"...the Lord has chosen you..."**

- John 6:44 - **"...No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..."**
- Philippians 3:14 - **"...the upward call of God..."**
- Romans 1:7 - **"...called to be saints..."**
- MacArthur further states, *"Salvation is independent of human influence..."* (this speaks to the TULIP position of "Irresistible Grace")

Key Warren Wiersbe Comments:

- *"Predestination applies only to saved people. Nowhere are we taught that God predestined people to be eternally condemned. If they are condemned it is because they refused to trust Christ."*
 - Supporting this position he cites John 3:18-21 - **"...He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."**
 - This verse includes several statements indicating free will:
 - **"...because he has not believed..."**
 - **".. men loved darkness rather than light..."**
 - **"...does not come to the light..."**
 - **"...But he who does the truth comes to the light..."**
- Wiersbe cites our need to accept the gospel in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 - **"...But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."**
 - This is evidenced by:
 - Our **"...belief in the truth..."**
 - Because, **"...He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory..."**
- He sees this as a process to salvation because:
 - Romans 3:11 - **"There is no one who seeks after God..."**
 - Luke 19:10 - **"...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."**
 - John 6:37 - **"...and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."**

- He agrees God chose us before time, which means there is nothing we can do in our own time to be chosen. We are all chosen to be in Christ, but we have the power to refuse God's offer.
- Wiersbe sees the debate as a disagreement between God's sovereignty and man's ability to reject His sovereignty, and states: – *"Does the sinner respond to God's grace against his own will? No, he responds because God's grace makes him willing to respond. The mystery of God's sovereignty and human responsibility will never be resolved in this life."*
 - In other words, what kind of "gift" would God's grace be if He made it "Irresistible"?
- He believes "Foreknew" means *"God sets His love on a person in a personal way."* – But it doesn't mean man will accept His love.
- Weisbe contends salvation is by choice. Because, *"Jesus had to die on the cross or there could be no salvation."*
 - *"Salvation includes more than the Father's elected love; it also includes the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the sinner and bringing him to faith in Christ."*
 - Supporting this he cites the steps in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, ***"...God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel,..."***
 - The choosing still requires sanctification and belief in the gospel.
 - Because, we are born again, ***"...through the word of God..."*** 1 Peter 1:23
 - By the action of , ***"...sanctification of the Spirit..."*** 1 Peter 1:2
- He states that 1 Peter 1:24 (Isaiah 40:6) speaks to the fact, ***"...All flesh [our mortal life] is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away,..."*** - In other words, no one is born in predetermined glory.
- In summary Wiersbe states: *"For we are chosen by the Father, purchased by the Son, and set apart by the Spirit. It takes all three if there is to be a true experience of salvation. As far as the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. As far as the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross. But as far as the Spirit is concerned, I was saved one night in May 1945 when I heard the gospel and received Christ. Then it all came together, but it took all three Persons of the Godhead to bring me to salvation. If we separate these ministries, we will either deny divine sovereignty or human responsibility, and that would lead to heresy."*
- Further, he contends, *"The same God who ordains the end - our salvation - also ordains the means to the end - the preaching of the gospel to the grace of God."*

All of this is merely scratching the surface of a very deep and confusing topic. If you desire to dig even deeper there are dozens of scholarly study materials available but I suggest you start with the following sources:

- Traditionalist View - Website "Soteriology 101" with Dr. Leighton Flowers. (Note: "Soteriology" means the study of salvation.)
- Reformed View - Website "Alpha and Omega Ministries" with Dr. James White
 - Both of these gentlemen are Biblical scholars, professors of theology and accomplished authors. Their podcasts and writings are very complex but also very informative. I have listened to both of them for countless hours to learn as much as I can about both positions.
 - But...I believe their debates are too complicated, overly critical and risk distracting us from the beauty of the gospel. It is just my opinion but I wish they would spend more time working together to spread the gospel of grace to a lost world rather than spending so much emotion and time debating a secondary issue.
- Mike Winger's website "Bible Thinker" includes dozens of excellent videos on a wide range of Biblical topics, including a study of Reformed versus Traditional theology.

I hope this has provided you a balanced view of both key positions so that you can prayerfully and thoughtfully determine where your heart lands.

Lesson # 29, The Book of Romans - Chapter 8 verses 31-39

Please note:

The topic of "election" in chapters 8 and 9 is highly debated and unfortunately results in disunity amongst believers. In Lesson #1 I gave an introductory explanation of the major schools of thought and told you where my heart lands. To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is we can study these chapters without debate.

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson we discussed one of the most hotly debated topics in Christian theology; the difference between Reformed and Traditional views of salvation. I tried to provide a balanced view of the two most common schools of thought with enough information to help you prayerfully consider your own position.

That said, I must admit that I find the rhetoric around this topic to be bothersome because it has become such a hotly debated issue within the evangelical church. Bothersome in the sense that many people in both camps are eager to spend significant energy and emotion debating a topic that at best is secondary when compared to the energy and emotion that should be spent sharing the gospel with a rapidly declining world. In reality, both positions believe we are saved by faith-alone in Christ-alone yet they disagree on the process by which God applies His grace. This is a circular debate of which Warren Wiersbe says, *"The mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility will never be realized in this life."*

My hope is believers on both sides of the debate will cool their heels and work together to devote their energy, blogs, websites and books to sharing the gospel of Jesus to a world heading to hell at record speed.

Now that we've broached that topic let's be encouraged by Paul as he closes out chapter 8.

Romans 8:31-39

Verse 8:31

Here Paul refers back to the amazing *"...things..."* he was just talking about.

- There is no condemnation for those with faith in Christ. Through our salvation our sins are redeemed and we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 8:1)
- Our salvation is possible because before time began God predestined that all mankind would be offered grace for the forgiveness of sin. By doing this, **"...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..."** (Ephesians 1:4a)
- The process of applying God's grace for forgiveness begins when our hearts are convicted by the Holy Spirit. But a key element of our salvation goes beyond simply being offered grace. Our salvation requires action on our part to either accept or reject the forgiveness being offered. As Paul explains, **"...God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel,..."** (2 Thessalonians 2:13b-14a). Please note the key phrase **"...and belief in the truth..."**, which requires belief and acceptance from us.
- Therefore, salvation comes through the act of believing in the truth of the gospel. That's because God's grace and forgiveness is not applied to us individually unless we come to the Father through **"...the way..."** and **"...the truth..."** of the sacrificial atonement of Jesus. (John 14:6)
- The inclusiveness of this process for everyone is validated by the apostle John who reminds us, **"...Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."** (1 John 2:1b-2).
- It is to the **"...whole world..."** that God elected to offer His grace, but it is the responsibility of the individual person to accept or reject His offer. In other words, a soul is not condemned because God failed to offer His grace. A soul is condemned because we fail to accept His offer.

Now Paul reminds us that with God's accepted grace and forgiveness we are eternally indestructible because, **"...If God is for us, [His righteous children] who can be against us?** This is a truth Paul emphasized in Romans 8:28-29 when he confirmed, **"...neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

- This is the power we have through our faith in Christ. The power we see in the young David when he faced the impossible odds of the Philistine giant, **"...Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know**

that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands." (1 Samuel 17:45-47)

- Or the strength David later declared, ***"Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident. One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock."*** (Psalm 27:3-5)
- Or as Isaiah reminds us, ***"For, I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, "Fear not, I will help you."*** (Isaiah 41:13)
- Or, as Jesus Himself said to the apostles in a storm, ***"...Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid..."***. (Mark 6:50)
- And with this confidence comes the promise that no one, ***"...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (Romans 8:39).

That's why Paul reminds us that nothing on this earth, including the tactics of the enemy, can defeat us because we are the children of God. Granted, we may suffer illness, ridicule and even death but we cannot be un-adopted or lose our place in God's family or eternal kingdom, because, ***"...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."*** (John 10:27-30).

To support this Paul provides several qualifiers to make his point that nothing can separate us from the Lord:

- ***"...God is for us..."*** (verse 31)
- ***"...His own Son was delivered up for us.. "*** (verse 32)
- Who ***"...died, and furthermore is also risen..."*** (verse 34)
- And in doing so it is ***"...God who justifies..."*** us. (Verse 33)
- The Holy Spirit and Jesus ***"...makes intercession for us..."*** (verse 26 and 34)
- We are made ***"...conquerors through Him who loved us..."*** (verse 37)
- So that, ***"...no created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.. "*** (verse 39)

Hallelujah!

Verse 8:32-33

And what better example of God's love for His children than a reminder that God Himself - in the person of Jesus - was given in earthly death so we may have heavenly life. Prior to our salvation we were God's enemy and deserved punishment in hell. ***"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."*** (Romans 5:10). That salvation was made possible because, ***"...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us..."*** (Romans 5:8) Jesus didn't die to show how religious we are or how good we live. Jesus died because we were sinful enemies of God who were offered a pardon of forgiveness through His grace. What more precious gift could He ***"...freely give..."*** than the holy blood of the Lamb of God. Jesus took our sin and ***"...nailed it to the cross..."*** (Colossians 2:14), who then, ***"...put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself..."*** (Hebrews 9:26), so that ***"...the world through Him might be saved..."*** (John 3:17). This was not a haphazard plan or something developed on the fly. Instead, ***"...when the fullness of the time had come..."*** [God's predetermined timeline] ***"...God sent forth His Son..."*** as the predestined sacrifice for the souls of men. (Galatians 4:4).

Verses 8:34-37

In Romans 8:1 Paul declared, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."*** We cannot be condemned to God's eternal wrath because through our faith in Christ we have been committed to live with God through our eternal life. This comes through our belief in the true gospel of Jesus:

- ***"...who died..."*** for our redemption,
 - ***"...Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed."*** (1 Peter 2:24)
- And who, ***"...is also risen..."*** in defeat of death and our sin,
 - ***"...But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen..."*** (Matthew 28:5-6)
- Who is now setting ***"...at the right hand of God..."*** Because our Lord is a living God!
 - ***"...Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*** (Hebrews 12:2)

And with that promise, no one, **"...shall separate us from the love of Christ..."**. Not **"...tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword..."**. Nothing can separate us **"...from the love of Christ..."** A love that transcends our understanding, **"...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."** (John 13:1b). A love John explained as, **"...In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins..."** (1 John 4:9-10)

And yet, Paul reminds us that our Christian journey may not be easy. Quoting Psalm 44:22, he expresses the lament of a backward Israel asking the Lord to redeem them. But here Paul stands firm in the fact that **"...we are more than conquerors..."**. Not through our own cunning and strength, but **"...through Him who loved us..."**. Paul would have understood why the Psalmist had such courage in the face of danger. Because, **"...I will not trust in my bow, nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies, And have put to shame those who hated us. In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever."** (Psalm 44:6-8). Paul didn't trust his future on his earthly weapons or military skill. Instead, his weapon was his faith.

Weapons like:

- Isaiah 41:13, **"For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'"**
- Psalm 27:3 - **"Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, In this I will be confident."**

Verses 8:38-39

What a beautiful passage of encouraging scripture. Few verses in the Bible can be more reassuring than this during a tough time in life. It is the outpouring of our salvation and the promise there is **"...no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."** (Romans 8:1), because no power on earth **"...shall be able to separate us from the love of God..."**. — Simply amazing.

Lesson # 30, The Book of Romans - Chapter 9 verses 1-3

Please note:

The topic of "election" in chapters 8 and 9 is highly debated and unfortunately results in disunity amongst believers. In Lesson #1 I gave an introductory explanation of the major schools of thought and told you where my heart lands. To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is we can study these chapters without debate.

Quick Recap:

In chapter 8 we were so encouraged. Beginning with the first verse Paul reminds us that being saved by grace means there is **"...now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."**. (Romans 8:1) That amazing truth is made possible because our debt of sin has been paid for by Jesus on the cross and we are adopted as sons of God. As such we are Children of the One True God who can call our heavenly Father **"...Abba..."**. A term of endearment only we can use. (Romans 8:15-16).

Please be encouraged by that.

Introduction to Chapter 9:

Although Paul was tasked with bringing the gospel to the Gentiles he was still a Jew and grieved over Israel's disobedience and rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. He reminds them that God's word has not failed (Romans 9:6). In other words, their knowledge of the promise given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the prophecies given to Moses, Hosea, Daniel, Zechariah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and many others should have been enough information for them to understand God's grace would come through a sacrificial Lamb for both Jews and Gentiles. But they stumbled because they sought redemption through religion and the Law, but not by faith. They stumbled because they failed to see Jesus -- the stone in Zion [Israel] -- as their redeemer and as a result they stumbled and fell into disbelief (Romans 9:33). Paul doesn't remind them of this with his own words or new theology, but uses the words of the prophets. Words they all should have known. This troubled Paul and left him in, **"...great sorrow and continual grief in my heart."** (Romans 9:2). To the point he says he would trade his own salvation for the salvation of Israel.

Now, let's look at Paul's impassioned plea for his beloved Israel.

Romans 9:1-3

Verses 9:1-2

Paul now shifts his focus from joy to burden as he thinks of the harsh reality that Israel has turned her back on the promised Messiah and replaced Him with religion and works. Paul knows all too well how far they have fallen. As a zealous Pharisee (Philippians 3:5) he did all he could to destroy the new belief that the poor, homeless carpenter from Nazareth is God (Acts 22:4 / Galatians 1:13). That was until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and understood the error of his ways. So the Lord called him to be **"...my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles..."** (Acts 9:15).

But having been a legalistic Jew and now an apostle of Jesus, Paul clearly understood the Old Testament election of Israel as God's chosen people to carry the message of the coming Messiah to the world. A role they failed to accomplish. And that failure burdened Paul because he wanted to see his beloved nation obedient to the task they were given.

But he will use this burden to help tell the story of redemption through Jesus. Paul will spend a considerable portion of his letter reminding his readers of Israel's past (chapter 9), their current disobedient state (chapter 10) and their future restoration (chapter 11). He does this to show his readers the critical role Israel has and will play in God's intended timeline. But here, right in the middle of his impassioned plea for salvation by faith, Paul takes a slight detour and spends time talking about his beloved Israel. Although as an apostle to the Gentiles it may seem he has changed the subject, we soon find that's not the case. His discussion about Israel is to further support his core message of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. But in doing so he wants his readers to understand the **"...great sorrow and continual grief in my heart..."**, because his beloved Israel has turned her back on the truth.

Not only was this message important to the first century reader but it is just as applicable to today's society as well. Particularly given the fact many "Christian" denominations have essentially separated themselves from the Biblical truth of salvation by faith-alone in Christ-alone and replaced it with the false doctrine of salvation by religion or works. But Paul's message is timeless because the world today has fallen away from God just as the ancient world had done. Yet...2,000 years after his letter to the Romans was written today's readers need to understand its message with urgency. For time is running out when God will be patient with disobedient mankind. As Peter reminds us, **"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but**

that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:9-10). Paul could foresee this event which is why he seeks to clarify the true road to salvation. Both for Israel and the remainder of the world.

At this point I think it's important to step back from Romans for just a moment to discuss an aberrant theology becoming more popular today. Often called "*Replacement Theology*", it is a school of thought that claims the modern church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. This is false, and frankly, given the volume of scripture related to Israel's eternal calling I am amazed that learned people would believe this; but they do. So given that, I want to review a short segment from our Revelation study that speaks to Israel's role in God's great plan through Christ's future Millennial Kingdom and specifically the eternal role Israel will play:

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*With the removal of satan and the coronation of Christ, the world, at least for a time, will become a place of righteousness. Christ will physically reign on earth, aided by us, the redeemed, who will be there with Him. Justice will prevail and the "...**Fruit of the Spirit...**" (Galatians 5:22 NIV) will be the very intent of every man's heart. The earth and its people will be as they were prior to the fall, when in God's righteous image, man walked with the Lord in the garden. It will be a time spoken of by Zechariah who described life under the divine rule in Christ's Kingdom as a time when, "...**many people and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and entreat him.**" (Zechariah 8:22 NIV). Joel speaks of the time when Jesus will be in Israel and, "**You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God...**". (Joel 2:26 NIV). This is the time when, "**The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together...**" (Isaiah 11:6 NIV). It will be a time when, "**I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety. I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. The trees will yield fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in the land.**" (Ezekiel 34:25-27 NIV). In another beautiful prophecy given to Ezekiel the Lord says, "**...this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. There I will live among the Israelites forever.**" (Ezekiel 43:7 NIV).*

How on earth could anyone read these passages of scripture and believe the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people? They will not be replaced. Instead they will be the fulfillment of God's promise, "**And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be**

disturbed." (2 Samuel 7:10 NIV). Some declare this promise applies to an earlier age and since then the church has supplanted Israel as God's chosen people and His messengers to the world. But they fail to recognize God's eternal promise, **"...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."** (2 Samuel 7:13 NIV). This is speaking of a **"...forever..."** throne. A throne of David, a Jew, in Israel. The throne of Jesus in His future Kingdom; in Israel. This is the throne the writer of Hebrew cited, **"But about the Son he says, 'Your throne. O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom...'"** (Hebrews. 1:8 NIV). We must also remember that God designated the end-times Tribulation as a time for Israel. As Gabriel told Daniel, the seven year period, **"...are decreed for your people [Daniel's people Israel] and your holy city [Jerusalem] to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring my everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place."** (Daniel 9:24 NIV). This is the time when the remnant of Israel will **"...look on the one they pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..."** (Zechariah 12:10a NIV). The time when Jesus will, **"...pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication."** (Zechariah 12:10b). This is the time we see in Revelation chapter 20 when Israel, plus the bride and all other believers reign with Christ in His earthly rule. It is the time when everyone will seek the face of Christ on His throne. When, **"In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of their robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"** (Zechariah 8:23 NIV). And when that happens Israel will finally be the messengers of God.

Please don't let anyone sway you away from that truth. The current focus on "Replacement Theology", "Kingdom Theology" and "Dominion Theology" is unbiblical because all of them contend the church has somehow replaced Israel. As good as that may sound to some Gentiles it is not supported by scripture. What is supported is the fact that Israel - though currently fallen away - **"...is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. There I will live among the Israelites forever."** (Ezekiel 43:7 NIV). --- And when Jesus says forever, He means forever.

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And that is why Paul is upset. He knew from scripture Israel would have a future role in God's plan, but they could not fulfill it in his lifetime due to their spiritual blindness (John 12:37-40).

So let's think what that future looks like and how it applies to Israel:

- The end of time during the Tribulation will be called **"...the time of Jacob's [Israel's] trouble.."** (Jeremiah 30:7).

- A time when 144,000 Jews, **"...of all the tribes of the children of Israel..."** who represent the entire nation of Israel will proclaim the gospel to the world. (Revelation 7:4 / 14:1).
- A time when Two Witnesses will testify for three years in Jerusalem, the place **"...where also our Lord was crucified..."** (Revelation 11:8).
- A time when the remnant of Israel will flee **"...into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days..."** [3 ½ years / half of the Tribulation] (Revelation 12:6).
- And after the final judgment, when God creates for His people a New Heaven and New Earth, He will reign from, **"...the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband..."** (Revelation 21:2).
- A time when the New Jerusalem will have **"...twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the twelve tribes of the children of Israel..."** (Revelation 21:12)

Does this leave any doubt that Israel has a divinely elected future role? Which begs the question, why would the Lord cast aside the people He made so many promises to? Obviously from scripture the answer is no, He has not. Certainly Paul knew Israel had temporarily abdicated her intended role as God's messengers, but God, who inspired Paul's words also knew the Gentiles would eventually claim their role as the chosen messengers of God. True, the church has a role of messenger to spread the gospel while Israel is in a state of denial, but that does not mean God does not intend to fulfill His promises and the role of Israel in His future plans.

Verse 9:3

This verse clearly shows the intense love Paul had for his nation and her people. He had been afforded the best Rabbinical training (Acts 22:3), to become a **"...Hebrew of Hebrews..."** (Philippians 3:5), and in every way a loyal Jew. And although his life was now devoted to **"...proving that this Jesus is the Christ [Messiah]..."** (Acts 9:22), he was still a Jew and understood the tragic mistake the people of Israel had made. The same mistake made by many "Christians" today, who have allowed corrupt spiritual leadership to distort God's word to the point they no longer believe the truth.

I must be honest, I have the same burden myself. When I look across the spectrum of denominations who continue to distort God's word I realize they are misleading people the same way the ancient Jewish leadership did. At the core of the issue is the belief that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is just not enough to save your soul.

Instead, they:

- Add non-biblical religious rituals, sacraments and positions of leadership,
- Have replaced God's word with man-inspired "scripture",
- Believe the notion that personal wealth and prosperity is a sign of salvation,
- Fall prey to the idea you can work your way to heaven,
- Distort Jesus to be something less than God-in-flesh (John 1:14).

In each case, well-meaning people unknowingly base their salvation on a Jesus-plus theology when in fact they are Biblically lost. I pray daily for the millions of people sitting under heretical teaching and apostate pulpits, who are being coerced into hell because they listen to what man says instead of what God said. I pray God will close their ears to the lies and open their hearts to the true gospel of Jesus. These are the people Paul spoke of when he warned Timothy, ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*** (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Paul was not speaking only to the people he was preaching to at the time. Although they had many of the same misconceptions, Paul is speaking to a future time as well, ***"...For the time will come..."*** looking forward to a time when the true gospel will be distorted to the point of being unrecognizable from a salvation perspective. That time is now, which is why our role as ambassadors for Christ is so important and why our understanding of God's word is so critical. That is the burden Paul had for Israel and the lost world, and it must be the same burden we have today.

But here Paul expresses the seriousness of his burden by proclaiming, ***"...For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren..."***. In other words, he would forfeit his own salvation for the salvation of Israel. I don't believe he is asking God to remove his salvation – which he teaches cannot be removed – but he uses this phrase to illustrate the dire urgency he feels towards his disobedient nation. Not only for their salvation, but also because Paul understands the fact they were not fulfilling their elected role as messenger to the world of God's Messianic promise.

But I think there might be another reason why Paul uses this statement. Throughout his epistles, and particularly in Romans, Paul uses Old Testament scripture to help his readers understand the central theme of Messianic prophecy throughout God's word. He might be doing the same thing here. So let's think about that for a moment. — One of the things that most infuriated Moses was the disobedience of the Hebrew people. God brought them out of bondage in Egypt, parted the sea, led the way by a fire in the night and a cloud by day, fed them manna from heaven, and even established a process for the blood atonement of their sin. Yet over and over the people fell into disobedience and idolatry. We see this in Exodus chapter 32 and the story of the golden calf. Moses had gone to Mount Sinai to receive the commandments of God. While he was gone the people became restless and made an idol of gold - a calf - to worship. When Moses returned and saw what they had done he became furious. He broke the

stone tablets of God's commandments (signifying the breaking of the Law), ground the calf into powder, cast its ashes in the water and made the people drink it, and then he had three thousand men executed. But, aside from his righteous anger towards those who had turned their backs on God's promise, Moses had a deep undying love for his people. So he went back to the mountain to seek atonement for the sins of Israel, and there he told God, ***"Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."*** (Exodus 32:32-33). Moses did basically the same thing Paul did. He wished he could forfeit his own eternity for the forgiveness of Israel. Like Paul, Moses understood the future role of Israel. He knew they had been chosen as a nation for God's service, ***"...Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."*** (Exodus 3:9-10). Also, like Paul, Moses understood the extent God had gone through to protect and punish Israel through cycles of obedience and disobedience, because, ***"...The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;..."*** (Deuteronomy 7:7-9)

Both Moses and Paul were both upset for basically the same reason. They knew God had elected the Hebrew people for a special task. ***"...For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God."*** (1 Kings 8:53) And yet, they failed miserably. As they continue to fail today. So both men, in their grief, expressed their burden in the most serious way possible – ***"Spare them, and take me."*** I believe Paul meant this for more than just the people in Rome, but for the whole nation of Israel and the critical role they were meant to play to carry God's message. The implication being, if Israel failed to fulfill their role as ministers to the world then God's message could be delayed in getting to everyone. In other words, the spiritual blindness of the Jews affected Rome, the rest of the world and the future of mankind. As a result, the gospel would not be shared by God's chosen nation, but by believers like Paul and like us, who were commanded by Jesus to, ***"...Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."*** (Matthew 28:19). Not because we have replaced Israel in her covenant role, but because we also have a role to play until the day when Israel will, ***"...look on the one they pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..."*** (Zechariah 12:10a).

But as with other Old Testament scripture cited by Paul, the learned Jews should have recognized the story of Moses and thought about why Moses said what he did...because the people had turned their back on God's promises and reverted to idolatry. Yet the Jews in Paul's time were no different but instead of worshiping a calf they worshiped the Law, Abraham's legacy and religious activities. These became their idols and they lost focus on God's promised Messiah. The exact same thing the apostate church does today.

Let's be aware of that as we share the truth with the world.

Lesson # 31, The Book of Romans - Chapter 9 verses 4-5

Please note:

The topic of "election" in chapters 8 and 9 is highly debated and unfortunately results in disunity amongst believers. In Lesson #1 I gave an introductory explanation of the major schools of thought and told you where my heart lands. To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is we can study these chapters without debate.

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 9 Paul expressed a deep personal burden for the disobedient nation of Israel. And just like Moses had done in the past, Paul expressed his grief with a profound statement, **"...For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen..."** (Romans 9:3). But why was Paul's burden for Israel so severe that he rhetorically wished to exchange his soul for theirs? Because he knew they were God's chosen people tasked with carrying His Messianic promise to the world. Yet, their own spiritual blindness prevented them from accomplishing their assignment which would inevitably hamper the spread of the gospel. So Paul's burden was for much more than just his Jewish readers. In extension, it was for the entire world who would suffer because of Israel's failure.

Now Paul will continue to explain why he had such grief for the failure of Israel by reminding them of the unique way God has prepared them for such an important task.

Romans 9:4-5

Verse 4 is a continuation of verse 3, **"...For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh..."**, but the original passage was separated by early scholars to highlight the second part of his statement (verse 4) which digs deeper into several key points about Israel's election as God's chosen people. Here Paul will identify a number of key attributes that characterize Israel's legacy and their intended role in God's divine plan. He does this to remind us they are a special people because they have a special assignment. Yet, because of their self-righteousness Israel felt superior to others and set themselves apart spiritually. So rather than sharing God's message of redemption with the world they kept it close to home and left the world in the dark. When Jesus came to earth as a man, He tried to show them the type of people He wanted them to be. He was strong, yet humble, He was master of all, yet a servant to all, He showed mercy and grace to Israel's worst enemies, and He told His followers to go to all the world to carry His

message of redemption. But the wicked Jewish leadership was blinded, corrupt and self-righteous, to the point they crucified the man they should have recognized as God.

So here Paul wants to highlight some of the God-given attributes of Israel as a people. He didn't do this to affirm their thoughts on righteousness by religion, but to help them understand how God had prepared them for the unique role of being His ambassadors to the world. Not only would this help them understand the part God intended for them to play, but it would also help them recognize the Messiah for who He is. A detailed study could be made about each of these attributes and how they uniquely qualified Israel to be God's messengers, but even the high level view we will discuss should reveal what the blinded Jews should have been able to see.

So to make his point Paul discusses the people, **"...who are Israelites..."** through their unique qualifications to be God's voice to the world:

- **"...the adoption..."**

- In chapter 8 we talked about the fact as believers in Christ we are redeemed and set apart as God's children. The Bible describes this position as being "adopted" by God as full heirs to His inheritance. As Paul explained, **"...For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [to salvation] these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."** (Romans 8:14-16).
- In much the same way the Hebrew people were set aside as God's chosen messengers. They were not given salvation just because they were Israel, but like Abraham, they still had to come to faith in God's promises through a blood atonement. But, Israel as a people were "adopted" as God's chosen nation. We see this in Exodus 4:22 when God spoke to Moses and said, **"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Israel is my son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve me.'"**
- Generations later Solomon reminded God's people of this distinction in his prayer, **"...For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God."** (1 Kings 8:53)
- These well-known passages should have helped Paul's Jewish readers understand that as the Lord's adopted nation they should be carrying out God's will by bringing His message of redemption to the world. A message of faith in the promised Messiah – Jesus.

- **"...the glory...,"**
 - God's favor, provision and glory was placed on Israel like no other nation. In fact, they are the only nation on earth with a documented past, present and future. And it is their future that includes the greatest glory of all when the Lord will set-aside a specific time in order to bring Israel back to Him. A time of Tribulation when they will **"...look on the one they pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10a).**
 - And once they are finally obedient Jesus will declare of Jerusalem, **"...this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. There I will live among the Israelites forever."** (Ezekiel 43:7).
 - Even during the wilderness walk, when Israel was often disobedient, the glory of the Lord still went with them. **"Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud."** (Exodus 16:10)
 - Likewise, **"And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."** (Leviticus 9:23-24)
 - This was when, **"...the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle..."** (Exodus 40:34). The glory given to Israel when God promised His presence in the Holy of Holies, **"...And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel."** (Exodus 25:22)
 - This is a glory shown to no one else but Israel in quite the same way.
- **"...the covenants...,"**
 - In a Biblical sense a Covenant is a permanent agreement between God and man. These include:
 - The Covenant with Noah after the flood. - **"...The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."** And God said to Noah, **"This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."**(Genesis 9:16-17)
 - The Covenant with Abraham - **"...I will make you a great nation..."** (Genesis 12:2) **"...And I will establish My covenant**

between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:7-8)

- The Covenant with Moses - The Law. - ***"...Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, [commandments] then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'*** These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6) God renewed this Covenant with Israel at Moab. A Covenant of their future, ***".. These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb."*** (Deuteronomy chapters 29-30, quoting 29:1)
 - This is the only Covenant that was nullified because it (the Law) was fulfilled in Christ. (Matthew 5:17)
- The Covenant of the everlasting Priesthood. - ***"...Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.'*** (Numbers 25:10-13)
 - This ***"...everlasting priesthood..."*** is later exemplified in Jesus as the High Priest, ***"... Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*** (Hebrews 4:14-15)
- The Covenant with David for an eternal kingdom. ***"...And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."*** (2 Samuel 7:16) ***"...Yet He has made me an everlasting covenant..."*** (2 Samuel 23:5)

- This Covenant will be fulfilled in the Millennial reign of Christ,
 - **"...For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, [everlasting] upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**
- The New Covenant, **"...They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me." (Jeremiah 32:38-40)** **"...Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore." (Ezekiel 37:26)**
 - This is a covenant fulfilled in Christ as the Mediator between man and God, **"...But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." (Hebrews 8:6)**
 - **"In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (Hebrews 8:13)**
 - But now, this is a covenant made with all people through the gospel. A covenant promise of death and redemption, **"And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (Hebrews 9:15)**
- These Covenants set Israel apart as a nation. Not as a self-righteous hoarder of God's message but for the intended purpose of preparing them to share His redemptive plan with the rest of the world.
- **"...the giving of the law....,"**
 - Paul then highlights one of the most amazing aspects of Israel's divine role. They are the keepers of God's "Law". In other words, the keeper of

His holy word - the Bible. A point Paul had already made earlier in his letter, ***"...What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*** (Romans 3:1-2). These ***"...oracles..."*** began with the Law given to Moses, which eventually became the core of the first five books of the Bible (Exodus 20:1). ***"...Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."***

(Deuteronomy 4:1-2). Through this decree God had entrusted the Hebrew people with something He entrusted to no one else – writing (under God's inspiration) and maintaining His word to mankind, ***"...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."*** (2 Peter 1:21).

- Of all the people who should have understood who the Messiah is, it should have been the Jews. They were the keepers, the scribes and the teachers of God's word that prophesied the Messiah's coming. Yet...their disobedience blinded them of the truth to the point they added-to and distorted God's word to suit their own religious needs and self-righteous attitude. Paul talked about this to the church at Corinth, ***"...unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."*** (2 Corinthians 3:13-14) The ***"...veil..."*** Paul talks about is the spiritual blindness of the people who read God's word but fail to make the prophetic connection between Messianic promises and Jesus. But don't we see the same thing happening today? Whole denominations teach and practice "doctrine" that is clearly unbiblical in a failed effort to make it relevant to themselves. Others discount the Old Testament as outdated or meant for someone else and fail to recognize the story of the Messiah that is woven throughout its text.

- ***"...the service of God..."***

- Israel was given a unique role to administer God's temple and offerings. ***"...And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons***

to minister to Me as priests. I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God." (Exodus 29:43-46)

- The Israelites understood this unique duty but over time they focused more on the religious aspect of their service and failed to make the connection between the temple, its sacrifices and observances, and the promised Messiah. As we have seen through our study of the Tabernacle, its design, furnishings, and even the materials it was made from were intended to illustrate the path to righteousness through a spotless blood sacrifice. A redemption process that would be punctuated by the promised Messiah. A Messiah who would be, ***"...wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 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."*** (Isaiah 53:5-6)

- ***"...and the promises..."***

- God made lots of promises to Israel, but paramount amongst all these was the Messianic promise. The promise that the Jewish people would host the coming Christ. Given that, they should have recognized promises like,
 - ***"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."*** (Micah 5:2)
 - ***"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, [David] and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."*** (Isaiah 11:1-2)
- Paul recognized this promise and tried to persuade the blinded Jews, ***"...that promise that was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus."*** (Acts 13:32-33)

- ***"...of whom are the fathers..."***

- Paul reminded them of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (renamed Israel) through whom the Messianic promise was first made. As God said to Abraham, ***"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..."*** (Genesis 22:18a). A blessing confirmed in Christ by Peter, ***"You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having***

raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." (Acts 3:25-26).

- This is a fulfilled promise Paul affirms by saying, ***"...and from whom, according to the flesh [earthly birth], Christ came..., " who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."***

Paul ends his discussion of Israel's God-given qualifications with the word ***"...Amen..."***. A term that in Greek affirms *"Truth - and so let it be."* Paul's self-righteous audience may have looked at these attributes as indicators of their salvation but that is not Paul's intent. Instead, he wants them to understand their unique role and how God has uniquely prepared them. Not for self-righteousness, but to be a model to the world of the redemptive Messianic promise. But sadly, like millions of people today, they missed the whole point, which is why Jesus said, ***"Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*** (Matthew 10:5-7). Jesus didn't tell His disciples not to witness to Gentiles. In fact, He later commissioned Paul to do just that (Acts 9:15). But His first priority was to bring Israel - His covenant messengers - back in line to recognize Him as the Messiah. Once they did, they would be zealous to tell the whole world about Him. This is what Paul meant when he said, ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."*** (underline added - Romans 1:16). The Jew was witnessed to first, because the Jews needed to be reminded of their unique role. Jesus didn't need to witness to the whole world Himself. He had already selected and qualified the nation of Israel to do that. Jesus wanted them to understand who He is so they would understand their intended role and carry it out.

But they failed to do so, and continue to fail to this day. Yet the time is coming when they will understand and repent. At a time during the Tribulation, when the gospel influence of the church will have been raptured away, the remnant of Israel will finally turn to Jesus. The time when, ***"...they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."*** (Zechariah 12:10a). And when that happens, 144,000 Jews, ***"...of all the tribes of the children of Israel..."***, will be sealed by God to go forward and finally bring His message to the world. They will be the greatest missionary corps that will ever live, composed entirely of found sheep. ***"...These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb."*** (Revelation 7:4 & 14:4b). They, along with the Two Witnesses, the Proclaiming Angels and the Tribulation Saints will be the final truth-bearers for the message of God's redemptive grace. (Revelation 11:3 / 14:6 / 20:4). But it is their failure to do this until the end-of-time that is the source of Paul's burden.

Lesson # 32, The Book of Romans - Chapter 9 verses 6-13

Please note:

The topic of "election" in chapters 8 and 9 is highly debated and unfortunately results in disunity amongst believers. In Lesson #1 I gave an introductory explanation of the major schools of thought and told you where my heart lands. To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is we can study these chapters without debate.

Quick Recap:

In verses 4 and 5 Paul explained how Israel was prepared by God to be His messenger to the world, **"4. ...who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5. of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."**

Here Paul lists several examples of God's provision to help his Jewish readers break out of their mindset of segregated superiority and embrace their role of spreading God's gift of redemption through the promised Messiah.

To do this he reminds them:

- They are **adopted** as God's chosen nation,
- They were shown the **glory of God** as He sought to commune with them in unique ways,
- He established multiple **Covenants** to show the relationship He intended to have with them,
- They were selected to be the scribes and keepers of God's words - His **Law** - and its prophecy of the Messiah,
 - They were given the opportunity of providing a special **service** for God, particularly through the temple and the priesthood. These were intended to illustrate redemption through a blood sacrifice which pointed to the coming Messiah as a sacrificial Lamb of God and as the Great High Priest,
- They were given unique **promises** if they would be obedient,
- And from them came the **fathers**, the patriarchs of the Judeo-Christian faith, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- And from them would come the Messiah in **flesh**, born as the "Son of Man" to lead His sheep in Israel back to Him and to their appointed task. (John 1:14 / Matthew 1:2&16)

But Israel failed, and the elected nation took the blessed provisions they had been given and turned them into an overly complicated, self-righteous religion. In doing so they missed the fact the poor homeless carpenter from Nazareth was God in flesh who had come to, **"...gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..."**. Yet sadly, as Jesus would point out, **"...but you were not willing!"** to welcome Him as their king (Matthew 23:37b). It was Israel's arrogance and spiritual blindness that burdened Paul's heart. Not just for the Jewish people but for the fact they failed in their mission to be the ministers of God's redemptive message to the world.

Now in the next part of chapter 9 Paul continues to provide an historical context to help the Jewish people understand their unique role in God's ultimate plan. But, the reality of what he tells them will shock many who continue to rely on their heritage as a perceived source of righteousness...

Romans 9:6-13

Verse 9:6

In Romans 3:1&2b Paul tells us, **"1. What advantage then has the Jew..., / 2b....Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God."** God elected the Jewish people to be the inspired writers and keepers of His holy word. Few if any assignments from God could be more important than this. From the words first given to Moses, then through the prophets, down to the gospels and epistles, culminating in what we now know as the Bible. But God also gave Israel His "word"; His promises and declarations if they would remain obedient. As Jeremiah prophesied, **"...For thus says the Lord: 'Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them.'" (Jeremiah 32:42)** God gave His words first to Israel. Both His written word and His promises. But here Paul anticipates his reader's potential question, **"...So given all of our failures to recognize God's plan has the word of God had no impact ("...no effect...")?** In other words, **"Has God's word failed?"** His answer of course would be **"No. God's word has certainly taken effect"**, because it proclaims Paul's core message: which is the prophesied coming Messiah that was fulfilled in Jesus. So, yes, God's word will have **"...effect..."**. As Isaiah proclaims, **"...For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."** (Isaiah 55:10-11). But we must remember what Israel has overlooked. God's word is not a legalistic recipe for righteousness, but is instead a roadmap to the gospel of faith in the promised Messiah. Today the spread of His word is primarily through the church, but in the future the gospel will be spread by Israel when their final remnant truly recognizes Him as their Redeemer and will, **"...look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him**

as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zechariah 12:10b / see also Zechariah 13:8 and Revelation 12:6 for an explanation of the remnant of Israel).

Verses 9:7-8

Here Paul explains why just being from Israel does not automatically bring righteousness. Remember, Paul is talking partly to a group of legalistic Jews who felt they were *all* made righteous because they were sons of Abraham - the chosen people, keepers of the law, and therefore morally and spiritually superior to others. In other words, Jews believed they were righteous because they were Jews. But Paul discounts that notion by saying, ***"...they are not all Israel who are Israel..."***. Or said another way, you are not God's chosen people just because you descended from Abraham. God elected Israel to be His messengers to the world, and as such, they should be sharing the truth of God's plan to redeem mankind. But they would not benefit from His election unless, like Abraham they, ***"...believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness..."*** (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6). Only those who have faith in the Messianic promise of God's redemption are made righteous. Paul explains this by saying, ***"...those who are the children of the flesh, [through their own efforts] these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise [with faith like Abraham] are counted as the seed."*** This should clarify his point, ***"...they are not all Israel who are Israel..."***. The true Israel would be those who understand and accept God's promise of the Messiah, and who in Paul's day would recognize Him as Jesus.

Verses 9:9-13

Paul will now shock many of his readers by revealing the fact not all descendants of Abraham are part of the elected nation. To do this he recounts two well-known stories: Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebecca. These are very complex stories found in Genesis 15-18 and 21-28. It would take many lessons to go through these in detail but the story's context is important. So let's look at the key points Paul wants his readers to mentally consider:

- God had established a Covenant with Abraham that a great nation would descend from him. That nation would be Israel. (Genesis 12:2 / 15:5)
- But also, that all people of the world [non Jews] would be blessed through him. In other words, blessed by Israel (Genesis 12:3 / Galatians 3:8)
- To fulfill this Covenant God promised a son would be born to the elderly Abraham and his wife Sarai. (Genesis 15:4)
- But they were old and did not patiently wait for God to fulfill His promises. Instead, Abraham fathered a son through a servant girl Hagar. (Genesis 16:1-5)
- This son, Abraham's physical first-born, was named Ishmael. (Genesis 16:11)

- But God was displeased with Abraham's impatience and declared the elderly and barren Sarai (now renamed Sarah) would bear him a son who would be given the Covenant blessing. (Genesis 17:15-19)
- This son would be Isaac, and through him (not Ishmael, the physical first-born) God would extend His Covenant promise. (Genesis 17:21 / 21:3)
- When Isaac was old enough to marry Abraham sought a bride from amongst their own people. (Genesis 24:1-4)
- So Isaac married Rebecca and through her Isaac fathered twin sons, who would become two nations and two peoples (Genesis 25:21-24)
- Her first-born was Esau, who by tradition should have inherited Isaac's blessing. But in one of the oddest stories in the Bible Isaac's blessing went to Jacob. (Genesis 27)
- Then God, in His infinite knowledge and wisdom selected the physically second-born Jacob through which to extend the Covenant first given to Abraham and by extension to Isaac. (Genesis 28:1-15)
- And God changed Jacob's name to "Israel" (Genesis 35:10)
- And Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22b-26)
- So, God cast His love on Israel, the people of Jacob, rather than Edom, the people of Esau. (Malachi 1:1-3 Obadiah 1:21). Which is why Paul reminds them, **"...As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'" (V 13)**
- All of this is why the people of Israel prided themselves in being the descendants of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 - But unfortunately they equated this relationship with self-righteousness.
 -

So what is the point in all of this? Well, Paul's Jewish readers would have known this story very well, yet they failed to understand a key point: - Not all of the children of Abraham became the nation of Israel. Abraham had a first-born son, Ishmael, who by tradition should have been his heir. But God did not follow man's tradition and instead elected Abraham's second-born son Isaac to extend the Covenant. So Ishmael did not inherit the national Covenant, and neither did Abraham's other six sons born to him later in life by Katurah. Likewise, God did not extend His Covenant through Isaac's first-born Esau, but selected Jacob instead. Paul's point, which should have been clear to a first-century reader, was that God does not elect by physical attributes - either a first-born or by religion or works. That's why Paul had earlier said, **"...For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."** (Romans 2:28-29). In other words, they were not a Jew just because they were circumcised, no more than they were saved just because they were a son of Abraham. Here Paul reminds them, **"...In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are**

counted as the seed. 9. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." In other words, God's Covenant promise was only carried by Isaac. Ishmael, Esau and the sons of Katurah were also sons of Abraham but they were not part of elected Israel. But more importantly, Paul clarifies that none of them were righteous just because of a physical inheritance but their inheritance came by faith - as the, **"...children of the promise..."**. Those who believed in the promises of God, like Abraham who, **"...believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness..."**, even if they were not from Israel (Genesis 15:6). This should clarify that their lineage through Abraham was not a source of righteousness. Instead, righteousness was offered to all people if they would do like Abraham and believe in God's promises – through faith – and not by works. (see Romans 4:3) God's selection (election) was not made because of works because, **"...for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil..."** (V 11a), but so that **"...the purpose of God according to election might stand..."** (V 11b). God's plan was to bring His offer of grace and redemption to all people of the world (John 3:16-17 / 1 John 2:2 / Romans 10:13), and He intended to do this in-part through the nation of Israel. Therefore, God, in His infinite wisdom, selected men He knew would be obedient to lead His chosen nation. He didn't elect them to salvation. He elected them to His service, but for righteousness they still had to believe in the promises of God just like Abraham did. And even though these men were often disobedient, God still elected to orchestrate His plan through them. And through that plan the Son of Man would be physically born through God's elected nation to recover His elected people and set them back on a path of obedience. That's why Jesus was born as a Jew. To shepherd His lost flock back to Him so that they would spread His message. But sadly, that day has not yet come. So God has extended His messenger service to His other people, His church. Those who have come to faith in Christ and go to all the world to share His glorious message. That way, God's word still has **"...effect..."** even though His chosen messengers still reject its Messianic truth.

But is that blindness limited to Israel and the Jewish people? Of course not. How many people today consider themselves to be a "Christian" but they have no idea what that really means. Maybe they come from a "Christian" family or were raised in the church, and like the Israelites they assume that imparts righteousness. Or, maybe they are active in the church and feel that makes them part of the body of Christ, but again have no relationship with the Redeemer. The issue Paul was addressing in the first century is the same issue that exists today.

And that's where we come in and why we have been commanded to go to all the world. So that everyone "elected" by Christ's sacrifice (all people) can choose to be made righteous by their belief in the work of Jesus on the cross.

Lesson # 33, The Book of Romans - Chapter 9 verses 14-33

Please note:

The topic of "election" in chapters 8 and 9 is highly debated and unfortunately results in disunity amongst believers. In Lesson #1 I gave an introductory explanation of the major schools of thought and told you where my heart lands. To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is we can study these chapters without debate.

Quick Recap:

Paul started the previous section of Romans with a profound statement, **"...For they are not all Israel who are of Israel..."** (Romans 9:6). His Jewish readers prided themselves in their nationalistic heritage and believed it brought them righteousness. But here Paul clarifies that just because you're physically from Israel doesn't mean you're spiritually from Israel. In other words, Israel was elected as a nation to carry God's redemptive message to the world, but righteousness - salvation - still required each individual Jew to have faith in the promises of God. Because without that faith they could not be God's true messengers. We see their error illustrated time and time again through the blinded Pharisees, scribes and teachers of the Law. That's because Jews who associated salvation with their physical descent from Abraham failed to recognize that Abraham himself had to be saved by faith because he **"...believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness..."** (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6). That's what Paul wanted his readers to understand. Abraham was made righteous by believing in God's promises, not in good works, religious signs or national heritage. And that's exactly the same thing Paul's readers must do. Even if they were the physical children of Israel.

Let's continue...

Romans 9:14-33

Verses 9:14-16

Just prior to this statement Paul used an illustration to show that God had chosen ("elected") Israel to carry His redemptive message to the world. To do this he used the stories of Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebecca to show that God, in His supreme authority, ignored the tradition of selecting the first-born son for inheritance and instead bestowed His Covenant on the second born. A lot of commentary has been written about these events in an effort to substantiate a "reformed" view of predestination, but in reality God was simply selecting someone to lead the people He had chosen to carry His message. Which in this case fell to the lineage of Abraham,

Issac and Jacob, and through Jacob to the twelve tribes of Israel. But...please understand, their selection to serve God as messengers did not guarantee their individual salvation. Each of these men, and every single believer since then was saved (made righteous) because they, **"...believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness..."** (Romans 4:3 / Genesis 15:6). God's "election" was for service, not for salvation. Otherwise, Abraham would have been saved by simply being chosen to serve and not by believing God's redemptive promises.

But here Paul anticipated a related question his reader's might ask, **"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?"** To which he responded, **"Certainly not!"**. One might suppose that if God selected Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau then God did something unjust to those who were not selected. Not at all. God does as God pleases but does so with infinite knowledge and divine wisdom and in a way that supports His predetermined grand plan. In this case He knew Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be faithful to Him so they were chosen (Genesis 17:19 / 25:23). Yet, God also knew they were sinful men and would still have to come to redemption through faith. At the same time God still prospered their other offspring even though they did not become part of nationalist Israel and were not the bearers of God's redemptive message (Genesis 17:20 / 25:12). But...they could still be redeemed if they believed in the promises of God. That's because God's Covenant promise to Abraham not only included Israel but also brought blessings on the whole world:

- **2. "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.**
- **3. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you...;"**
 - **"...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:2-3)

First, God promised His blessing to a **"...great nation..."** (Israel) but then extended that blessing to **"...all the families of the earth..."**. In other words, the redemptive promise extended to Israel was also promised to the Gentile world as well, because, **"For God so loved the world [not just elected Israel] that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him [through faith] should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn [unelect] the world, but that the world [not just Israel] through Him might be saved."** (John 3:16-17). God **"...loved the world..."**, so much that He would offer His redemption to everyone who would believe. That's because God is, **"...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** (2 Peter 3:9).

So here Paul reminds his readers of another story from their heritage to further substantiate his point, **15. For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."** He wants to show that salvation is not a product of election offered to

specific people, but is God's grace and mercy extended to everyone, to, **"...all the families of the earth."** (Genesis 12:3). In this sense everyone is "elected" to receive grace, but the receipt of that grace requires a payment for sin through a blood offering. That means grace is acquired (**"...accounted to him..."**) by either looking forward to the Messiah through the action of a blood offering in the Tabernacle, or, in our case, by looking back to the blood offering made by the Lamb of God on the cross. This is why the apostle John (a Jew) reminds us, **"...Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."** [non Jews] (1 John 2:1b-2).

That's why we can't be "elected" to salvation against our free will. God's grace is not irresistible, because we can reject it. That's why our salvation, just like Abraham's salvation, is accounted to us through our belief in the promises of God fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ. It is then our responsibility to believe or reject God's promise made through the gospel. A promise made to **"...whoever believes in Him..."** (John 3:16). But the application of God's grace is not forced on us. It requires a conscious faith-based decision on our part to either accept or deny God's free gift of grace. That's what Paul means when he says, **16. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."** Salvation does not come through our will or our works (**"...him who runs..."**), but through God's grace and His free gift of mercy to all who believe. It is our faith, not our election or works, that results in salvation.

To illustrate this point Paul uses another familiar Old Testament story by comparing Moses and Pharaoh. (Exodus chapters 3-12). Moses was called by God to rescue His people from captivity in Egypt. Not only were they slaves but after four hundred years of living in Egypt many of them had adopted Egypt's pagan culture and idolatry. In other words, they were unfit to be God's messengers. Initially Moses resisted God's call and questioned his selection, but he believed the promises God made and agreed to be His messenger to Pharaoh. (Exodus 3:11 / 4:10). Likewise, Pharaoh was called by God to let His people go, which he could have done, but instead Pharaoh resisted God's call and refused His request. (Exodus 5:1-2). By using this example Paul shows Moses as a picture of accepting God's offer and Pharaoh is a picture of rejecting it. Both Moses and Pharaoh were sinners, so both needed redemption. One was a Hebrew and one a Gentile, but that didn't matter because they were both made in God's image and both were shown the power and glory of God in the same way. Yet only one accepted what God said and the other rejected it. God had given Pharaoh example after example of His power and illustrated the consequences of not accepting His offer. But through his repeated rejections Pharaoh stood himself apart from God and effectively hardened his heart against God's will.

Verses 9:17-18

So why did God include Pharaoh in His redemptive plan to begin with? ***"17. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."***

18. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

(Quoted from Exodus 9:16). God elected Moses to be His messenger. God also used Pharaoh (in a sense "elected him") to serve another purpose. Why? ***"...that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth..."***. Both men were chosen by God for a specific role and both were given specific commands. One accepted and one rejected. This goes back to what Paul said about rejecting God at the very beginning of his letter. ***"...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind..."***. (Romans 1:28). God gave Pharaoh knowledge of God and multiple opportunities to see His power and holiness, yet Pharaoh refused to accept Him for who He is. Therefore, the plagues God imposed on Egypt were a result of Pharaoh's rejection of God's sovereign authority even though God offered time after time again for Pharaoh to change his mind and avoid His wrath. And God did all of this so that Israel - His appointed messengers - would be released and, ***"...My name may be declared in all the earth."*** That brings us back to Israel and God's intention for bringing them out of Egypt in the first place. God had elected Israel to be His messenger to declare His name ***"...in all the earth..."*** (see John 3:17). God's plan had not changed just because Israel (as a people) were disobedient. In fact, they are still disobedient today, but that does not change God's plan or Israel's intended role.

So let's put this story in context to understand why Paul used it as an example: — Hundreds of years before Moses was born the Hebrew people, direct descendants of Abraham and Isaac through the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel), had migrated into Egypt to avoid a famine. God's plan to accomplish this took many years to implement, beginning first with Joseph being sold into Egyptian slavery (Genesis 37) and culminating in his father Jacob (Israel) and their entire family moving to Egypt years later (Genesis 39-50). But after generations in captivity the Hebrew people rebelled, rejected God's promises and fell into the sin of Egypt's culture and pagan worship. That meant God's intended messengers were off track and needed to be brought back in line. Given that, we might wonder why God didn't simply stop the famine or immediately move Jacob's family to Egypt? He certainly could have, but if He did we wouldn't have the Messianic story of Joseph or a beautiful example of God's sovereign power over all things to accomplish His divine plan.

But is that the only example in the Bible where a choice was made to accept or reject God's promise? Not at all, so let's look at a few more examples:

Cain and Abel

Genesis chapter 4

- Both men knew God's expectations for a sacrificial offering
- Both had the same opportunity to comply
- One was obedient to God's commands
- But the other was disobedient
 - One accepted
 - And one rejected

Ruth and Orpah

Ruth chapter 1

- Both women had the same opportunity to accept the God of Israel
- And both had to make the same decision
 - Remain in their old life with their false god
 - Or seek a new life with the true God of Israel
- One accepted
- And one rejected

Saul and David

1 Samuel chapters 16-24

- Both men were kings of Israel
- Both were given opportunities to follow the Lord
- One was obedient
- But the other was disobedient
 - One accepted
 - And one rejected

Judas and Peter

Matthew chapter 16

- Both men walked with Jesus for three years
- Both listened to Him speak the same words
- Both watched Him perform the same miracles
- One was sold-out to Jesus
- But the other sold Jesus out
 - One accepted
 - And one rejected

The two thieves on the cross

Luke chapter 23

- Both men hung beside Jesus
- Both heard His words
- One repented and sought forgiveness

- But the other blasphemed Jesus and died in sin
 - One accepted
 - And one rejected

All of these examples, and many more like them, paint a beautiful picture of God's grace and is one of the most consistent themes in the Bible. Grace that is offered to everyone for the forgiveness of sin, but there's a catch. In His total sovereignty God doesn't dictate who will accept and who will reject. He lets us decide which decision we will make and which road we will travel. The road to obedience or the road to destruction. God provides the map and Jesus provides the way, but we must decide whether or not to take the trip with Him and believe by faith.

Now, given those examples as context let's go back to Romans to understand why Paul used the example of Moses and Pharaoh.

God's desire was for Pharaoh to release His people so they could return to Him, **"...that My name may be declared in all the earth..."**. God used Moses as His messenger to instruct Pharaoh to release God's messenger nation (Exodus 4:22). Moses agreed, Pharaoh refused, and we end-up with the story of the Exodus and the formation of Israel as a nation. In both cases neither man was made righteous by what they did. Moses was made righteous by His faith in God. Conversely, Pharaoh was lost because he chose to reject God. In both cases the outcome was under the sovereign will of God and was orchestrated to suit His intended purpose. But...the eternal outcome of both men was based solely on their personal decision to accept or reject God's offer.

So let's think about this story as it relates to a prophetic view of Jesus. — When Jesus came as the Messiah He sought first to regather Israel. Just like Moses had done. To accomplish this task Jesus was born a Jew, in nationalist Israel, and was descended through the royal lineage of king David. He ministered in Israel and focused on the Israelite people, because as He told His disciples, **"...I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** (Matthew 15:24b). That's because His primary task was to rescue Israel from their sinful mindset and restore them as His messengers to the world. So when Jesus sent His disciples out to witness He **"...commanded them, saying: 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'** (Matthew 10:5-7). In other words, tell Israel their Messiah is here. Why did He do that? Because He still intended for Israel to be His gospel messengers and He, the Shepherd, came to gather His sheep to be those messengers. But they rejected Him over and over (just like Pharaoh did) and in doing so brought great punishment on themselves. They didn't make a golden calf like the ancient Israelites had done, but they were so focused on self-

righteousness through the Law that religion had become their idol and caused them to miss the Messiah. That's why Jesus wept at the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Not because of His coming crucifixion, but because He had come to gather His children **"...as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings..."**, but, as Jesus already knew,, **"...but you were not willing!"** (Matthew 23:37b). Now, in that context listen to how Luke describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, **"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.'"** (Luke 19:41-44). This is why Paul wept over Israel. After centuries of Messianic prophecy the Messiah had physically come at **"...the time of your visitation..."**; the visit of the Messiah to Israel. Had they recognized Him they would have had, **"...the things that make for your peace!"**. Instead they rejected Him and as a result, in due time they would be severely punished. Do you see the parallel? God sent Moses to rescue His chosen messengers from slavery in Egypt. But rather than worship God with an offering for sin they made a golden calf. As a result, they were punished for forty years in the desert until only a remnant remained who eventually made it to the Promised Land. Likewise, God sent Jesus, as a Jewish man, to rescue the lost sheep of Israel. But they rejected Him again and instead of making an offering to Him as their Lord they exchanged Him for a prisoner and had Him crucified. As a result, they were punished and scattered across the earth for almost 2,000 years, leaving only a remnant of faithful believers. Paul wanted His readers to understand this. To help them see that their salvation did not come through religion or works, but through the saving grace of God embodied in the Messiah they had crucified.

Verse 9:19-20

So after this Paul anticipates another question, which basically says, *"If God is sovereign, and yet we are able to choose, and if we choose to deny God's grace, then why does God judge us?"* Paul's answer is simply, because God is God. **20. But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"** Every action of God is perfect and cannot be questioned. As the Psalmist says, **"...Be still and know that I am God..."** (Psalm 46:10). And as God reminded Job, **"...“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it to what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"** (Job 38:4-7). We have all **"...resisted His will..."**. That's called sin. But we all have been elected

to forgiveness and redemption if we will freely surrender ourselves to God's holiness and accept His offer of grace. The same offer He makes to everyone, **"...Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!"** (Isaiah 45:22) That's the thing Moses understood but Pharaoh rejected. That's why God finds fault and punishes those who ignore His offer.

Verse 9:21

Paul refers back to familiar illustrations in Isaiah 45 and Jeremiah 19 using the example of a potter and his wares. In doing so, he points to the fact we have no control over our parentage or heritage, but we do have control over the decisions we make in life. Unlike a clay bowl that cannot turn itself into a clay cup, God has given us the freewill to control much of what happens in our lives. Where we live, how we live, how we dress, and whether or not we accept the free gift of God's grace is largely up to us. God created everyone, both the one who accepts and the one who rejects. They are both made in the same way from the same materials but that's where the similarity ends. We are not inanimate clay objects, but are **"...fearfully and wonderfully made..."** by the hand of God, and in His image so that, **"...my soul knows very well."** who God is (Psalm 139:14 / Genesis 1:26). But God gives us a freedom the clay does not have — we can choose the outcome of our eternity by either accepting or rejecting the gift of grace through Christ. That's a choice both Moses and Pharaoh had to make.

Verses 9:22-24

Along these same lines Peter tells us, **"...The Lord is not slack [slow] concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."** (2 Peter 3:9) God is not slow, He is patient. God could have told Moses one time to rescue His people and when Moses questioned His decision He could have simply chosen someone else. Instead He showed Moses His patience, grace and mercy. Likewise, God could have commanded Pharaoh to release His people one time and if he refused simply destroy Egypt. Instead, God was longsuffering and gave Pharaoh multiple opportunities to recognize who He is and to accept His commands. God didn't make Pharaoh just to destroy him, but He gave Pharaoh every opportunity to recognize Him as God. That means Pharaoh wasn't elected to destruction but was elected to make a choice. In this case, and in the case of all offers of grace, God is not slow. As He did with Pharaoh He will provide mankind every opportunity to recognize His authority and accept His call to salvation.

Verses 9:25-26

Hosea prophesied the future disobedience of Israel. That being the case Paul's readers should have recognized their attitude towards the Messiah would result in God's punishment (Hosea 1:1-8). But God also promised a future restoration of Israel under the Messiah's kingdom. (Hosea 1:10-11 / Isaiah 54:1-8 / Ezekiel 37:15-23). That is the time when the remaining one-third of Israel will finally say, **"...The Lord is my God.."** (Zechariah 13:8b-9b). But until that time salvation has come to the Gentiles that they may believe and become messengers of God's redemptive grace. A fact Paul expressed to the doubting Jews as a prisoner in Rome, **"...So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,.Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.' 'Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!' And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.'" (Acts 28:25-29)**

Verses 9:27-29

A lot could be said about the meaning of this verse but Paul reminds his readers of the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 10:22-23) that Israel will be punished for her idolatrous behavior. Israel was scattered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Romans because of her rejection of God's calling. But a day will come when the remnant will finally accept Christ as the Messiah. This will come a time when, **"And it shall come to pass in all the land," Says the Lord, "That two-thirds in it [Israel] shall be cut off and die, But one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.' "** (Zechariah 13:8-9). This is the time when, **"...they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."** (Zechariah 12:10). This will be in the future Tribulation. A time of final punishment when God will show His mercy for Israel, **"...but for the elects sake those days will be shortened..."** (Matthew 24:22). **29. "And as Isaiah said before: 'Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah."** The remnant of Israel will be the one-third spoken of by Zechariah. They will be the final survivors of God's punishment who come to accept Christ as their Messiah and Savior and recognize Jesus as the **"...Lord of the**

Sabaoth...". Just as Jesus destroyed the wicked Sodom and Gomorrah and rescued the small remnant of Lot and his daughters. (Genesis 19:17). Likewise the final remnant of Israel will be removed from the wrath of God and protected. (Revelation 12:6).

Verses 9:30-33

Paul wraps-up this portion of his letter by summarizing his key message. The Gentiles who **"...did not pursue righteousness..."** through their own efforts found it through faith in Jesus. But, the self-righteous Jews, who sought artificial righteousness through the Law, did not find righteousness at all. **"...Why? Because they did not seek it by faith,..."** in the Messiah. Instead, they sought it through religion, works and their perceived heritage. Paul then reminds them of the Messianic promise in Isaiah 28:16 of the stone of Zion, the Rock, the Messiah, **"...a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation..."**. The **"...chief cornerstone..."** (Matthew 21:42 / Psalm 118:22). The **"...stone rejected by you builders..."**, (Acts 4:11) who is, **"...Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone..."** (Ephesians 2:20 / 1 Peter 2:6). This is what the Jews missed. Rather than seeing the Messiah as their promised Rock, they saw Him as a fraud and they stumbled in the dark. The same thing is happening to millions of people today who are stumbling over Prosperity Gospels or a focus on ceremony and ritual religions.

Lesson # 34, The Book of Romans - Chapter 10 verses 1-21

Quick Recap:

In chapter 9 Paul mourned for the people of Israel. Partly because they had complicated scripture to the point God's plan for sacrificial atonement had become a blur of rabbinical rules the people attributed to salvation. But beyond that, Paul was distraught over the fact Israel's blindness meant they were not fulfilling God's intended purpose as His messengers to the world. As a result, the Jewish people were not spreading the gospel of salvation through faith in the sacrificial offering of the Messiah, but instead were cloistered in their self-righteousness and being wholly disobedient to God.

Paul spoke about Israel's past "election" as God's chosen nation to carry His message to the world. But they failed and had not fulfilled the task they were given. So Paul shocked his readers by declaring, **"...For they are not all Israel who are of Israel..."** (Romans 9:6). In other words, just because you're a Jew doesn't make you part of "Israel", if you failed to be God's elected messenger. His point was, if you're not sharing the message God gave you then you're being disobedient and cannot count yourself amongst Israel. That's why Paul hypothetically wished he could exchange his own glorious eternity for Israel's if it meant they would accept Jesus as the Messiah (Romans 9:3).

But that message is timeless, and today we could still apply Paul's thoughts to our own society by truthfully saying, *"...You are not a Christian just because you think you're a Christian..."*. That's because today, possibly more than any time in history, the enemy has convinced mankind they can achieve eternal life through religion or by being a good person. That means millions today, just like the Jews of Paul's day, seek righteousness by bypassing Jesus.

Introduction to Chapter 10:

Chapter 10 continues Paul's plea for Israel's acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. I suspect if Paul could visit Israel today he would be appalled to find they still don't accept Jesus over two-thousand years after he made this persuasive argument. So here he summarizes his previous discussion of the Law-versus-grace by clarifying, **"...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes..."** (Romans 10:4). Christ's action brought an **"...end of the law..."** which means those who accept Christ no longer need the Law to help them see the need for redemption. Not only does this clarify the fact Christ is the fulfillment of the Law - through His sacrificial atonement of sin - but it also dispels the Reformist view of selective salvation because it offers righteousness, **"...to everyone who believes..."**. Not just to those who believe they

have a pre-regenerated heart and cannot deny God's irresistible grace. But to those who understand that God's grace is offered to all so that, **"...whoever believes on him will not be put to shame."** (Romans 10:11). This is possible because, **"...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."** (Romans 10:13 / Joel 2:32). And that means **"...whoever believes..."**, not just those preselected to believe.

After this discussion Paul further expands on the spread of the gospel by asking, **"...How can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace."** (Romans 10:14-15 / Isaiah 52:7). — How incredibly beautiful are the feet (and hands and voice) who bring the news of Jesus to a wretched and lost world. That's why we must remember, it is our **"...feet..."** that enables us to **"...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."** (Matthew 28:19). And that's why Paul was given the Book of Romans.

I could have broken chapter 10 into several lessons, but when you read it through it is basically one thought that builds on itself. So to ensure continuity let's explore all of this amazing passage together:

Romans 10:1-21

Verse 10:1

As we discussed in chapter 9, Paul was heavily burdened by the fact Israel was disobedient as a nation. They had been selected ("elected") by God to be His people and His nation, and as such, they would be messengers to the world to bless all nations with the truth of God's atoning grace (Genesis 12:1-3 / Deuteronomy 7:6-8). For this task God trained them and prepared them by:

- Making them the scribes and keeper of His word,
- Giving them His covenants,
- Prophesying His message through them,
- Showing them the sacrificial requirement,
- And by bringing the Messiah from among them.

But Israel rejected God's call and had for the most part ignored His prophets and over-complicated the Law by adding rules of their own. This resulted in a sense of earned self-righteousness that eventually caused them to miss the coming of their promised King (Matthew 23:37-39 / Luke 19:41-44). But Paul desperately wanted Israel to turn to Jesus and recognize Him as the Messiah. That's why he told them the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. To help them understand that righteousness of

the revered Jewish patriarchs came through faith and not from their own works or religion.

Later in chapter 11 Paul will declare prophetically that **"...all Israel will be saved..."**. (Romans 11:26) This doesn't mean everyone in Israel will be saved just because they are Jews. It means there will be a time in the future when the remnant of Israel, **"...will look on Me whom they pierced..."** and finally recognize the Son of Man is in reality the Son of God (Zechariah 12:10 / John 1:1-14). But sadly, that event will occur when only a portion of Israel will remain. (Zechariah 13:8-9). Even so, Paul would never give up hope, **"...that they may be saved..."**

Verses 10:2-3

This is a core theme in Romans. Israel had over-complicated the intended Law of God by adding rabbinical laws of their own. But in their attempt to gain righteousness by being hyper-religious through religious works, Israel had placed their own efforts above the efforts of the promised Messiah. As Paul points out, they certainly had a **"...zeal for God..."** but that zeal had been polluted by a greater zeal for their own self-righteousness. They saw the Law as something to be achieved, but not as a way to recognize their sin and point out their need for a Redeemer. So they added their own rules to the Law as they attempted to gain even more righteousness. Mark gives us an example of this when he tells us about the religious Pharisees who stood before Jesus (before God) and failed to recognize who He is because they were too busy criticizing His disciples for something as simple as not ceremonially washing their hands. (Matthew 15:3 / Mark 7:1-23)

Why did they do this? Because they had head-knowledge of what the Law said, but not heart-knowledge of what the Law meant. That's because they were **"...ignorant of God's righteousness..."**, which comes through faith, and had replaced it with **"...their own righteousness..."** which they thought came by works. As a result, they have not, even to this day, **"...submitted to the righteousness of God..."** which is imparted through the work of Jesus on the cross. (Romans 10:3). Yet Paul could **"...bear them witness..."** because he understood their confusion. As a Pharisee he had been one of them and was just as **"...zealous toward God as you all are today.."**. Even to the point of persecuting the followers of Jesus (see Acts 22:1-5 - verse 3 quoted). But now he understood that Jews and Gentiles are both saved the same way, and neither are saved by works or religion. (Acts 11:1-18 / 15:10-11). A fact millions of people still miss, 2,000 years later.

Verse 10:4

In one sense Jesus being **"...the end of the law..."** speaks to the fact He is the fulfillment of the Law, **"...Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the**

Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill..." (Matthew 5:17) Jesus fulfills the Law because the Law was intended to make us aware of our sin, so that we would seek redemption through Christ the Redeemer. By using the phrase **"...the Law or the Prophets..."** Jesus speaks to the total volume of Old Testament scripture that repeatedly points to the promised Messiah (see Galatians 3:8 / John 5:46 / Luke 24:27).

But, in the context of his Roman letter Paul may have also intended another meaning of the phrase **"...end of the law..."** by qualifying that it is the end **"...for righteousness to everyone who believes..."**. The **"...end..."** result of the law is salvation for the believer. In other words, as believers we are now forgiven and there is **"...now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."** (Romans 8:1). The law, which was intended to help us see our sin and recognize our need for redemption, has done its job when we are saved through our faith in Christ. That's because **"...the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus..."** (Galatians 3:24-26). The Law was our teacher because it taught us about our sin so we would recognize our sin, and therefore recognize our need for a Redeemer. But after we accept Christ it brings about an **"...end of the law..."** as our teacher.

Thank You Jesus!

Verse 10:5-8

Basically verses 5-8 tell us to obtain **"...the righteousness of faith..."** (justification by faith in Christ) does not require us to go to the highest heights or the lowest lows to find Jesus. Here Paul paraphrases Leviticus 18:5, which says **"...You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord..."**. But as Paul points out many times, we, as mortal men, cannot fully keep the law. Adherence to God's law certainly bears fruit through a Godly life but it does not bring forgiveness and salvation. That still requires faith in the blood sacrifice as a sign of our faith in God's redemptive power. As Paul explained to the Galatians **"...But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just (saved) shall live by faith..."**. (Galatians 3:10) To explain the simplicity of this process Paul paraphrases Deuteronomy 30:11-14, **"... 'For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it..."** What Paul is simply saying is, "You've overcomplicated the road to salvation." We don't have to ascend to heaven to find salvation. Nor do we have to cross the depths of the sea to hear about it. The gospel is right in front of us." It is in God's word, in His

promises and in His death and resurrection. As a result, it is **"...very near..."** just as the Lord promises, **"...you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart..."** (Jeremiah 29:13). Finding Jesus is not a long journey of the feet. It is a short journey of the heart. And it is a journey to a Lord who is always near, always available and always calling to us. Just as the Lord promises through the Psalmist **"...Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me..."** (Psalm 139:7-10)

Thank You Jesus.

Verses 10:9-11

Now, near the halfway point of his letter Paul brings it all together and cuts to the chase to explain why salvation must come through faith.

Simply because:

- There is an all-holy God,
- And we all sin,
- And because of our sin we deserve God's eternal wrath,
- Yet, God offers us mercy,
- Not through our own religion or works,
- But through His grace,
- By a blood sacrifice,
- That culminated in the sacrifice of the promised Messiah.
- The Lamb of God. The poor homeless man from Nazareth.

Given that context, Paul then clarifies what we sometimes call the "simple" plan of salvation:

- We must, **"...confess with your mouth..."**
 - That is, to make a public profession of our faith...
- In **"...the Lord Jesus..."**
 - By recognizing that He is the Son of God and the promised Messiah,
- But to do this is more than belief in our head.
 - We must **"...believe in your heart..."**
- Believing that Jesus is the Christ - the Messiah, who was crucified for our sin and then resurrected in victory when,
 - **"...God has raised Him from the dead..."**
 - As our living and eternal King...
- And if you do this truly from your heart, **"...you will be saved..."**

- ***"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness..."***
 - ***"...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation..."***
 - ***11. "For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (paraphrased from Isaiah 28:16 and 49:23 / Romans 9:33)***

Verses 10:12-13

Here Paul quotes Joel 2:32 to clarify something difficult for a legalistic Jew to understand. And that is the fact ***"...whoever calls on the name of the Lord..."*** which includes everyone; Jew and Gentile alike. Although they did not have generations of provision and preparation like Israel did, Gentiles are saved the same way Jews are. By faith. Not by adherence to the Law, their lineage to Abraham or by an external sign. Both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way by simply putting their faith in the life, death and resurrection of the Nazarene carpenter. (Refer to Psalm 105). Isaiah points to this truth when he speaks of those who were not Israel but still came to God, ***"...“I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people..."*** (Isaiah 65:1-2a) These verses discount the notion that God selects certain people to salvation and certain people to wrath, and that He only calls to those He has pre-selected to believe. Instead, He is ***"...found by those who did not seek Me..."***, because He says to all nations, ***"...‘Here I am, here I am,’..."*** as He offers His grace to ***"...a rebellious people..."*** That's because ***"...there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (Gentile)..."*** so that ***"...“whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”..."***. Here Paul uses the word ***"...whoever..."***, "Pas" in Greek. A word translated as *"the whole"* / *"every kind of"* / *"all kinds"* / *"all people"*. This shows clearly God extends His gift of grace to everyone. Because that's what ***"...whoever..."*** really means.

Verses 10:14-15

When we think of the Lord's command to share the gospel we generally think of Acts 1:8, ***"...But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** or the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, ***"...And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen..."***

But here Paul follows his summary of the plan of salvation by telling us why the Great Commission is so important. And in doing so he answers the question a lot of people ask themselves, *"But why should I go witness?"* So, Paul answers the question:

- ***"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"***
 - How can the lost believe in Jesus if they have never heard about Jesus?
 - ***"...Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)***
 - It is through Jesus that we show people ***"...the way..."*** to eternal life.
- ***And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"***
 - So how can they hear about Jesus if no one tells them about Jesus?
 - ***"...So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30-31)***
- ***And how shall they hear without a preacher?"***
 - A preacher is not just a seminary trained man in the pulpit.
 - We are all preachers of the gospel.
 - The Greek root of this term is *"Kerusdo"*, which means *"to declare or proclaim"*. This is something we are all commanded to do.
 - As Peter says, ***"...But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."*** (1 Peter 2:9-10)
 - We are all called to share the gospel.
- ***And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"***
 - Paul was sent:
 - ***"...But the Lord said to him, (about Paul) "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:15)***
 - ***"...As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3)***
 - So, we are sent by Jesus just as Paul was, ***"...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..."*** (Matthew 28:19)
- ***As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"***
 - Here Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:7, ***"...How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims***

peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

- Our **"...feet..."** indicate action and movement. It doesn't tell us to stand still and think about it. It tells us to move forward, on the feet God gave us, to wherever He sends us.

And that is our task. To go to the lost - the unreached - and reach them with the good news of Jesus. The gospel of salvation by faith. This is the same message proclaimed to the world on the night the Messiah came to earth. A message of peace with God through faith in Christ, **"...Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"** (Luke 2:10-14) This is the same **"...glad tidings of good things!..."** Paul is talking about. Christ, the promised Messiah has come to us with His offer of redemption if we will simply believe. The same message proclaimed by the heavenly host can now be proclaimed by us if we will simply **"...go..."** and **"...preach the gospel..."**.

Thank You Jesus

Verses 10:16-18

In Galatians 3:8 Paul tells us, **"...Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand..."** Not only does this say we are saved by faith, but it says **"...Scripture..."** (the Old Testament), was **"...preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand..."**. The gospel of salvation by faith in God's promised redemption was preached to Abraham generations before the Messiah came to earth and hundreds of years before we had the "gospels" of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, or the letter of Paul's to the Romans. In fact, the good news of the "gospel" is the constant theme of the prophetic Old Testament. The blood-red thread of a sacrificial atonement throughout scripture that tells us we must be saved by believing in the promises of our crucified and risen Savior.

But given that, Paul then says **"...But they have not all obeyed the gospel..."**. Instead, they overcomplicated the message of God's grace and replaced it with man's works. To explain this he cites Isaiah 53:1 which asks, **"...“Lord, who has believed our report?”..."**. This is the great Messianic prophecy of the coming Redeemer who was **"...despised and rejected by men..."** and who was **"...wounded for our transgressions and, He was bruised for our iniquities..."**, because, **"...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all..."**. (Isaiah 53:3, 5, 6). Yet, despite this and many

other prophecies the people Jesus came to rescue **"...did not receive Him..."** (John 1:10).

But Paul knew that all too well because he had also rejected the claim of the homeless Carpenter and tried to destroy His followers. So here Paul re-enforces what he said in verses 14 and 15 by emphasizing, **"...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God..."**. Meaning, faith comes by hearing the core message of God's word - the message of promised redemption - the message of the Messiah. But as a point of clarification I want to explain that the word **"...hearing..."** does not mean a person has to physically "hear" with their ears. And it certainly does not mean a deaf person cannot be saved because they cannot physically "hear". The Greek word Paul uses in this verse for **"...hearing..."** is "akoe", which means, *"properly, hearing; used of inner (spiritual) hearing that goes with receiving faith from God, i.e. spiritual hearing (discerning God's voice...)"*. The term indicates "hearing" with the heart, not with the ear. In fact, if we had to rely on physical hearing in order to be saved that would be a type of works-based salvation because physical hearing would be something we would have to "do" - an action we would have to take. But the entire book of Romans speaks against this notion and instead emphasizes the fact salvation comes from the heart, which is the meaning of "akoe". Paul clarifies this by stating, **"...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God..."**. The Lord reminds us of this in 1 Samuel 16:7, **"...For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."** That is why Paul said **"...For with the heart one believes unto righteousness..."**. Salvation is a product of faith, that comes from the heart, and not from our ears. It is the word of God that speaks to our heart, and that is what we "akoe" when we hear and believe.

Paul then quotes from Psalm 19:4, **"But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.'" This is a Psalm of David that shows he understood the revelation of God's glory., "...The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."** (Psalm 19:1-4). Paul's point is that Israel, and in fact the whole world, should understand who the Messiah is.

Verses 10:19-21

So Paul continues to drive his point home. Israel should have known! They were set apart and prepared by God. They were given every advantage so they would believe God's promises and then share His promises to the world. Moses understood this generations earlier when he told Israel what God said, **"...I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation..."** (Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:21) by

offering His grace to the rebellious Gentiles. The **"...foolish nation..."**. The people who were not chosen as His favored nation. And yet, when the Gentiles heard the gospel they came to Jesus by the millions.

Thank you Jesus!

Lesson # 35, The Book of Romans - Chapter 11 verses 1-10

Quick Recap:

In chapter 9 Paul spoke about the selection of Israel as God's chosen people who would carry His redemptive message to the world. They were prepared and provisioned more than any other nation and would flourish if they would simply be obedient to the Lord. But they failed and went through cycles of disobedience that made them ineffective as a messenger. Sadly, they also overcomplicated the commands of God by adding needless Rabbinical rules that overshadowed the true intent of the atoning gospel of grace. This burdened Paul to the point of **"...great sorrow and continual grief in my heart..."** for his disobedient people (Romans 9:2). But in his grief Paul exposed a troubling fact the Jews had not thought of, **"...they are not all Israel who are of Israel..."** (Romans 9:6) God had selected Israel to be His representative to the world and the proclaimer of the promised Messiah. But their disobedience meant they were not fulfilling the will of God. So Paul basically told them, *"You are not part of Israel just because you call yourselves a Jew."* Similarly, we could survey many segments of the modern "church" today who have replaced the sacrifice of Jesus with doctrines of prosperity, works and sacraments, and say to them, *"You are not a true believer just because you call yourselves a Christian."* This is tough love, but Paul had to get their attention – just like we need to do.

In chapter 10 Paul continued his assessment of Israel by highlighting the fact they had rejected the gospel. Their focus on adherence to the Law, their historical relationship with Abraham and their need for external signs had become their view of righteousness. But sadly, it was ineffective because it sought to replace the plan of salvation God offered through His gift of grace. So here Paul cuts to the chase and provides what we have come to call "The simple plan of salvation": **"...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."** (Romans 10:9). Very simply, salvation does not require religion or works. It requires heart-felt faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The homeless carpenter from Nazareth, who is God, and who is the only source of redemption. Paul follows this with a statement that is arguably one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible, **"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."** (Romans 10:13). Here he reminds us whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, Jesus came so that all could find eternal life in Him.

Thank You Jesus.

Introduction to Chapter 11

Paul now expands on the story of Israel from both an historical and end-times view. Those who have studied the Book of Revelation will recognize what Paul means when he says, **"...all Israel will be saved..."** (Romans 11:26). Of course this doesn't mean all Jews will be saved just because they are Jews. Instead, Paul is pointing back to Old Testament scripture that prophesied a future event when the remnant of Israel, **"...will look on me [Jesus] whom they pierced [crucified]. Yes, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son..."** (Zechariah 12:10b). But this event will not occur, **"...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in..."** (Romans 11:25b / Revelation 11:2 & 14:15). In other words, until the last Gentile who will accept Christ has done so. Then God will bring a time of Tribulation upon the earth focused on the regathering of Israel's remnant as His people. Leading up to this, Paul discusses Israel as a remnant and reminds them that through time God has always reserved a portion of His people who were obedient. But Israel's heart was hardened by unbelief and for the most part they still refuse to accept Jesus today. As a result, the gospel came to the Gentiles, who, along with believing Jews, who accept Christ, will become His bride - the church - so that we will all become part of God's kingdom. Paul makes this intent very clear, **"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh [Jews] and save some of them."** (11:13-14). In other words, Paul hoped that leading Gentiles to Jesus would make his Jewish brothers and sisters envious of what the Gentiles had and would want it for themselves. Paul completes this chapter with a doxology that combines portions of Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah as a beautiful praise of the majesty and power of God.

Now, with that context let's begin chapter 11.

Romans 11:1-10

Verses 11:1-2

These verses clearly discount any notion of a "Replacement Theology" - the contemporary theory that God has replaced Israel with the church. Paul is very clear that God has not **"...cast away His people."** Instead, He uses himself as an example of a Jew who was brought to faith in Jesus. He was not **"...cast away..."** but was rescued by God. Further, Paul reminds them that God **"...foreknew..."** Israel, and had selected them as His chosen messengers even though He knew they would initially fail. So God made a promise to them (Jeremiah 33:19-25) declaring that His covenant with Israel is as permanent as the day or night, or the heavens and earth. In other words, a promise that will not be broken. Granted, Israel is currently disobedient, but a day is coming when they will eventually carry-out their task and share the gospel with the world. This will happen when the Lord selects one hundred and forty-four thousand

Jews (144,000) **"...of all the tribes of the children of Israel..."** (Revelation 7:4), who will carry God's message to the world. This will be a missionary team like the world has never seen before who will be protected by God as they carry out their ministry. God will also send Two Witnesses who will **"...prophecy one thousand two hundred and sixty days..."** (Revelation 11:3), which is one-half of the seven year Tribulation period. They will be a witness to Jerusalem but seen by the whole world, **"...the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations..."** / **"...those who dwell on the earth..."** (Revelation 11:9b & 10a). This will be the time anticipated by Paul when Israel will finally fulfill their intended role. And for that to happen God will not cast His people away. Instead, as the Lord promised:

- **"For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people."** (1 Samuel 12:22)
- **"And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel."** (1 Kings 6:13)
- **"If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David— that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky."** (Psalm 89:30-37)
- **"But He [Jesus] answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" (Matthew 15:24)**

Please join me in praying for the people and nation of Israel. For the day when they will eventually find their way.

Verses 11:3-4

As he often does, Paul turns to Old Testament scripture to make his point. Here he uses the example of Elijah to explain the fact God always has a remnant of the faithful ready to do His will.

Let's look at this in context, through the story found in 1 Kings chapter 19:

- **"9. And there he [Elijah] went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' 10. So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.' 11. Then He said, 'Go out, and**

stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12. and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. 13. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14. And he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” 15. Then the Lord said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. 16. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. 18. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Here we see Elijah, a prophet of God, running in fear from the evil queen Jezebel. This is a wonderful passage that teaches us so much about God's presence in our lives. At those times when He is the ***“...still small voice...”*** that so often speaks to our hearts when we are enduring a great trial. But the point Paul makes with this story is the fact Elijah thought he was the only remaining faithful person in Israel, ***“...3. “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life...”***. But Elijah was wrong. Even though Israel had fallen into sin and had largely rejected God, there was still a remnant left who would be faithful. So God responded to Elijah's fear, ***“...“I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”*** This was God's remnant, which is the point Paul was trying to make when he said, ***“...2a. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...”***. No. God has not cast all Israel aside. Yes, they are disobedient, but the Lord will always have the remnant few who will carry His message. There are remnants of believing Jews in modern Israel today, but we also know from scripture many Jews in Paul's day had accepted Jesus as the Messiah:

- ***“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”*** (Acts 2:41)
- ***However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”*** (Acts 4:4)

Paul used the story of Elijah to show God will always have a remnant of faithful believers, but I also believe there is a contemporary application for us as well.

So let's explore that thought:

Clearly, we live in a society that is falling away from God, and from a Biblical perspective the situation is not going to get much better. We know that from our study of Revelation chapter 18 which describes the character of mankind during the Tribulation. A time when society as a whole will thrive on sin, be totally self-centered and worship their own prosperity (Revelation 18:9-19). But mankind won't get in this condition overnight. They will slowly gravitate towards that point as values and morals give way to their own gratification. That's happening today, probably more than ever before, and is the reason we're seeing a dramatic shift towards prosperity and works-based gospels. People are leaning towards false doctrines that discount Jesus and instead seek to worship themselves, their own efforts and their own prosperity. The result is, Jesus becomes less important to the world at large and "christianity" becomes more focused on success in life than it does on Christ.

But in a sense this is exciting (for lack of a better word). To understand what I mean, let's think about it this way:

- If we believe Revelation 18 describes the character of mankind during the Tribulation,
- And if we believe society will be as it was in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37 / Luke 17:26),
- And if we believe the Rapture is imminent (which means the Tribulation is not far behind),
- Then the fall of man and the decline of the church is in fact part of God's plan coming to fulfillment.

Given that context, those of us who are faithful to Jesus and His word are a minority – God's remnant. Just as it was for the seven thousand faithful in Elijah's day, we – true Christ followers – are the remnant left to share the gospel with a falling world. I think that helps put our task in perspective. That's why I say this is "exciting". Because I am so thankful and blessed that as the world turns away from Jesus we, His faithful remnant, draw even closer to Him as we look to His soon return.

Thank You Jesus!

This is basically the same point Paul was trying to make when he said, ***5. Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace...***. In other words, in this fallen world — either Paul's Roman Empire or today's progressive empire — God will always have His faithful remnant. We are faithful through our salvation, ***"...by election of grace..."*** because of our faith in Christ Jesus. We are

"elected" as God's people because we have accepted His offer of **"...grace..."** that is applied to all who believe in Christ. And as such, **"...there is a remnant..."**, and it is us.

Thank You Jesus.

Verse 11:6

We're the remnant because we remain faithful to the Lord as the world falls away. So here Paul reemphasizes the most common theme in Romans. The fact salvation comes by faith and not works. God's **"...grace..."** is **"...grace.."** because it does not depend on our **"...works..."**. In other words, if we could work (earn) our salvation then God's grace (a gift) wouldn't be grace at all. It is a gift of grace because it cannot be earned by works. That's because anything resulting from works is a wage, not a gift. So if salvation could be earned then **"...grace is no longer grace.."**, and it would no longer be a gift. This is the same sentiment Paul shared with the church at Galatia by stressing the bottomline, **"... I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness [salvation] comes through the law, [works] then Christ died in vain."** (Galatians 2:21)

Verses 11:7-10

Clearly God has selected Israel as a special people with a special purpose, **"...the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."** (Deuteronomy 7:6). He has provided for them, cared for them and has been patient with them. Over the centuries and even to this day some Jews believe, but the majority are blinded to the truth. To the point when the promised Messiah finally came they misinterpreted the event and crucified Him. Even now, over 2,000 years later and after untold volumes of Biblical commentary they remain blinded. As Paul will remind them later in his letter, **"...blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."** (Romans 11:25). This blindness is a result of their rejection of God's promises and covenants. The blindness that hardened their hearts because they sought opulent self-righteousness instead of the Carpenter's humility, **"...for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory..."** (1 Corinthians 2:8). But they did crucify Him because they were blinded and did not recognize Him. The sight they needed was not physical or wrapped-up in their rules and religion. The sight they needed was faith. Because their, **"...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him..."** (Isaiah 64:4 / quoted in 1 Corinthians 2:9).

To explain this Paul points back to three Old Testament passages:

- **8. "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."**

- From Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4:
 - God sent them His commandments, but they didn't follow them.
 - So He sent them His prophets, but they didn't listen.
 - So He sent them the Messiah and they killed Him.
- They were blinded by their own self-righteousness because true faith requires a humility they didn't have.

9. And David says: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.

- Quoted from Psalm 69:22 - Israel's provision from God - His law, His word, His guidance - was like a table prepared for a wonderful meal. But their rejection of His grace, replaced by their own self-righteousness made their table **“...a snare and a trap...”**. God's word was distorted, His commands ignored and His prophets killed. The Hebrew word used here for **“...snare...”** is like a bird caught in a trap who came to eat. Likewise, the provisions God gave Israel became a trap they set for themselves.
- **10. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always.”**
 - Quoted from Psalm 69:23 - As a result of their disobedience Israel's vision is impaired. Like someone with a blindfold. They have eyes but cannot see because they are burdened under the weight of spiritual oppression when they should be under the yoke that Christ would carry with them (Matthew 11:29)

This is a tragic commentary about fallen Israel, but is society in general any different today? Millions of people, dozens of denominations and thousands of priests and preachers have God's holy Word, yet they teach salvation by works, prosperity and sacraments. And when they do that they sinfully ignore the clear Biblical teaching of God's gift of grace and eternal life through faith in Jesus. But we shouldn't be surprised. Paul warns us there will be a great falling-away prior to the return of Christ, **“...Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first...”** (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

But we should not be anxious or in despair. Instead, be the remnant. Embrace the role we play as God's faithful few and share the gospel of Jesus with a falling world.

Lesson # 36, The Book of Romans - Chapter 11 verses 11-15

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 11 Paul emphasized the fact that Israel - even in her fallen state - remains the chosen people of God. To make his point he asked, **"...has God cast away His people...?"** To which he replied, **Certainly not!"** (Romans 11:1). This statement should dispel the contemporary notion that God has replaced Israel with the church. Without a doubt the church plays an important role in God's timeline by sharing His gospel message with the world. But that doesn't discount the fact Israel will eventually return to God and recognize Jesus as the Messiah. A time when they **"...will look on me [Jesus] whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son..."** (Zechariah 12:10b). Until then, the body of believers, the church (both believing Jews and Gentiles), will carry the message for God until the future awakening of Israel.

Now Paul will expand his discussion about disobedient Israel with surprising results for the Gentiles...

Romans 11:11-15

Paul continues to flesh-out his argument that Israel - although disobedient - has not lost the favor of God. In verse 1 he asked, **"...has God cast away His people? Certainly not!"** (Romans 11:1). Now he further refines his question by asking, **"...have they stumbled that they should fall?"** Again he emphatically responds, **Certainly not!"** (Romans 11:11). Granted, Israel was then, and is now, in a disobedient state, but God's covenants with them do not rely on their actions. God's promises were made by God and therefore will never fail nor be rescinded. In that context Israel has failed, **"...stumbled..."**, but their failure will not affect the eventual outcome of God's plan and His plan for them will not **"...fall..."**. And yet, Israel's disobedience had an intended consequence that was always part of God's plan – that the gospel would be spread by the Gentiles. The failure of Israel as God's messengers did not mean God's plan would fail as well. Instead, God would enable His non-Jewish creation (Gentiles) to hear the gospel and temporarily become His messengers. That means for a season, Israel has forfeit their intended role to be the light that brought the redemptive message of God to the world. A task made clear by Isaiah, **"...‘I, the Lord, have called You [Israel] in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house."** (Isaiah 42:6-7) This clarifies Israel's intended role was to bring God's truth to the the Gentile nations, **"...As a light to the Gentiles..."** and to fulfill the promise made to Abraham, **"...I will make you a great nation; [Israel] I will bless you And make your**

name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth [Gentiles] shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3). Abraham's descendents were to be a blessing to *"...all the families of the earth..."* by being a light to *"...Those who sit in darkness..."*; those who did not have God's Covenant Word. As God had declared through Isaiah, *"...Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'*" (Isaiah 49:6). In other words, just establishing twelve tribes and forming the nation of Israel was not enough. God also gave Israel the task of being *"...a light to the Gentiles, That you [Israel] should be My salvation [the gospel] to the ends of the earth [the Gentiles]..."*. This is the same passage Paul quoted to the Jews at Antioch, *"...As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."* (Acts 13:42-48).

But Israel was arrogant and self-righteous and failed in the task God gave them. Instead of spreading God's word they kept it to themselves and added to it and distorted it until it became a stumbling block to them. Even so, there were a few in Israel who understood God's intended plan. Those like Simeon who made the connection to Messianic prophecies when he saw the baby Jesus, *"...So he [Simeon] came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."* (Luke 2:28-32). Here Simeon seems to reflect on Isaiah 52:10, *"...The Lord has made bare His holy arm, in the eyes of all nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God."* This means it was always God's plan for, *"...all nations..."*, not just Israel, to understand God's redemptive message so that salvation would come to *"...all the ends of the earth..."*. Simeon

understood that and through his faith God allowed him to see the baby Jesus as the **"...light to bring revelation to the Gentiles..."**. Had Israel complied with God's command and carried the **"...light of the world to the world..."** (John 8:2), their witness would have been, **"...the glory of your people Israel..."**. But they failed and missed the opportunity to see their promised King for who He is. As a result, it is now the Gentile's role, for a time, to carry the gospel to the world...including Israel.

But isn't it amazing that only a small handful of people throughout ancient Israel recognized the coming Messiah. They knew hundreds of Messianic prophecies. They even knew the town He would come from (Micah 5:2). And yet, only a few understood God's promise, **"...For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."** (Isaiah 9:6-7).

And that is the core understanding Paul was trying to present to his Roman readers. That the prophesied Carpenter from Nazareth was in fact the promised Savior of the world, and that salvation comes only through Him. He wanted them to understand what the Psalmist understood generations earlier, **"...That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations..."** (Psalm 67:2). Paul was persistent because he understood both he and Israel had been given a unique assignment. To share God's **"...salvation among all nations..."**. As a Jew, a Pharisee, and now a convert to Christianity Paul was chosen by God as , **"...a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles..."** (Acts 9:15). Given that assignment and the clear prophetic scripture pointing to Jesus, it must have grieved Paul's heart when several years later he was imprisoned in Rome and his Jewish listeners still doubted this truth, **"...So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."** **"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves."** (Acts 28:25-29)

But the fact Israel would grow apart from God and the fact His message would translate to the Gentiles should not have been debatable. As Paul had already pointed out in Romans 10:19, even the *Song of Moses* predicted the future stumbling of Israel

and God's witness to the Gentiles, **"...‘And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them, Because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. And He said: ‘I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be, For they are a perverse generation, Children in whom is no faith. They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation.’"** (Deuteronomy 32:19-21) So Paul makes the same point here when he says, **"...13. For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14. if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them."** Paul's desire, as Moses had pointed out generations before, was that Israel would see the faith of the Gentiles and want what they had. The Gentiles served the God of Abraham, followed the Hebrew text and placed their faith in a Jewish Carpenter. This should have made the Jews jealous for what the Gentiles (we) have. But it was not to be, either in his lifetime or ours. But Paul knew, as we do today, that salvation of the Gentiles will be the, **"...reconciling of the world..."** and that one day the remnant of Israel will turn to Jesus as their Redeemer and **"...they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son..."**, (Zechariah 12:10b). That is the time when **"...their acceptance be but life from the dead..."**, and a people, who are spiritually dead will flourish again in the Lord's kingdom. As Isaiah foretold, **"...But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you; Therefore I will give men for you, And people for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, And gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth—Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.” Bring out the blind people who have eyes, And the deaf who have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, And let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, And show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified; Or let them hear and say, “It is truth.” “You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, And besides Me there is no savior.”** (Isaiah 43:1-11).

This is the time Paul will speak of in verse 26 when he says, "**...And so all Israel will be saved...**". The time when the final Tribulation remnant of Israel will eventually turn to the Lord and fall at His feet as their Savior.

And until that day may we not fail at our task to show Jesus to the world.

Lesson # 37, The Book of Romans - Chapter 11 verses 16 -24

Quick Recap:

In the second part of chapter 11 (verses 11-15) Paul made a profound observation, **"...But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles..."**. (verse 11) As the Psalmist knew, Israel's task was to be God's messenger to the whole world, **"...That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations..."** (Psalm 67:2). This assignment should not have been a surprise to Israel because Isaiah had proclaimed this about them, **"...I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."** (Isaiah 49:6). The nation of Israel had been selected as God's messengers to carry His redemptive message to the world. But they had failed, and instead kept His word to themselves and distorted it to the point they stumbled over their own religious self-righteousness. But God did not change His plans just because Israel had become disobedient. So the gospel went to the Gentiles, and many believed, who for a season will carry the message of redemption to the world. Paul hoped this temporary shift would make the Jews jealous enough to realize what the Gentiles have and want it for themselves, **"...For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them."** (verses 13-14) But for the most part Israel remains disobedient to this day which means sharing the gospel is now our task until Israel returns to the Lord.

Paul wrote this passage within the context of:

- Israel was selected to carry God's redemptive message, but they failed in their own self-righteousness,
- So, as prophesied, the gospel went to the Gentiles. And as they came to faith in Jesus they took God's message to the world.
- But...in time, the remnant of Israel will return to Jesus as He destroys the last remnant of unbelieving mankind during the future Tribulation.

Now Paul will go deeper in his explanation to help his readers understand the Gentile's role as temporary messengers but also to give them a warning.

Romans 11:16-24

Verse 11:16

The **"...firstfruit..."** and **"...root..."** which **"...is holy..."** may be speaking about the Biblical heritage of Israel often represented by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The historical patriarchs of the faith. In pointing back to them Paul describes Israel as a **"...lump..."**. Probably pointing back to Numbers 15:17-21 where God commanded Israel to make a bread offering of their first harvest to show that everything Israel has belongs to God, **"...Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.'"**

Abraham, who along with Isaac and Jacob (through which the twelve tribes of Israel came) are in essence the roots of our Judeo-Christian faith. Righteousness - salvation - was credited to Abraham because of his faith in the promises of God. Promises that were in-turn passed down through Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob and then to Israel as a nation (Genesis 12:3 / 15:6 / Romans 4:1-4). Paul illustrates this point by saying, **"...the firstfruit [Abraham - the "...root..." is holy..."** (righteous through his faith). Therefore, the **"...lump..."** [Israel] and its **"...branches..."** are holy because they are descended from Abraham. Israel is the chosen nation, but...and this is a key point the self-righteous Jews misunderstood...their inheritance to Abraham as a nation does not make them righteous and justified (saved) as individuals because personal salvation still requires personal faith in the Messiah and not in their heritage or religion (Romans 4:3).

Verse 11:17

Here Paul begins a lengthy discussion using the illustration of grafting branches into a tree. This is a method of horticulture many of his readers would have been familiar with which would help them grasp the complex topic. A lot has been written about this passage and there are a number of interpretations as to what it means. So to help us more clearly understand the intent of Paul's message let's establish a few key points.

- The **"...olive tree...."** is symbolic of Israel:
 - **"...The Lord called your name, Green Olive Tree, lovely and of Good Fruit..."** (Jeremiah 11:16)

- **"...His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree..."**
(Hosea 14:6 - probably speaking of the future Millennial Kingdom of Jesus)
- The **"...root..."** probably speaks of the patriarchs of the faith, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and through them the twelve tribes of Israel, the royal line of David and the birth of the Jewish Messiah. As Jesus reminds us in Revelation 22:16, **"...I am the Root and the offspring of David..."** Of course, Jesus is the ultimate source of our faith but He works through people, which includes Abraham, and through him to Israel, and through them to the Jewish Messiah, **"...the offspring of David..."**.
- The **"...branches were broken off..."** means unbelieving Israel. For a time they have rejected their place as God's messengers and are not fulfilling their intended role. Jeremiah described disobedient Israel in a similar way when he said, **"...“Go up on her walls and destroy, but do not make a complete end. Take away her branches, for they are not the Lord’s. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously with Me,” says the Lord."** (Jeremiah 5:10-11) However, we must remember that Israel is still the tree with its roots because they will eventually return to God and accept Jesus as the Messiah (Zechariah 12:10).
- The **"...wild olive tree, were grafted in among them..."** are the Gentile nations, grafted into the Judeo-Christian faith, who received the gospel message when Israel became disobedient.

Here Paul uses the example of grafting branches to illustrate the inclusion of Gentiles into the faith so we can spread the gospel after Israel's failure as God's chosen messenger. The grafting speaks of Israel, **"...the olive tree..."** with its disobedience and, **"...broken off..."** branches, and the Gentile nations whose branches are now **"...grafted in among them..."**. This simply means as Gentiles we are not Jews but we worship the same God as Abraham, who is the root of the tree, and are saved by the Jewish Messiah who is the ultimate Root to which we are joined.

Generally in horticulture, a cultivated branch is grafted into a wild tree, but here, the wild branch (Gentiles) are grafted into the cultivated tree (Israel). The result does not represent - as some would contend - that the church has replaced Israel (Replacement Theology). Instead, Israel is still God's chosen people who in a future time will return to Him when they acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (Zechariah 12). In the meantime, they are still the tree with its roots, but the grafted branches can now bear good fruit as an adopted part of the tree until Israel retakes her assigned position in God's plan. As we've discussed before there will be a time during the Tribulation when God will send

His messengers throughout the fallen world. Messengers who will all be Jewish.
(Revelation 7:4-8 & 14:1-5)

But sadly, in the end, it is the non-believing Gentile branches that will fall away when Israel retakes its role as God's messengers and mankind is destroyed in the Tribulation (1 Timothy 4 / 2 Timothy 3 / 2 Thessalonians 2 / Revelation 12 & 18).

Verse 11:18-24

But God gives us - the Gentile branches - a warning, **".....do not boast against the branches..."**. This points back to God's promise to Abraham, **"...I will make you a great nation [Israel] ; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. 3. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth [Gentiles] shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:2-3). This is one of the reasons I do not believe the "Replacement Theology" is Biblical. God says very clearly He will bless the nations (non-Israel) through Abraham who is the firstfruit (verse 17) and the root. It's also very clear from Paul's teaching, plus Daniel 9:24, Jeremiah 30:7, Zechariah 12:10, Revelation 12, and many other passages that Israel is paramount in God's national plan for the future (see Romans 9:1-5). So, God warns the Gentiles not to boast about our position with Him because, **"...you do not support the root, but the root supports you..."**. Our faith is not based on a world view or a Gentile heritage. Our faith is rooted in the promises made to Abraham, the covenants made to the patriarchs, God's word inspired through Hebrew writers and the Jewish-born Messiah who brought the Son of God to earth as the Son of Man to take our sin to the cross. Therefore, our position as God's children is as an adopted child and an heir with Jesus, **"...For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [to salvation] these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs...heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."** (Romans 8:14-17) In other words, we are not related to Israel through a nationalistic blood heritage but are adopted into God's family (grafted) through the blood of Jesus Christ. We are grafted-in and supported by the roots of our faith that is rooted in God's message to Israel. As such, we have not replaced Israel but have been wonderfully and gloriously grafted into the tree through our faith in Jesus, God's holy sacrifice for the redemption of all sin (John 3:17). This is why Paul says, **"...But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."** (Galatians 6:14). Our boast should not be in ourselves but we should boast in Christ and the cross as the source of our righteousness. Therefore we should **"...not be haughty, but fear. 21. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either."** God does not love His Gentile believers any more than He loves Israel, and He has certainly not changed His grand plan by replacing Israel with the church. Israel will return to God at a time in the future when

they finally recognize the Carpenter from Nazareth as the Messiah. At that time they ***"...will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."..."...into their own olive tree?"***

Also keep in mind, the Millennial Kingdom will be a time of Christ's reign on earth, from Jerusalem, in Israel.

A time when:

- ***"...This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"*** (Zechariah 8:23)
- ***"...1. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. 2. Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."*** (Micah 4:1-2)

No, the church has not replaced Israel, but for a time we have been grafted-in and adopted as God's children so His message goes to all the world.

Lesson # 38, The Book of Romans - Chapter 11 verses 25-36

Quick Recap:

In the previous segment of chapter 11 (verses 16-24) Paul spoke of Israel's failure to accept their role as God's messengers. A failure which prompted the revelation of God's redemptive plan to the Gentiles. **"...16. For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree..."**. Paul describes the inclusion of Gentiles by referring to Israel the same way Jeremiah did - as an olive tree - **"...The Lord called your name, Green Olive Tree, lovely and of Good Fruit..."** (Jeremiah 11:16), and refers to their **"...firstfruit..."** which probably means the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now Paul interjects a new term, **"...a wild olive tree..."**, to represent the Gentiles who were offered the gospel when chosen Israel fell away from its assigned task as God's messengers. But this should not have been a surprise. Generations before, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, **"...I, the Lord, have called You [Israel] in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house."** (Isaiah 42:6-7). Israel's intended role was to bring God's truth to the Gentile nations by being, **"...a light to the Gentiles..."** and to fulfill the promise made to Abraham, **"...I will make you a great nation; [Israel] I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 12:2-3). Abraham's descendents, through nationalist Israel, were to be a blessing to **"...all the families of the earth..."** (Gentiles) by being a light to **"...Those who sit in darkness..."**. In other words, those who did not have God's Covenants and Word. As God had declared through Isaiah, **"...I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."** (Isaiah 49:6 - underline added). This is a prophecy Israel should have recognized when centuries later Jesus would say, **"...But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** (Acts 1:8 - underline added). This command, to take God's redemptive message **"...to the ends of the earth..."**, was the assignment Israel was given but failed to achieve.

Israel failed to carry God's message, but God always knew this would happen so His plan did not change. Despite Israel's disobedience God still sent the gospel to the nations through the Gentiles. The process of presenting the gospel to the Gentiles is what Paul describes as **"...a wild olive tree** [Gentiles], being **"...grafted in among**

them [Israel]...". To help his readers understand he used a well known horticultural process of grafting branches into a tree to produce fruit. By being **"...grafted in..."** the Gentile believers **"...became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree..."**. Meaning, we as non-Jewish believers still benefit from many of the gifts God originally gave to Israel:

- His inspired word,
- The core Judeo-Christian doctrines,
- Redemption through faith in the Jewish Son of Man Jesus
 - Who is in reality the promised Messiah and the divine Son of God.

This grafting-in is similar to Paul's prior description of our faith as an adopted child, **"...For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, [to salvation] these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs...heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."** (Romans 8:14-17) As believers in Christ we are brought into the family of God. As a **"....grafted in..."** branch and as a **"...joint heir..."** with Jesus.

What a beautiful place to be!

But then Paul gives us a warning not to boast of our position, **"...Do not be haughty, but fear. 21. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either..."** (Romans 11:20b-21). We are not to consider ourselves superior to Israel, nor as their replacements. Because a time will come when the final remnant of Israel will realize the error they have made and recognize Jesus for who He is (Zechariah 12). At that time God will, **"...graft them in again..."** as His beloved chosen people. (Romans 11:23 / Revelation 12:6 / Zechariah 14:3-11).

Now, let's conclude our study of chapter 11.

Romans 11:25-36

Verses 11:25-27

In Greek, the word **"...mystery..."**, **"mysterion"** doesn't mean an unknowable riddle like in a mystery novel, but as used in the Bible it means a truth that can be known through scripture as God reveals it. One of the key truths Paul reveals in Romans is the spiritual blindness of Israel. As we've discussed, Israel was elected by God to carry His redemptive message to the world (Genesis 12:2-3 / Isaiah 49:6). Instead, they hoarded the knowledge of God's plan and overcomplicated it with Rabbinical laws that led them to focus on trying to earn righteousness through religion and works. Over time this blinded them to the truth of God's gift of unearnable grace (Romans 11:7). I think the

importance of this error merits going back to our discussion of Romans 11:7 in Lesson #35. Here is a short excerpt:

*"...This blindness is a result of their rejection of God's promises and covenants. The blindness that hardened their hearts because they sought opulent self-righteousness instead of the Carpenter's humility, **"...for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory..."** (1 Corinthians 2:8). But they did crucify Him because they were blinded and did not recognize Him. The sight they needed was not physical or wrapped-up in their rules and religion. The sight they needed was faith. Because their, **"...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him..."** (Isaiah 64:4 / quoted in 1 Corinthians 2:9).*

To explain this Paul points back to three Old Testament passages:

- **8. "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."**
 - *From Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4:*
 - *God sent them His commandments, but they didn't follow them.*
 - *So He sent them His prophets, but they didn't listen.*
 - *So He sent them the Messiah and they killed Him.*
 - *They were blinded by their own self-righteousness because true faith requires a humility they didn't have.*

Paul wanted the Gentiles to understand this failure so they did not become **"...wise in your own opinion..."**, (Proverbs 3:7) like the Jews had been. A condition referred to by Jesus, **"...*I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes...*"** (Matthew 11:25). The hypocritical Pharisees saw themselves as wise and did not understand we must come to Jesus with the unearned faith of a child. A lesson in humility Jesus even had to teach to His own disciples (see Matthew 18:1-5).

So Paul wanted the Gentiles to understand their role of carrying God's message for a period of time. But how long will that time be? Paul tells us, **"...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in..."**. This phrase describes the period of time we know as the "Church Age". Roughly the time between the gospel coming to the Gentiles after the crucifixion of Christ until the Rapture of the church to join Jesus in glory (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 / John 14:2-6). At the point of the Rapture the Church Age will come to an end, signifying the **"...fullness..."**, or "completeness" of the church on earth. After that the bride will be taken home and the seven year Tribulation will start (Daniel 9:20-27 / John 14:2-6 / the entire book of Revelation). More Gentiles will certainly be saved during the Tribulation but its main focus will be to bring the final remnant of Israel to the point of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. The time when they

will **"...look on Me who they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son..."** (Zechariah 12:10). Paul describes this event with a statement that is often misinterpreted:

"...26. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:" "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27. For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

As we have discussed before, this verse does not mean all Jews will be saved just because they are Jews. Paul is simply pointing his readers back to Old Testament scripture that prophesied a future event when the remnant of Israel will recognize the Carpenter from Nazareth as the Messiah and the Son of God. (Zechariah 12:10b). This should have also reminded them of several other prophetic proclamations about Israel's future.

Verses like:

- Psalm 14:7 **"...Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad."**
- Isaiah 59:20 **"...The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob " says the Lord."**
- Zechariah 13:8-9 **"...And it shall come to pass in all the land," Says the Lord, "That two-thirds in it [Israel / Zion] shall be cut off and die, But one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.' "**

This is a praise and celebration of what will occur to the future remnant of Israel. But that event will not occur, **"...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in..."** and the formation of God's church will be complete (Romans 11:25b / Revelation 11:2 & 14:15),. Then Jesus will Rapture His bride and shift His focus to regathering Israel's remnant as His people. This is what Paul was speaking to earlier in his letter when he said, **"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh [Jews] and save some of them."** (Romans 11:13-14). Paul's primary focus was leading Gentiles to Jesus, but in doing so he also wanted his Jewish brothers and sisters to understand the way to righteousness is through faith in Christ.

Verses 11:28-32

Here Paul clarifies Israel's current state (then and now). They have rejected God's grace applied through the Messianic sacrifice, and therefore have rejected the gospel. This puts the Jews being diametrically opposed to those who believe in salvation through faith in Jesus. That said, Israel remains God's chosen ("elected") nation even though they are currently disobedient. And as such **"...they are beloved for the sake of the fathers..."**. This speaks to the promises and covenants God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that **"...are irrevocable..."** and will not change, **"...and God remembered His covenants with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them."** (Exodus 2:24). This acknowledgment is permanent even though Israel is temporarily blinded and disobedient. We see this in Moses' beautiful prophecy of Israel's falling away and God's eternal love, **"...then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; they will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgments and because their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord."** (Leviticus 26:42-45)

This is the unfailing love Paul is talking about for Israel. The people who are **"...beloved for the sake of the fathers..."**, and who were given **"...gifts..."** - His word and covenants - **"...and the calling of God..."** to be His messengers. These promises and statutes **"...are irrevocable..."**, because they are permanent.

Paul then reminds us, his Gentile readers, we were once unsaved and **"....disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Israel's] disobedience..."**. In other words, Israel's disobedience to their God-given task did not prevent the gospel from coming to the Gentiles. So Paul clarifies Israel's eventual position, **"...even so these [Israel] also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you [Gentiles] they also may obtain mercy."** All of this continues to discredit the current notion that the church has replaced Israel. It should be clear to us by now that is simply not the case. Israel's role has not changed but in time their disobedience will become obedience when the day comes that **"...They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The Lord is my God.'" (Zechariah 13:9b).**

May we all continue to pray for Israel. The tree into which we are grafted.

Verses 11:33-36

Paul ends with a beautiful doxology of praise by quoting from Isaiah 40:13 (verse 34) and Job 41:11 (verse 35). In doing so he answers a potential question, *"How can this be? How can God's plan anticipate all of these scenarios and still bring about His intended will? Very simply, because God is God. As the Psalmist declares, **"...Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth."*** (Psalm 46:10). God creates all, He controls all, and He already understands exactly what is going to happen in the future and how it will turn out. How else could He give us the Book of Revelation with hundreds of prophetic details linked back through scripture? This is the preeminent omniscience Isaiah declared in Isaiah 46:9-10, ***"...Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure...'".*** This is what Paul means when he proclaims ***"...the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God..."***. He is God ***"...and there is none like Me..."***. That's why He can tell us both ***"...the end [the future] from the beginning,*** [the past). The events ***"...from ancient times..."*** all the way to those ***"...things that are not yet done..."***.

This is a testimony to the enormity of God we must all understand. It is the reason nothing in our lives ever takes God by surprise. He knows ***"...things that are not yet done..."***. Even the most mundane events in our life, because ***"...He knows the secrets of the heart..."*** and ***"...His understanding is infinite..."*** (Psalm 44:21b / 147:5b) . That's also why the Psalmist can say ***"...And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them."*** (Psalm 139:16.) I love that verse because it tells us that God has designed (***"...fashioned..."***) each of our days before we ever lived the first one. That means our days are intentional, not haphazard, so we need to be alert and obedient to His call so we can use each of our days to glorify Him. That way, our life lived, ***"...For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever."***

Thank You Jesus.

Lesson # 39, The Book of Romans - Chapter 12 verses 1-3

Quick Recap:

Now we come to a turning point in the Book of Romans. Through the first eleven chapters Paul provides a comprehensive defense of the gospel. He does this by speaking primarily to two groups of people - Jews and Gentiles. People who thought they could earn righteousness and eternal life by practicing religion or by their own works. But this is counter to the message of the gospel which only offers salvation one way; through God's unearned gift of grace applied by Jesus on the cross.

To explain this Paul slowly takes his readers through a chronology of thought to reach a specific conclusion:

- There is one true God,
- Who is all holy,
- And since God is holy He cannot tolerate disobedience,
- So God established expectations for man to live by,
 - He did this through either the written Mosaic "Law",
 - Or through the law of consciousness,
- Violating God's expectations is called sin,
- And mankind cannot enter God's perfect eternity with sin,
- Therefore, their sins must be forgiven in order to be saved from destruction,
 - But that forgiveness comes with a very high cost,
 - Through the shedding of innocent blood,
- But mankind, no matter how hard they try, cannot achieve God's expectations (the Law) through their own efforts,
 - So God initiated a sacrificial system that must be observed in order to redeem sin,
- That's because the Law on its own has no power to forgive sin,
- Instead, the Law was given to help us recognize our sin,
 - And by recognizing our sin we recognize our need for redemption,
 - And by recognizing our need for redemption,
 - We recognize our need for a Redeemer,
- Eventually God fulfilled the sacrificial redemption through a promised Redeemer,
 - Who is the Holy Lamb of God,
 - And the ultimate sacrifice,
 - Who took our sin,
 - On Himself,
 - And redeemed our sin through His death and resurrection,
- This is the Messiah,
 - The Carpenter from Nazareth,

- Jesus Christ,
- Paul's message is clear,
 - We cannot earn redemption on our own,
- It must come through faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

So why did it take eleven complicated chapters for Paul to explain something that to us makes so much sense? Because, to the average person, either in the first-century or today, it doesn't make sense at all. Jews then and now believe righteousness comes through their own religious efforts. They thought they could rely on their rituals and works to achieve the Law, but in doing so they have become blinded to the fact the Law was only intended to point to their sin and their rituals point to their Redeemer. In addition, they further complicated the process of grace by adding their own Rabbinical rules in an effort to earn even more merit. That's why they could not understand how a poor, homeless Carpenter from Nazareth could be the promised Messiah – who is God – and who they assumed would be a mighty warrior king. That's why the humble man Jesus infuriated them to the point they crucified Him when they should have understood prophecy and bowed down before Him.

Likewise, the Gentiles, who for the most part came from idolistic cultures sought righteousness through their own good works, in an effort to do something that would earn the favor of their pagan gods. But in both cases, Jews and Gentiles alike missed the whole point. The point is salvation cannot be earned. It is a free gift from the One true God through grace that is only applied one way. The way that God established. Through faith in the Messiah Jesus. That is the core message of Paul's letter to Rome. A letter that provides a roadmap to salvation. A letter often called the "Roman Road".

But Paul's ancient readers are no different than our society today. The vast majority of people we meet probably believe there is some type of afterlife - a heaven - but they generally believe getting there can be earned by what they do or how they live. Either through religion or good works. That's why millions of people follow sacrament-based belief systems and why the self-focused "Prosperity gospel" movement is so popular. Our society is conditioned to work in order to earn a wage; a reward. So logically, they believe you can work to earn a heavenly reward. That's because our society has been conditioned – probably now more than ever before – to focus on themselves and their own prosperity, which they see as a measure of their righteous worth. But all of that is counter to God's plan for salvation which doesn't require us to work at all, but instead requires us to have faith and believe.

Society's focus on religion or works emphasizes the efforts of man on earth but discounts the efforts of Jesus on the cross. That's why the Book of Romans is timeless and why every believer must be equipped with the truth of the gospel so we can lead people to the truth of Jesus. As Paul would exclaim, **"... 22. For Jews request a sign,**

and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23. but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24. but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24 - underline added)

That's why we're studying Romans verse by verse. To ensure we are fully equipped to **"...preach Christ crucified..."** every day.

Introduction to Chapter 12:

Now in chapter 12 Paul shifts his focus to our life as a believer in Christ. Not simply being a believer, but being a believer who truly lives for Jesus. Here we find another of his iconic "Roman Road" verses compelling us to, **"...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service..."** (Romans 12:1) What an encouraging statement, that our, **"...reasonable service..."** for the Lord is the result of our life lived for Jesus. But this is more difficult than it seems because our human nature (**"...the old man..."** - Ephesians 4:22) is still sinful, even after we are saved (**"...the new man..."**), so Paul admonishes us to, **"...not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."** (Romans 12:2). Paul then instructs us how to do this. By not thinking too highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3), but instead to love, teach, encourage, give, show mercy, and to do all of that with **"...cheerfulness..."** (Romans 12:8). He then provides one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible related to love (Romans 12:9-13), further instructing us to love those who treat us poorly. (Romans 12:16). All of this, when combined, is a life of testimony lived for Jesus.

Now, let's begin our discussion of a life lived for Jesus...

Romans 12:1-3

Verse 12:1

The term, **"...beseech..."**, in Greek, *"Parakalos"* can mean *"to exhort"* and *"to encourage"*, but the root can also mean *"to come along side to help"*. Which is exactly what Paul is trying to do. For eleven chapters he has presented a detailed breakdown of the gospel to help his readers recognize who the true Messiah is. But now he shifts his full attention to the lives of believers, his **"...brethren..."**, his brothers and sisters in Christ for the next phase of our instruction. As he does, he is speaking to his family. To us. The followers of Jesus.

We see a common theme throughout Paul's letters. The transition from lost to saved, from unrighteous to righteous, from the old man to the new, from being enemies of God to being fully in-Christ. Paul will now focus on the application of our faith to initiate the transformation of our life from what we were to what we are. A life lived for

Jesus. Here as in other epistles Paul will provide practical application to help his readers learn how to live a life that glorifies God.

He begins by focusing on our bodies, which is unfortunately our primary source of sin. Through our mind temptation enters and through our physical body the actions of sin occur. This is why James focuses so strongly on the evil of our words alone, **"...Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."** (James 3:5-8) Likewise, Jesus tells us how important this is, **"...But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."** (Matthew 12:36-37)

Given that warning, we need to recall what Paul said in chapter 6, **"...do not present your members** (including our tongue) **as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness..."**. (Romans 6:13). This describes the fact that after we are saved our bodies take on a new role which brings with it new responsibilities. That's because a believer's body is the **"...temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you..."**, therefore, we are to **"...glorify God in your body..."** (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20b / see also Romans 8:9-11).

This is why Paul encourages us to **"...present your bodies a living sacrifice..."**. Because a sacrifice was required to atone sin. Either the Old Testament sacrifice of the spotless lamb (Leviticus 23:18-20) or the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus, the Holy Lamb of God (Hebrews 7:26-27). So in that same vein Paul encourages us to consider our **"...bodies..."** as a **"...sacrifice..."** by the way we live. In this way, **"...Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death..."** (Philippians 1:20b). Offering our bodies (our thoughts and actions; words and deeds) becomes our most powerful testimony by showing Christ to the world as we exhibit the transformation of our lives through our faith in Jesus. We should also not lose sight of the fact Jesus is our model, a true **"...living sacrifice..."**, who willingly went to the cross for our sin and lives today bearing His wounds for us. (Isaiah 53:5 / 1 Peter 2:24 / John 20:27). He is the example who we emulate and through which we can function as **"...a living sacrifice..."**.

We know from Paul's earlier comments, **"...There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."** because we are **"...free from the law of sin and death..."** (Romans 8:1 & 2b). This lack of **"...condemnation..."** is what enables us to be **"...holy, acceptable to God..."**. It is our faith in Christ that brings

this freedom through our salvation and is the first step in "sanctification". The process of growing in our faith, and being set apart from the world as we live in-Christ and represent Him through our lives. This growth occurs when we, **"...Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you."** (Leviticus 20:7-8). It is in this same mindset Peter directs us to do, **"...Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."** (1 Peter 1:13-16). This focus, to consciously present ourselves as **"...a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God..."** is vitally important, but is not always easy. Paul has already told us this battle can be difficult, because **"...I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do..."** (Romans 7:14-15). This is the battle Paul speaks of as a conflict of our wills. The conflict between our sin nature (the old man) and our born-again nature (the new man). That's why we must remember we, **"... have been crucified with Christ; [the old-man] it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; [the indwelt new-man] and the life which I now live in the flesh [our earthly body] I live by faith [through our salvation] in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."** (Galatians 2:20)

Paul then shares something profound. This new life, lived for Christ before the world is our **"...reasonable service..."**. In the Greek, **"...reasonable..."** simply means what you would think, *"rational or logical"*. In other words, given the price Jesus paid to atone our sin it is logical that we should want to live a life that reflects God's gift and the precious price paid for our atonement. Given that, it brings to mind a quote we might want to consider...

- *"Jesus paid an incredible price for our soul. --- But if we look at our life, what did He get for the price He paid?"*

By describing our life as a **"...reasonable service..."** Paul is simply saying, a life lived for Jesus makes perfect sense because there can be no greater worship of our Lord than when we live for Him before the lost world.

I pray we will all think about it this way.

As a side note - Paul himself knew full-well what it means to be a **"...living sacrifice..."**. Near the end of his life he told Timothy, **"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** (2 Timothy 4:6-7). Here Paul identifies with the "drink offering" (Numbers 15:5 / Exodus 29:40 / Leviticus 23:18).

This was the offering which followed the burnt and grain offerings for the people of Israel. In God's instructions recorded in Numbers 28:7 the priest is told **"...in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to the Lord as an offering..."**. Clearly, Paul saw his own life as a sacrifice. An element poured out as an offering to God.

Then he tells us how to do this:

- Fight the good fight - Courageously resist sin in our lives and stand our ground with solid doctrine and a Biblical worldview.
 - **"...And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.** (Romans 12:2)
- Finish the race - Never give up. Endure and persevere as we seek to honor God with our testimony in every circumstance. No matter how bad it is.
 - **"...My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind..."**(James 1:2-6)
- Keep the faith - Be strong in our faith, unwavering in our trust, and dedicated to a life lived for Jesus.
 - **"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'** (Isaiah 41:10)

I pray our own lives, through our testimony lived-out before the world, will be an offering to God, **"...a sweet aroma to the Lord..."** (Leviticus 23:18b)

Verse 12:2

The apostle John tells us basically the same thing, **"...Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."** (1 John 2:15-17). John's description of sin, **"...the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..."** is exactly the same way satan tempted Eve, **"...So when the**

woman saw that the tree was good for food, [lust of the flesh] that it was pleasant to the eyes, [lust of the eyes] and a tree desirable to make one wise, [the pride of life] she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate." (Genesis 3:6). These are the same temptations the world throws at us today that induce us to **"...be conformed to this world..."**. But, when Jesus was praying in the garden for His followers He reminds us, **"...They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world..."** (John 17:16). In other words, once we are saved and striving to live a life for Christ we are no longer part of this world, but have been remade into something new, different and eternal. That means we may lose friends, or there may be places we don't go, things we don't watch and activities we don't do. All of this so we are, **"...not be conformed to this world..."** and so we can **"...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God..."**. You may hear someone describe this as being *"In the world, but not of the world."* This is the same sentiment expressed by the writer of Hebrews when he says, **"...For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come..."** (Hebrews 13:14)

To make the transformation from a worldview to a Christ-centered view Paul tells us to **"...be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."**. The word **"...transformed..."** comes from the Greek *"metamorphousthe"*, from which we get the word metamorphosis. It means to *"change form"* or *"to be transfigured"*. As the name implies, this is more than a simple attitude change. Just like a caterpillar completely changes its form to a butterfly, so too we are changed from the old man to the new and from the eternally condemned to the eternally redeemed. A transformation Paul described to the church at Corinth when he said, **"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."** (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is our life, given as a **"...living sacrifice..."** and **"...being transformed..."** as we are sanctified to become more and more like Jesus.

This transformation is possible, **"...by the renewing of your mind..."** as we grow closer to Jesus in our daily walk. As Paul explains, **"...you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind..."** (Ephesians 4:17b). Instead we are to, **"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."** (Colossians 3:2). The common thread in each of these verses is our **"...mind..."**. Our mind is the source of our intelligence, wisdom, creativity, love, words and actions. But it is also our mind that breeds ignorance, anger, hate, and sin. As Paul reminds us, **"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."** (Romans 8:6). So how do we transform our minds to be more spiritual and more like Jesus? Personally, I think it is only possible through investing quality time in God's word. **"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."** (Psalm 119:11) The Lord can speak to our hearts in many ways, but I have found He speaks the clearest and in the most detail through His word. It is through God's word we are equipped to accomplish the tasks He gives us because, **"...All Scripture is given**

by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) It should be no surprise that God's word provides **"...instructions for righteousness..."** in order to renew our minds, so we **"...may be complete..."** and **"...thoroughly equipped..."**. So, given that, why are so few Christians in God's word everyday seeking His **"...instruction..."** to ensure they are **"...equipped..."**? Maybe that's why so many go through life unequipped to meet the inevitable challenges we will all face. Clearly it is through God's word we learn what is expected so that our mind can be conformed to the image of Jesus, as we, **"...put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him..."** (Colossians 3:9-10). Here Paul speaks of our transformation as having our minds **"...renewed in knowledge..."** And where does that knowledge come from? From God's word of course:

- **"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law [His word] of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, [His word] who seek Him with the whole heart!"** (Psalm 119:1-2)
- **"You have commanded us to keep Your precepts [His word] diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes! [His word] Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments."** [His word] (Psalm 119:4-6)
- **"I will meditate on Your precepts, [His word] and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; [His word] I will not forget Your word."** (Psalm 119:15-16)
- **"I have declared my ways, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes. [His word] make me understand the way of Your precepts; [His word] so shall I meditate on Your wonderful works. My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word."** (Psalm 119:26-28)

Psalm 119 is about God's word. Through 176 beautiful verses the Psalmist exhorts the majesty, power and direction we receive from God's word. It is a Psalm that will draw you into God's word like no other because it is here God speaks so clearly about the transformational power of His word on our lives.

Likewise, prayer is of course also transformational because it is through prayer we speak relationally to God and seek His will. In this way we may, **"... prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."** This is not divine confirmation of our will, but is a sincere search for God's will. Just as Jesus prayed, **"...nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."** yet, so should we (Luke 22:42). The combination of seeking God in His word, and building a relationship with Him through prayer is the way to ensure we can accomplish **"...the renewing of your mind..."**.

Verse 12:3

But as we strive to be more like Jesus we must remain humble. We live in a society that seeks after TV preachers, mega-churches and outward ecstatic actions of our faith. Yet, true faith in Jesus comes through the strength of humility. Jesus said of Himself, **"...Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."** (Matthew 11:29). This gentleness should not be interpreted as weakness. In Greek, gentle is "*praus*", defined as "*Not weakness but rather refers to exercising God's strength under His control.*". It means we have power, but we also have the ability to keep it in check. We see this so clearly when Jesus tells us He us **"...gentle and lowly in heart..."**. Yet, He is willing to be our yoke-fellow, carry our burdens and help us **"...find rest..."**. Likewise, Paul reminds us we are saved **"...through the grace given to me..."**. A gift we did not earn and could not work for. This means we are to be humble and **"...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..."**. Instead, we are to **"...think soberly..."**, and be self-controlled. In that way we conform to the model Jesus gave us, **"...And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'"** (Mark 9:35). I think this humility is most profound when we think back to the fact the Lord of All Creation went to the cross of death to give us an eternity of life. In doing so God gives each of us **"...a measure of faith..."**, so we can humbly, yet powerfully, represent Him as a **"...living sacrifice..."**, because we have been **"...transformed by a renewing of your mind..."** so we are not **"...conformed to this world..."**.

I pray this encourages you as much as it encouraged me.

Lesson # 40, The Book of Romans - Chapter 12 verses 4-8

Quick Recap:

Chapter 12 is a turning point in the book of Romans. Here Paul shifts his focus from a detailed explanation of the gospel to begin instructing his readers on how to live for Jesus. The first two verses in the chapter set the stage by telling us to **"...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God..."**, with the intended result that we are not **"...conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."**. This speaks to the process of transitioning from the "old man" to the new, and from being enemies of God to being children of God. This is a continuous process called *"sanctification"* which simply means we grow stronger in our faith and closer to Jesus as we strive to live a life that glorifies Him.

Now in verses 4 through 8 we see the same thread-of-thought that started in verse 1. But since these verses speak specifically to spiritual gifts I wanted to isolate verses 4 through 8 so we have time to thoroughly explore their meaning.

So, with that, let's breakdown verses 4 through 8.

Some view these verses as talking about ecstatic gifts such as tongues, hands-on healing and visions, but I'd prefer we explore these verses from the perspective of being equipped (gifted) to spread the gospel. I think this approach will fit well within the core context of Paul's writings in Romans as he seeks to prepare believers for the task of spreading God's redemptive message.

So, to establish some context for a discussion about "equipping" believers, let's go to the instructions Paul gave to the church at Ephesus.

- ***"And He [Jesus] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."*** (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Here Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus about believers being equipped to do God's work. In doing so he makes several key points:

- He defines several roles that exist within the church: ***"...apostles ...prophets, ...evangelist...pastors...teachers..."***
 - Now, before you assume these titles are meant for someone other than you, please remember...
 - Jesus told all of us to, ***"...Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;..."*** (Matthew 28:19-20)
 - Each of us is commanded to ***"...go..."***; to evangelize, and to ***"...make disciples..."*** by ***"...teaching them..."***.
 - In other words, we all have a part in sharing the gospel and to help others (***"...teaching..."***) better understand our faith. That's why Peter calls all of us ***"...a holy priesthood..."*** (1 Peter 2:5)
- Paul then defines several tasks we are given to do:
 - ***"...equipping of the saints..."***
 - To build Biblical knowledge and identify spiritual gifts
 - ***"...for the work of ministry,..."***
 - That doesn't mean just preachers
 - It is any action to share God's truth of the gospel
 - Or any action to teach, encourage, support, help, or any other task within the body of Christ.
 - ***"...for the edifying of the body of Christ..."***,
 - To encourage the body of believers
 - To build each other up in Christ
 - ***"...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God..."***
 - To build a harmony and unity amongst believers
 - As we are being sanctified in our spiritual growth
 - And become one body functioning to glorify God.
- Then he tells us what happens when we're not equipped like this. We will be:
 - ***"...tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting..."***
 - In other words, unless we are Biblically equipped in solid doctrine then we could end-up like the apostate churches we see more and more prevalent today.
- Instead, we should all seek to be:
 - ***"...speaking the truth in love,***
 - So we ***"...may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ..."***

- ***"...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies..."***
- ***"...according to the effective working by which every part does its share,..."***
- ***"...causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."***
 - This is the spiritual unity we seek within the Body of Christ
 - Unity with each other and unity with Jesus

We could spend hours discussing this passage and the responsibilities all of us receive from the Lord's direction. But for now we'll use the context of these verses as the basis for studying chapter 12, verses 4-8 and Paul's discussion of the spiritual gifts that enable us to share the gospel.

Romans 12:4-8

Verses 12:4-5

First, Paul reminds us:

- ***"...we have many members in one body..."*** That speaks to individual believers within the church; who are the "body of Christ"
- ***"...but all the members do not have the same function..."*** The Lord uniquely gifts each of us. Maybe to preach, or teach, or to encourage, or to come along side someone in need. We all have different functions within the Body, but...we all have a function.
- ***"...so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."*** The Body of Christ (the "church") is the collective gathering of believers as we live-out our lives together for Jesus. Our strength is through our unity with Jesus, and through Him, our unity with each other. That's why our unity is so important.

In Ephesians 4 (above) Paul reminds us even though we are a collection of individual believers we are:

- ***"...the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies..."***
 - Each person brings gifts to strengthen of the body
 - Our goal is to be ***"...knit together..."*** whereby the strength of the garment is in the strength of the joining of individual threads.
- ***"...according to the effective working by which every part does its share,..."***
 - We all play a role.
 - We all have a job to do for the body. If one part fails to ***"...knit together.. "*** then the whole body suffers.

- **"...causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."**
 - So the body grows and multiplies new believers.
 - And as we grow we are equipped. And as we are equipped we are made spiritually mature so we can collectively share the message of Jesus.

Paul further defines the role of the Body of Christ in his letter to the church at Corinth. This is a long passage but I think we should read it to help understand the overall context of the collective body.

- **12. "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14. For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18. But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20. But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22. No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24. but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25. that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Corinthians 12:12-26)**

As we read this we begin to better understand what Paul is talking about in Romans 12:4-5, **"...we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5. so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."** We are all different, but we are all in the same spiritual family through our adoption by our **"...Abba Father..."** (Galatians 4:6 / Romans 8:15). But, we **"...do not have the same function..."** because we have been gifted to perform different roles in the service of God through the body. This is important for us to understand because so many Christians apparently believe their gift is to attend church

on Sunday morning. But that's not what Paul is talking about. Instead, Paul tells us, **"...God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased..."**. (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Let's think about that:

- God has **"...set..."**. In other words, established, a role for each of us, **"...each one of them..."** to do.
 - That includes every believer. That includes you and me. Why? Because it takes every one of us using the gifts God gives us to do the tasks God gives us for the body to function.
- And God **"...has set the members..."** exactly **"...as He pleases..."**. That means God has established each of us to have a role. Something He has set for us to do. But what is it? That's where you need to pray to understand how God wants you to walk in the Spirit and honor Him with the role He **"...has set..."** for you.

Verses 12:6-8

Here Paul gives examples of the gifts we are given **"...according to the grace that is given to us..."**. It is God's grace, applied through our faith in the work of Christ, that brings salvation, so then, it is our salvation that brings us gifts. Bottom line, if you're saved God will enable you to do the work He calls you to do. And He will call you, but we must listen.

Then Paul says **"...let us use them..."**, to...

- **"...if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith..."**; The Greek meaning of this does not necessarily mean predicting the future. Instead, it basically means proclaiming the truth. This is something we all do when we share the gospel.
- **"...or ministry, let us use it in our ministering..."**. This is not speaking specifically to pulpit ministry (preaching) but speaks to helping others or providing a service by ministering to them. That may be assisting someone, working in the nursery, supporting the food ministry, participating in a mission trip, or simply coming to the aid of a Brother or Sister in need.
- **"...he who teaches, in teaching..."**; This is rightly-dividing and explaining God's word to others. We should all be able to do this to some degree.
- **"...he who exhorts, in exhortation..."**; Many have been given gifts of love to encourage and comfort others through God's word. I think a great example of the is our "Surviving Sisters" group. Godly women who reach out to other women in need, to encourage, teach and support them.
- **"...he who gives, with liberality..."**; Giving of our resources and ourselves. And to do it in abundance.

- **"...he who leads with diligence..."** This is not limited to church leadership. It might be leadership in your home, or one who guides others through a battle in life. In either case, we are to do it with enthusiasm and dedication, **"...with diligence..."**
- **"...he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."** We should all do this many times a day. Even in our declining society, **"...Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones."** (Proverbs 16:24)

But what about those who don't use the gifts God gave them to accomplish the tasks He assigned them to do? Well...to understand that let's go to 2 Corinthians 5:10

- **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."**

This is not talking about the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation chapter 20, when those who died lost will be sentenced to an eternity in hell. Instead, this is talking about the "judgment" or review of believers. It is not a judgment for sin because a believer's sin was already judged on the cross. It will be the time when Jesus will review our life as a believer to see what we did with our salvation. In other words, He will critique the role we played in the body to assess how well **"...every part does its share,..."** (Ephesians 4:16) Specifically, it will be a judgment to review how well we used the gifts we were given. Every believer will stand there, before God, so that Jesus can look at us and say... **"...Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you a ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."** (Matthew 25:21) Or, we might hear Him say, **"You wicked and lazy servant..."**. Both of these examples are members of the body who will go to heaven. One will enter as a tool used by the Lord and the other will bow his head in regret. Let's make sure we all hear **"...Well done..."**.

Lesson # 41, The Book of Romans - Chapter 12 verses 9-21

Quick Recap:

Beginning in Chapter 12 Paul provides instructions for our Christian life and the encouragement that comes from being a child of God. He sets the stage by telling us to **“...present our bodies as a living sacrifice...”** and not to be **“...conformed to this world...”**. This is speaking of our personal testimony lived in-Christ before the lost world. A testimony that should result from focusing our daily lives on glorifying God. Paul then reminds us **“...we have many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function...”**. This is to remind us that God calls each of us – every believer – to tasks He wishes us to accomplish. Some will minister, some teach, some encourage, some give, some serve, but we all have gifts God intends for us to use for His glory.

In other words, there are no sidelines or dugouts in the Christian life.

Now at the end of chapter 12 Paul encourages us with a gift every believer must have — the ability to Love. The character of God is love, so as believers our character must be love as well. But this needs to be sincere love so we can love like the apostle John tells us to do, **“...let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth...”** (1 John 3:18). That's essentially the same message Paul now presents here.

Now, let's dig a little deeper into our Lord's guidance for life...

Romans 12:9-21

Verse 12:9

Here Paul focuses on a core characteristic of our personal testimony, **“...love...”**. A character trait we must have because it is probably the single most powerful action that will show the lost world the truth and joy of our salvation. That's because **“...God is love...”** (1 John 4:8). So if we seek to emulate Jesus in our lives we must show love in our own character.

Since love is so important to our witness I want to spend a little time exploring what love means from a Biblical perspective.

The theme of God's amazing love is found throughout the entire Bible, but most profoundly when expressing the truth that **“...love covers all sin...”** (Proverbs 10:12). In other words, God's love is so powerful and complete it can redeem any sin in our lives. No matter how grievous our sin may be, God's love is even greater. We find this fact expressed no more clearly than in the most iconic verse of salvation, **“For God so**

loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) This is of course talking about salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, but to really grasp its meaning we need to focus on the word **"...gave..."** and how it is used to illustrate the love of God. It reminds us, **"...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8). That's amazing. Jesus loved us so much He was willing to die for us **"...while we were still sinners..."**. Not while we were being religious or trying to work our way to heaven, but while we were being openly disobedient towards Him. This is not a love we have to earn, nor is it a love we can be religious enough to achieve. It is a love like no other. It is the grace of God that is applied to us when we willfully accept the One who willfully offered Himself for us. That's why the sacrifice of Jesus for His sinful creation is the most supreme example of God's amazing love. Because it proves, **"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."** (John 15:13)

Thank You Jesus.

The apostle John wrote a lot about love and the fact the very nature of God is love,

- **"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."** (1 John 4:7-11)

In the same way Paul reminds us that since **"...love never fails..."** we must show the love of God in every circumstance:

- **"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."** (Colossians 3:12-14)
- Further, he reminds us the source of our love is none other than the indwelling Holy Spirit, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."** (Galatians 5:22-23)

Likewise, Peter also speaks of love as he looks back to Proverbs to remind us,

- ***"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' (1 Peter 4:8)***

Paul talks about ***"...love..."*** in all of his epistles and letters, but there are two specific passages that to me express the deep Biblical meaning of love he is trying to convey:

- ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' [see Psalm 44:22] Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)***

This is a passage I often go to in moments of stress or worry. It tells me that no circumstance or condition I will ever face in life will separate me ***"...from the love of Christ..."***. In other words, nothing I will ever face on this earth can defeat us because our salvation means ***"...we are more than conquerors..."*** through our faith in Jesus. (Romans 8:37) It is this eternal invincibility as a ***"...conqueror..."*** that ensures no power or thing ***"...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** This is a level of love we can scarcely comprehend but is a love promised to us by God.

The second verse that speaks to me about the power of God's love is in 1 Corinthians 13:

- ***"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.." (1 Corinthians 13:1-8)***

So let's look at this passage in a little more detail to understand some of the attitudes we should focus on so we can, ***"...let love be without hypocrisy..."***:

- ***“...Love suffers long...”***
 - Our love must be patient with others.
- ***“...and is kind...”***
 - Kindness is often difficult to show in a tough situation, but love makes it possible.
- ***“...love does not envy...”***
 - When we love we are not envious or jealous of others, but instead put them first.
- ***“...love does not parade itself...”***
 - Love is not proud. It often takes great humility to show great love.
- ***“...is not puffed up...”***
 - We do not strut about in our love. We show it honestly and genuinely with humility.
- ***“...does not behave rudely...”***
 - Our love should not dishonor others. It is often our attitude more than our actions that reflects the love of Jesus to others.
- ***“...does not seek its own...”***
 - Love is not self-seeking. It is focused on others before ourselves.
- ***“...is not provoked...”***
 - Love does not react with anger.
- ***“...thinks no evil...”***
 - Love results in goodness, not evil. Not even an evil thought.
- ***“...does not rejoice in iniquity...”***
 - Love keeps no record of wrong. It holds no grudges. It seeks no fault.
- ***“...but rejoices in the truth...”***
 - We cannot share the truth of God without love. If our love is not true then how credible will our witness be?
- Love is timeless. Because It:
 - ***“...bears all things...”***
 - ***“...believes all things...”***
 - ***“...hopes all things...”***
 - ***“...endures all things...”***
- Because...
 - ***“...Love never fails..”***

Verses 12:10-23

Next Paul gives us some examples of how we should love:

- ***“Be kindly affectionate to one another...”***
 - Showing love with kindness.
- ***“...giving preference to one another...”***

- Putting others first.
- **“...not lagging in diligence...”**
 - Love reacts quickly. Not as an afterthought.
- **“...fervent in spirit...”**
 - Our love should be focused and intentional.
- **“...serving the Lord...”**
 - Loving through serving with a focus on glorifying God.
- **“...rejoicing in hope...”**
 - Our love should bring hope and encouragement.
- **“...patient in tribulation...”**
 - This can be a difficult task but we must show love even during suffering.
- **“...continuing steadfastly in prayer...”**
 - Prayerfully seek the Lord's guidance on how to love.
- **“...distributing to the needs of the saints...”**
 - Being alert to when our Brothers and Sisters need our love.
- **“...given to hospitality...”**
 - Our love should be inviting and welcoming.

Each of these statements provide attributes we can show in our daily walk. They are actions that will encourage fellow believers and show the love of Jesus to those who are lost. Included in these are key words we can carry in our minds to help us focus on the love of others. Words like **“...affectionate, giving, serving, rejoicing, patient, continuing and distributing...”**. We should all focus on these.

Verse 12:14

After his detailed description of love Paul then challenges us with one of the most difficult commands in the Bible. We are to love those **“...who persecute you...”**. It is so easy to love those who love us back, but it is generally difficult (nigh impossible at times) to love those who do not love back, or to love those who seek to harm us in some way.

But here Paul seems to be paraphrasing the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes...

- **“But I say to you who hear:**
 - **“...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...”**
 - **“...bless those who curse you...”**
 - **“...pray for those who spitefully use you...”**
 - **“...To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also...”**
 - **“...from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either...”**
 - **“...Give to everyone who asks of you...”**
 - **“...from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back...”**

- ***“...just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise...”***
 - ***“...But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?”***
 - ***“...For even sinners love those who love them...”***
 - ***“...And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?”***
 - ***“...For even sinners do the same...”***
 - ***“...And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you?”***
 - ***“...For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back...”***
 - ***“...But love your enemies, do good, and lend,...”***
 - ***“...hoping for nothing in return;..”***
 - ***“...and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.”*** (Luke 6:27-35)
- Wow. If that doesn't challenge you I don't know what will. Here Jesus gives us so much more direction than simply blessing those who persecute us. Jesus includes people who hate us, curse us, use us, beat us, and steal from us. Next He tells us to love them, give to them, help them, and pray for them. Then on top of all that He tells us to love them without being loved back, help them without receiving any help from them, and give to them while, ***“...hoping for nothing in return...”***. In one sense this is an application of what we often call "unconditional love". The type of love that compelled God to put on flesh, live amongst His wicked creation and die for our sins. It is love so beautifully gifted through God's amazing grace and mercy. So here Jesus tells us how to love like this. Instead of telling us to run, hide or fight, we are commanded to confront issues in a way that might be counter-intuitive to many of us - we are to love - by taking action. Here Jesus tells us to ***“...do, bless, pray, offer and give...”***. The point is, Jesus tells us to take action. Not an action of retribution, retaliation or revenge, but an action that shows love. An action that basically says ***“... ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”*** (Luke 23:34).

I'll be honest. Sometimes it is difficult for me to love in certain situations but we must try, because that's what Jesus did and that's what He tells us to do. And if we could truly love this way we would love like Jesus and the world would know we are His, ***“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** (John 13:35)

Verses 12:15-18

Love like this pays huge dividends for both us and the one being loved. Our love in times of triumph can enable us to **“...rejoice...”** with those who are celebrating. Likewise, our love in times of tragedy will enable us to **“...weep...”** with those in pain or grief. In other words, our love can bridge the gap of emotions from elation to depression as we seek to love everyone for whatever need they have. But true love like this must come from humility towards others. Remember, **“...love does not parade itself...”**, and is not proud. Love **“...is not puffed up...”** but is genuine and honest. Paul reminds us that love like this comes from a heart that truly seeks to bless others. And if we can do that then we will, **17. "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."**

Verse 12:19

But commanding us to love with this kind of forgiveness might cause some to ask, *“But wait a minute. Am I supposed to love people who harm me? Why not seek revenge instead of love. Isn't that what they deserve?”*.

If we think about it from a worldly human perspective this question makes sense. Wouldn't we feel justified seeking retribution against someone who harmed us in some way? Probably so, but that's not what the Lord has asked us to do. Here Paul paraphrases Leviticus 19:18, **“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.”** and **“...Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them.”** (Deuteronomy 32:35 - see also Psalm 94:1). As difficult as it may seem it is not our place to seek vengeance. A time will come when God's wrath will rain-down on everyone who fails to accept God's grace. But until then He still offers grace to each of them, and He expects us to do the same.

Verse 12:20

Paul brings this section to closure by quoting from Proverbs 25:21-22, **“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you.”** This is similar to the command given by Elisha for dealing with Israel's Syrian captives. An action that brought temporary peace, **“Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" But he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.”** (2 Kings 6:21-23).

These quotes provide real-life Biblical application for the early commands Jesus gave us in Luke 6 (above) ***“...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,..” / “...bless those who curse you,...” / “...pray for those who spitefully use you...” / “...To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also...”***. In one sense these actions show our enemies the type of treatment that gives them shame - represented by the ***“...coals of fire on his head...”***. Their shame results from the fact they wanted to harm us, but we repay their actions of hatred with our actions of kindness, which will often dissipate their anger. As Proverbs 15:1 says, ***“A soft answer turns away wrath...”***. In doing so we **21. *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”***

Granted, this can be a very difficult lesson to apply in life, but it is one we must strive to do every day.

Lesson # 42, The Book of Romans - Chapter 13 verses 1-7

Quick Recap:

In chapter 12 Paul shifts his focus from giving us a detailed description of salvation to providing guidance for living our life as a follower of Christ. He begins by commanding us to **"...present your bodies a living sacrifice..."** but as we do reminding us not to be **"...conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."** (Romans 12:1-2). The renewal Paul talks about is the transformation from the **"...old man..."** to the **"...new man..."** (Ephesians 4:23-24 / 2 Corinthians 5:17), and describes our position in Christ as we are transformed from who we were to who we are. This is the process we call **"sanctification"**, which simply means becoming more like Jesus as we draw closer to Him and seek to live within His will. Paul then focuses on love. A character trait we must all have because **"...God is love..."** and we must show the love of God to others (1 John 1:8). As difficult as it may sometimes be, our lives must show love because it is our lives, lived for Christ, that is a powerful testimony of Jesus to a lost world.

Paul's focus on love will now lead us into a topic where love might be very difficult to show.

Introduction to Chapter 13

Chapter 13 continues Paul's instruction for living our life for Christ, and begins by focusing on a topic that will certainly hit home with many believers — living under the influence of an ungodly government. This is a passage Paul wrote at a time when the church was coming under increasing persecution from both Jewish leadership and the Roman Empire. A time very similar to the mindset we see emerging today as the world falls further away from God. I look forward to investigating this passage together because I think it will help us better understand how Jesus expects us to act during these difficult times.

Paul will then take us on a foray into end-times prophecy by reminding us to, **"...awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."** (Romans 13:11). Paul isn't talking about our **"justification"** (salvation) because it's clear he's speaking to those who already believe. Instead, he's talking about the Rapture. The time when Jesus will return to gather His bride and take us home (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). He then reminds us of something we need to consider everyday, **"The night far spent, the day at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."** (Romans 13:12). This is counsel we would do well to heed today.

Now, let's dig into the first part of chapter 13.

In chapter 12 Paul provided instructions about how to love like Jesus. Even challenging us with a very difficult command to **"...Bless those who persecute you..."**. He then follows right behind this with chapter 13 and the direction to **"...be subject to the governing authorities..."** (Romans 12:14 / 13:1). In a broad sense if those two verses were taken together they could be interpreted to mean, *"...bless the governing authorities who persecute you..."*. That's an interesting thought and given the current condition of our own society it can be a very hard pill to swallow. Particularly when considering the condition of our own political debates about issues that seem to divide us more every day. Even creating division within the church. For the most part these dividing issues stem from something the **"...governing authorities..."** are either doing or not doing that further drives our society farther away from God. That's a sad commentary and it probably causes all of us to feel like something has to be done to right the ship. But, as we consider what those recovery options may be, we as believers must remember Paul's warning, **"...Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** (Romans 12:14 & 19-21 - also see lesson #41)

As we move forward through this chapter let's keep that last verse in mind, **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."** (Romans 12:21)

I thought a long time about how to teach this chapter. On one hand I could focus on the ills of modern society, mankind's continual falling away from God, and our government's role in enabling our nation to fall. I could talk about progressive agendas, liberal politicians and laws being considered or passed that defy God's commands. I could talk about the potential for panic and fear as we watch the emergence of a systematic formula for globalizing the world's thinking towards a liberal, non-Biblical view. Yep. It would be easy to write about all of that and foster lively political debate.

But I'm not. Instead, I'm going to approach chapter 13 the same way Paul did. By focusing very little energy or ink on combating the failures of society, and instead focus on how we as believers should seek to influence our society by sharing the gospel. In this way we can do as the Lord commands and, **"...overcome evil with good..."**.

I say all of this with a thought running through my mind:

— *"We could debate with politicians until we're out of breath and never change their mind. But if we can lead them to Jesus they'll change their own mind."*

Let's start with a little context:

Immediately following his command to love those who persecute us Paul talks about the government. I don't think that's a coincidence. Paul, who was of course inspired by God, needed to talk about love before talking about government, because government is often so hard to love. Paul was certainly aware of this difficulty because he had plenty of experience dealing with corrupt and evil governments – both Jewish and Roman. As a prior Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, Paul had been part of the corrupt and self-righteous Jewish leadership. To the point he **"...persecuted followers of this Way [Jesus] to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison."** (Acts 22:4). He did that because he hated followers of Jesus so much he, **"...persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it."** (Galatians 1:13). But once he became a Jewish convert to Christianity, Paul was hated by both the Jews and the pagan Roman government. So much so, **"...some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul..."** (Acts 23:12). The Jews were upset because his teaching busted their self-righteous bubble. And the Romans had lost patience with him because his ministry caused civil unrest wherever he went. Not because he protested the actions of civil authority, but because he shared the gospel of a poor Carpenter from Nazareth who claimed to be the Messiah. This infuriated leadership to the point, **"...They were brought before the magistrates and said, 'These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice. The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.'" (Acts 16:20-22).** Paul's punishment was not the result of political debate or his stance on social issues. It was because his ministry reached across the Roman Empire and literally **"...turned the world upside down..."** (Acts 17:6).

One of the reasons I started our Romans study with several preparatory lessons on the Roman Empire was the help us understand Paul's life in their oppressive government (see Lessons #2-6). A society that was arguably the most pagan and bloodthirsty culture in history. That meant Paul was no stranger to bad governments or bad leaders. So given that fact, I find it noteworthy that Paul, and for that matter Jesus, spent very little time talking about the evils of civil government or human law. Instead, Paul focused on the gospel of salvation and declared his narrow focus to, **"...preach Christ crucified..."** (1 Corinthians 1:23). To me that supports the statement I made earlier in this lesson — *"We could debate with a politician until we're out of breath and never change their mind. But if we can lead them to Jesus they'll change their own mind."* — I believe Paul may have felt the same way because he saw the only path to social reform was through a road that leads the public to Christ.

But Paul's near-silence on civil law or government didn't mean there weren't opportunities for him to speak out.

For example:

- Paul spoke at the Areopagus in Athens. A forum that gave Him the attentive ear of the most influential scholars of the day. Yet rather than talking about social reforms He talked about Jesus. (Acts 17:22-34)
- He spoke before the Jewish Sanhedrin and talked about the resurrection of Christ. A hotly debated topic amongst the self-righteous Jewish leadership. He didn't do this as an effort to change their laws, but to help them recognize the Carpenter from Nazareth as the Messiah. (Acts 22:30 - 23:10)
- He was then given an audience before the Roman Governor Felix. That would have certainly been a forum where he could discuss the government's oppression of Jews, the forced occupation of Israel, Rome's illicit and liberal laws or a dozen other social ills. Instead, he shared the gospel with Felix and his sinful wife Drusilla and they **"...heard him concerning the faith in Christ..."** (Acts 23:23 - 24:27)
- Paul then met with the Roman Governor Festus and through Him with King Agrippa. But again Paul seems to have sidestepped any opportunity to complain about the government and instead preached the gospel to which Agrippa said to Paul, **"...‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian.’"** (Acts 25:1 - 26:32).

Paul's focus on the gospel was not because Rome had a healthy legal system or a moral society. To the contrary, laws in the Roman Empire legalized many of the same sinful social issues being debated today. In fact, there were laws allowing a father to murder family members, laws legalizing immoral behavior in ways we could hardly imagine today, laws that legalized abortion, laws that subjugated women and children, laws that promoted slavery, and other laws even more heinous than many being considered today in the US. These laws, and Roman culture in general, were made worse by the fact everyone was assigned to a social class that could significantly limit your freedoms or impose added restrictions on your life. This hedonistic culture eventually degraded into an extremely bloodthirsty society that not only executed millions of people but did so for public sport. This was particularly true of Jews and Christians who were seen as troublemakers. For example, in Acts 18 we see the story of Aquila and Precilla who were amongst the Jews and Christians driven out of Rome by Emperor Claudius. This type of persecution continued until the Romans eventually destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. Effectively removing Israel from her homeland for the next two thousand years. Even years later when the apostle John recorded the Book of Revelation he was a Roman prisoner in the penal colony on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:9)

The point of all this is the fact Paul lived in a society characterized by great sin, immorality and liberal leaders. This would have given him ample opportunity to fight both the Jewish and Roman governments. He could have organized protests or riots, or he could have found allies with which to proclaim a public agenda for social reform. In

doing so he could have spent considerable time and energy trying to change the government or its leaders. But he didn't. Instead he humbly – and often while being persecuted or from prison – shared the gospel. Why? Because Paul knew the greatest opportunity for true social reform was to reform the heart of man through the true gospel of Jesus.

It may be difficult for us to believe, but we in the US do not hold the patent on poorly run governments or poorly performing leaders. In fact, corruption and sin have characterized society and governments since ancient times. We've already talked about the failures of the Roman Empire so let's look at a few other examples of fallen societies and their unfit leadership:

- In the time of the Judges (1398-1043 BC) Israel fell away far away from God into Idolatry, ***"...Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths."*** (Judges 2:11-13). So God gave them leaders to help guide their actions, but Israel remained sinful, ***"...Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them."*** (Judges 2:17). By the end of this period human leadership had failed and society fell apart, ***"In those days there were no kings in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*** (Judges 21:25)
- The prophet Samuel warned Israel not to seek a human king because they already served the King of kings. But Israel rebelled, demanded a king and told Samuel ***"...Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations..."*** (1 Samuel 8:5). Samuel pushed back and warned them of the wrath to come, but the people ignored him and responded ***"...No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."*** (1 Samuel 8:19-20) But the people refused to seek God's guidance and selected a man for his good looks; a man named Saul, ***"...There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people."*** (1 Samuel 9:2). But Saul was a poor leader and Israel suffered greatly under his reign.
- Over the next 450 years (1043 - 561 BC) Israel had 42 kings and one queen. But most were simply unfit to lead and ***"did evil in the sight of the Lord"*** (1 Kings 16:30). These kings included:
 - United Israel:
 - 3 kings

- Saul - who failed and was removed by God.
 - David - who was a good king but committed adultery and murder while in office.
 - Solomon - who was given great wisdom by God but sadly fell into Idolatry.
 - The Northern Kingdom of Israel:
 - 20 kings.
 - All 20 were bad.
 - The Southern Kingdom of Judah:
 - 20 kings.
 - Of them 12 were evil and 8 were good.
 - Or, another way of looking at it, 82% of the rulers of ancient Israel were considered evil in the eyes of God.
 - Hmmmm. Sound familiar?
- Much later, during the time Jesus was on earth and even afterwards during Paul's ministry, the religious and civil leadership of Israel was totally disobedient to God. In fact, Jesus called the leaders of Israel and the wicked Pharisees **"...Serpents, brood of vipers!..."** because they were so corrupt and self-righteous (Matthew 23:33) Sadly, it was the Jewish leadership who insisted on the crucifixion of the promised Messiah and it was the Jewish leadership who persecuted Paul. (2 Timothy 4:7-8)
 - Did you know it was once illegal in England to own a Bible printed in the English language? Yep...and at times it was even illegal to own one, read one or even memorize a verse in English. For centuries the English government and the church made it illegal to print or own a Bible in the common language of the people. Instead, the Bible was generally printed in Latin and sometimes Greek. Languages that could be read by a very small percentage of the population. Why? Because the government and the church held great political power over the people. A power that could be enhanced by telling them what the Bible said — and often telling them in such a way to support their political position. As Donald Blake explains, *"The church's powerful hold on the laity depended on biblical ignorance. Any free use of the Bible in worship and thought signaled a deep threat to the church's authority."* ("A Visual History of the English Bible" Donald Blake, 2008). Making things even more complicated was the fact the English government vacillated between Catholic and Protestant doctrine depending on who was on the throne at the time and what religion they followed. Each subsequent change in leadership could bring with it severe denominational persecution.
 - But all of that began to change with a man named John Wycliffe (1320-1384) who sought to translate the Bible into a common language everyone could read. Many others followed him. Men like William Tyndale (1494-1536) who felt so

strongly about the need for a common language Bible that he reportedly told church leadership, *"If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou doest."* His dream was that even the common worker in the field would have a copy of God's word he could read and live by. Something their leadership was not doing. But their battle was hard fought and as chronicled in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (1563) and hundreds of men like these were imprisoned or executed for simply wanting a Bible everyone could read.

- For example:
 - In 1401 church leadership passed a proclamation, *De Heretico Comburedo* (Regarding the Burning of Heretics) which stated:
 - *"Diverse, false and perverse people of a new sect...they make and write books, they do wickedly instruct and inform people...and commit subversion of the said catholic faith...That this wicked sect, preachings, doctrines and opinions, should from henceforth cease and be utterly destroyed..."*
 - Basically this included anyone who translated or owned the Bible in English and stipulated they should be burned at the stake. William Sawtre, a follower of Wycliffe was the first to be burned.
 - Even the church inquisitor Thomas More had to receive government permission to simply read a Bible in English in order to condemn those who translated it.
 - For his efforts in translating the Bible from Greek to English William Tyndale was burned alive in 1536 under the authority of Henry VIII. His recorded last words were *"Lord, open the king of England's eyes."*
 - Likewise, John Rogers (1505-1555) who worked under the name "Thomas Matthew" translated what is called the "Matthew's Bible". For his efforts he was executed in 1555 as one of the first victims of the Catholic queen Mary. Known as "Bloody Mary", she is believed to have authorized the execution of over 290 Protestants.
 - But other courageous men fought the battle.
 - Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk (1483-1546) pushed back on Catholic indulgences and in doing so prompted the Protestant Reformation. But he was imprisoned in-part because he also translated the New Testament into common German.
 - Tyndale supporters and printers like Peter Quentel, Peter Schoeffer, George Joye, Theodore Beza and others labored in secret, often under threat of arrest or death and frequently had to work in other countries where they could continue their translation work and smuggle Bibles back to England.

- Eventually, Miles Coverdale (1488-1569), a Yorkshire pastor, was allowed to translate the entire Bible into English, but even so he was exiled from England for most of the 1520's to the 1540's.
 - As a last example, a young man named John Porter who was known for his beautiful voice was arrested in Saint Paul's Cathedral and imprisoned for simply reading the English Bible out loud in church. In doing so, he had violated Bishop Bonner's "*Admonitions*" displayed in the church which required Bible reading to be done quietly and without any explanation of the text.
- The Bible in our hands got there through the provenance of God, but sadly through the heroic efforts of men like those above who lived under governments and leaders we now view as "civilized" even though they persecuted those who simply wanted us to have a Bible we could read. Yet, they persevered and focused their attention on getting the gospel in the hands of the common man. Even if it meant sacrificing their lives to do so.
- As bad as all of this sounds, if we look to the future we can see things will get much worse.
 - The Tribulation, described in the book of Revelation, will be a seven year period with the most sinful government in history.
 - After the Rapture the majority of those left on earth will turn away from God (Revelation 6:16)
 - They will worship satan and his political puppet, the antichrist (Revelation 13:4)
 - The antichrist will form a world-wide government, controlling the economy, military and religion. It will be so vile the Lord calls it "***Mystery Babylon, The Great Mother of Harlots and of The Abominations of the Earth***" (Revelation 17:5 & 18)
 - From this government will come the most demonic and sinful society in history. Far more hedonistic than the Roman Empire of Paul's day or the most sinful leaders that exist in our own time. Its people will blaspheme God and focus on their own sinful prosperity even as they are being utterly destroyed by God (Revelation chapters 17,18,19)
- But why is it important for us to understand all this? Well...if we believe the Rapture is imminent (which means it could happen at any time) then the Tribulation period will not be far behind. Chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation highlight the sinful character of mankind and their demonic government during

the Tribulation period. Given that the Tribulation is only a short seven year period it stands to reason mankind will need to be in the right frame of mind at the beginning of the Tribulation in order to so quickly follow the demonic antichrist. I believe what we see happening in society today is the trajectory required for mankind to degrade to the point the antichrist will be appealing to them. Even if the Rapture and Tribulation do not occur for generations it will take time for this slow-fade to occur. Liberal laws, “progressive” leadership and a clear disregard for God’s will is seen all across our society and could certainly be part of this eventual decline.

Given that it's easy to watch our society degrade and panic or fear, but we shouldn't. The Bible clearly indicates a moral and spiritual falling away is a natural progression mankind must go through in order to end-up where God has already told us they will go. That's why I'm providing so much background on the frailties and failures of past governments. To help us understand that man's government has always failed to some degree and ours is no exception. But what we can't allow to happen is let the media and social or political rhetoric command so much of our attention and emotion that we forget why we are here – to share Jesus with a world headed to hell. Throughout history God has always had a remnant of His faithful followers to carry-on. I believe that remnant is now us – the Bible believing, Christ-centered, gospel spreading church. As such, we have a great calling. The command from the Lord to share His message of redemption to a society seeking for answers but stumbled by the enemy. In Revelation 10:11 a mighty angel says to John, ***“You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.”*** This is clear direction to continue spreading the gospel as we seek to ***“...make disciples of all nations...”*** (Matthew 28:19). That's why we must share the gospel while we still can and equip the body of Christ to stand strong, ***“...for I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak...”*** (Ephesians 6:20 / see also Ephesians 4:11-16 / 6:10-20) . Granted, the government's actions and laws are important and we must stand rock-solid to defend what is Biblical, but we must do so with the realization that based on what we see in Revelation the world is not going to get any better. That's why we must share Jesus with as many people as we can, and with the assumption that every elected leader or voter led to salvation will change their own agenda ---- And nothing, not even corrupt politics, liberal agendas or persecution should distract us from that task.

Now, with our head hopefully wrapped around all that, let's look at the verses in that context:

Verse 13:1-2

God, in His infinite power and omniscience, ordains the order of all things. This includes administration of the home (Genesis 2:18-25), government (Genesis 9:1-17) and the church (Acts 2). We must remember, God knows all things and nothing ever

takes Him by surprise. In other words, whatever is happening in governments and society today and throughout history has always been known by God. Given that, Paul tells us to be **"...subject to the governing authorities..."**. This simply means to live as a law abiding citizen. We can certainly be vocal about our beliefs and stand firm to oppose unBiblical agendas, but we cannot resort to anarchy. Why? Because Paul tells us, **"...there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God..."**. God knows exactly who will be in power and how they will lead. But He has also provided sufficient guidance that should enable those administrators and leaders to act and lead in a Godly way. But man is fallible, and if they are lost they are in rebellion against God and will not govern as they should. Sadly, that means a government led by sinful people will inevitably lead to a sinful government, because whether they recognize it or not, they seek after the same fruit that trapped Eve.

So let's think about it this way. Generally speaking, a government, who is the earthly civil authority, "should" be beneficial to society. Government should provide support, infrastructure, police security, military protection, social services and other means of helping the population be safe and prosper. Even a poorly run government should be focused on supporting their people – within the confines of God's direction. That's why the US Government adopted the slogan "In God We Trust", why the Ten Commandments are (or were) prominently displayed in multiple government buildings and why the song *America the Beautiful* includes the verse "God shed his grace on thee." Clearly, our nation and our government were founded on the premise of following God's lead, but that ideal is fading daily from our national conscience. As a result, the way the government "should" be leading is not how they are actually leading. Instead, politicians often have a biased agenda and seek legislation to promote their own ideology. Which, because they are human, can be inherently sinful. But at least in the US, this issue results from the will of the majority. Even the poorest performing leaders are generally elected by a majority of the people. That being the case, the actions and attitudes of the government generally reflect the actions and attitudes of those who elected them. That's why there is so much polar-opposite division in our country today. Our nation is divided across issues that address morality in ways we have not seen before and have prompted discourse that would have been unheard of in past generations. But even when we disagree with the government's position we must be mindful of how we resist. Paul warns us **"...whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God..."**. Why? Because we are to be law abiding citizens unless - and I stress unless - the government's actions require us to sin. Peter and John were faced with this decision when the wicked Sanhedrin directed them to stop preaching the gospel of Jesus, **"So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'"** (Acts 4:18-19). As a result, the group of believers prayed to God for strength to share His gospel in

spite of the government's direction, ***Now Lord, look on their threats, and grant your servants that will all boldness they may speak your word...And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken...***" (Acts 4:29&31a) In this case, the people had every right to pray for God's intervention in their dispute with the government. Instead, they prayed for the strength to share the gospel in spite of the government's actions. Given that example, we might not like a law or what it represents, but unless the government requires us as individuals to do something against God's will, then the law in itself is not causing us to sin. Even so, in today's political climate that stance is often very hard to accept and we feel obligated to do something more. But, if we choose to act we must remember what the word says about love, ***"...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*** (Romans 12:21) That's what we must strive to do and that's why our focus should be on leading others to Christ.

Why? Because *"...We could debate with politicians until we're out of breath and never change their mind. But if we can lead them to Jesus they'll change their own mind."*

Verses 13:3-7

Here Paul re-emphasizes the concept that government in and of itself is not inherently evil. If we as citizens act in a responsible way and seek change through honest and ethical means then we have no reason to fear authority. We might not like what they stand for, but if we are law abiding we have no reason to fear them. In most cases, even the most liberal or inept government still tries to maintain some semblance of law and order. Otherwise anarchy will result. Of course this is not always the case and there are certainly examples of corrupt governments who subjugate and persecute their own people until the point the people must resist. The American Revolution for independence from British tyranny is a prime example where a dictatorial government had to be overthrown because they had total disregard for the welfare of the people. Even Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen to address the civil government (Acts 22:22-29), but as we've already discussed he used that opportunity to share the gospel, not to protest against the leadership or their laws. Why? Because the infrastructure of government is needed. For the most part, governments generally try to protect their populace from theft, murder and other crimes by establishing laws and a justice system. That way, if a government attempts to lead in a Godly way then they will be ***"....God's minister to you for good..."***, because they will seek to protect the people and lead as God commanded. But if you are a criminal then the government will be ***"...God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil...."***. At least that's the way God commands governments to lead. Unfortunately where we find the most division today is when the government oversteps the boundaries set by God in order to impose their own sinful ideologies. This is seen most clearly when a government tries to regulate issues that are clearly established by God. In doing so they politicize the law to

fit their biased ideological agenda and violate God's direction. When that happens it creates conflict and division amongst the people. That's what we're experiencing today.

Governments are like people. God establishes clear boundaries within which man and governments should operate, but He does not make us do it. Just as He allows mankind to reject His offer of grace, God knows man (in our sin nature) will fail to follow the rules He has provided. And that failure often includes how leaders lead. As Paul told the crowd in Athens **"...God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us for in Him we live and move and have our being..."** (Acts 17:24-28). This clearly establishes the fact God is in total control and dictates what "should" be done. But the problem starts when governments fail to **"...seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him..."**. Or worse, as we often see today, leaders will enact unBiblically and biased legislation and then try to spiritualize it to give it legitimacy. Again, that's why I believe **"...if I can lead them to Jesus they'll change their own mind."** But all that said there is a reality we need to consider, **"...For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."** (Ephesians 6:12-13). Our battle is not against human leaders or governments. They are simply a puppet in the enemy's hands and may not even realize it. That's why the Bible calls satan **"...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience..."**. (Ephesians 2:2). The **"...sons of disobedience..."** can be anyone or any institution that blatantly subverses the will of God and the commandments of God and takes it on themselves to lead through their own sinful agenda. **"...And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works..."** (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) But again, what Paul is pointing out is the fact the greatest weapon we have to combat any situation is generally not to physically resist, but to spiritually influence by using **"...the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."** This **"...armor..."** is the "weapons" we have to fight with and are defined by Paul in Ephesians 6:14-19 as: **"...truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word, prayer, perseverance, supplication..."**. Consider those elements, supported by God, and

realize how much more powerful we are than anything you see in social media or hear from politicians. In a word, that's why we must — Be Calm - And Share the Gospel.

There are 433 verses in the book of Romans but Paul only talks about the government in seven (0.016%). The rest of his focus is on salvation and living as a follower of Christ. Granted, we live in a very confusing time. A time when our government seeks legislation to legalize activities prior generations may have never considered. But we must remember this is nothing new. Prayer was banned in schools in 1962, and the murder of unborn innocents was legalized in 1973. What we see today is part of the slow fade into "normalized" sin that will eventually mold a society who is ready to accept the antichrist as their leader. That transition will not happen overnight, but will take generations to degrade to that level. Given that, it's very easy for us to worry and panic over what we see happening. But we can't. We must stand our ground where we can, stay faithful to God's word at all times and pray like the early church, ***Now Lord, look on their threats, and grant your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word...And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken...*** (Acts 4:29&31a).

Above all things is our task to share the true gospel of Jesus. As Erwin Lutzer says in his book "Cries From The Cross", *"The world is not impressed when we malign them with overtones of political self-interest. Remember, at the end of the day, what the world needs is to see Jesus."*

Lesson # 43, The Book of Romans - Chapter 13 verses 8-14

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 13 Paul implores us to ***“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities...”*** (Romans 13:1). Let's be honest; it can be a real challenge for a follower of Christ to adhere to guidance like this because so many actions and ideologies of our government are counter to the commands from our Lord. But maybe that's why Paul places his short discussion on the government immediately after telling us to ***“Bless those who persecute you...”*** (Romans 12:14). On reflection I think his point is, even on the most difficult days we must show the love of Jesus to a world who needs Him so badly.

So given that context, I approached this passage in Romans a little differently than you might expect. Instead of focusing on the ills of our government and what should be changed, I stressed the importance of sharing the gospel with them. I did this with a thought running through my mind:

- *"We could debate with politicians until we're out of breath and never change their mind. But if we can lead them to Jesus they'll change their own mind."*

I truly believe that is our task. Not to confront the government through angry rhetoric or physical anarchy but by sharing the love of Jesus through the beauty of His gospel message. By doing so we should strive to be like the early church, who when persecuted by their government sought strength from God to share His message, ***“Now Lord, look on their threats, and grant your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word”...“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken...”*** (Acts 4:29&31a).

So along those lines I share what Erwin Lutzer says in his book "Cries From The Cross" – *"Have we forgotten that God's power is more clearly seen in the message of the cross than in any political or social plan we might devise?"*

And with that, let's look at the remainder of chapter 13:

Romans 13:8-14

Verses 13:8-10

Now let's continue to explore Paul's guidance for living a life for Christ.

After his short discussion about being ***“...subject to the governing authorities...”*** (Romans 13:1), Paul shifts gears back to guidance for our Christian life and specifically

the topic of love. A topic he dove into back in chapter 12, when he pushed us in the deep end and said ***“Bless those who persecute you...”*** (Romans 12:14). Ouch! That task can be very difficult to accomplish, but nevertheless, it's a task we've been given to do. But the intent of that command is not meant to frustrate or confuse us but serves as a reminder that above all other actions in life our task is to share the true gospel of Jesus with the world. A task that can't be done effectively unless we have the love of Jesus in our hearts. The type of love illustrated by our Lord's command to love someone even if they don't love us back; as if we were loaning them love and expecting it to be returned, ***“...But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them...”*** (Luke 6:32 - see Lesson 41). We don't love because we expect anything in return. We love because ***“...God is love...”*** and our words and actions should reflect God to the world (1 John 4:8). To reinforce this fact Paul reminds us to payback what we have been given, ***“...Render therefore to all their due...”*** (Romans 13:7). He then continues that thought within the context of love and implores us to, ***“...Owe no one anything except to love...”***. This doesn't mean you can't borrow. It means we need to give back what we have borrowed. And to do it in love. In the Beatitudes Jesus said ***“Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”*** (Matthew 5:42). Similarly, the Old Testament provides guidance for borrowing, such as, ***“If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.”*** (Exodus 22:25-26). Paul's point in verse 8 is simply to pay our debts as a visible manifestation of our love for others. Because owing someone and not paying back what we owe can lead to multiple consequences - like distrust, loss of confidence, damaged friendships, financial burden and hypocritical love (see Romans 12:9 and Lesson 41). To avoid these issues we need to honor the agreements we make, not allow ourselves to become entangled in debt we can't repay, and never treat a debt lightly so that it damages our testimony. That's why he says we are to ***“Owe no one anything except to love one another...”***. Love is a key component of our testimony that shows Jesus to the world, so here Paul reminds us not to get ourselves in a situation that would hamper the authenticity of our love towards others. Our efforts to repay what is owed shows our intention to honor the person or institution who allowed us to borrow. That honor is a way of showing our love for them as ***“...our neighbor...”*** who we are supposed to love more than ourselves. (Matthew 22:39). To show the importance of this type of love Paul uses the rest of this verse to link his thoughts to the intent of the Law.

You'll recall from our earlier lessons that the Law (either Mosaic or natural) has no power to forgive sin nor can it impart righteousness. The Law was given to help us recognize our sin, and by doing so, recognize our need for redemption. That said, our attempts to live within the guidance of the Law will result in love, so here Paul makes a statement about the Law we need to understand, ***“...for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”*** This doesn't mean love fulfills the Law for the purpose of earning righteousness (a Jewish misconception). It simply means if we could truly love like Jesus then we would fulfill the tenants provided by the Law because we would not commit the sins highlighted by the Law. In other words, if we could love God and our neighbors the way we're commanded to, then we would not ***“...commit adultery...”*** ***“...murder...”*** ***“...steal...”*** ***“...bear false witness...”*** ***“...covet...”***, or violate any of the

other commandments against God or man. Jesus spoke to this when He was asked which is the greatest commandment, ***"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*** (Matthew 22:37-40). What Jesus was simply doing is summarizing the commands of the Law into two actions: love God above all things, and love others above ourselves. This effort doesn't bring salvation but it shows the world a life lived for Christ. I think Paul is simply reminding us of this to ensure we understand the power of love in our testimony.

Verses 13:11-14

Paul now takes us on a quick trip into end-times prophecy by reminding us to, ***"...awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."*** Paul isn't talking about our justification (personal salvation). Instead, he's talking about the future Rapture. The time when Jesus will return to gather His bride and take us home (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). As Jesus said to the faithful church at Philadelphia, ***"...Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from [save you from] the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."*** (Revelation 3:10) So in that context Paul reminds us here of something we need to consider everyday, ***"The night far spent, the day at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."*** This is counsel we would do well to heed today. Although we don't know when the Rapture will occur, things are certainly happening around the world - politically, socially and spiritually - to indicate we are in the final segment of God's prophetic time table. Given that, the time is at hand for us to snap-out of our comfort and complacency and share the gospel of Jesus with those who are running out of time. Earlier Paul gave us detailed guidance about how to love. Even how to love a government who persecutes us. But now he's stressing the urgency of love because we're running out of time to share the gospel message. He tells us to ***"...cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light..."***. That ***"...darkness..."*** is the falling world around us that ***"...so easily ensnares us..."*** (Hebrews 12:1). How often do we let the condition of our world and our government drag us down? How often do we get frustrated or even fearful of what we see happening around us? Probably a lot. So we need to ***"...cast off..."*** these influences and instead ***"...put on the armor of light..."***, the light who is Jesus so the world can see Him through us. ***"...Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*** (John 8:12). This is essentially the same thing Paul said to the church at Ephesus, ***"...Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*** (Ephesians 6:11-13) Our battle isn't against human governments and society's failures. Our battle is against satan and his influence on the people around us. That's why we are to ***"...put on the armor of light..."***, because that light is Jesus and when we ***"...put on the Lord Jesus***

Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.", we cannot be defeated.

To accomplish this critical task Paul tells us to **"...awake out of sleep..."** and **"...walk properly, as in the day [the light]..."**. This **"...walk..."** is simply our personal testimony when we are alert to the Holy Spirit working in and through us. Paul talks about this idea of being awake and walking in the Spirit:

- To the church at Ephesus, **"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.' See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.**" (Ephesians 5:8-17)
- And to the church at Corinth - **"Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."** (1 Corinthians 15:34)

Likewise, Peter spoke of our walk and being alert (awake) to the darkness around us:

- **"Be sober, be vigilant; [awake] because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."** (1 Peter 5:8-9)

You'll recall Paul talked about our testimony, our **"...walk..."**, in Romans 7:4 when he said that, **"...we should bear fruit to God."** The **"...fruit..."** he's talking about is our personal testimony, **"...that we should bear..."**, which simply means - **"to put forth"** or **"to testify"**. The **"...fruit..."** is the outpouring of our faith through the Holy Spirit, who is working in us and through us so the world may see the impact of Jesus on our lives. Our **"...fruit..."** is the product we **"...bear..."**. It is the outcome of our lives lived for Jesus as we **"...walk properly..."** before a lost world. This **"...walk..."** which **"...bears..."** our **"...fruit..."** is how Paul defines what our life should look like to the world, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."** (Galatians 5:24-25).

This is our life, as a living proclamation of Jesus to the world seen through the actions of our faith. It is simply our faith lived out daily, as the Holy Spirit works in and through us to make Christ known to the world by using us to accomplish His plan. That's why it's so vitally important to guard our testimony every minute of every day and to be equipped so that the **"fruit..."** we **"...bear..."** is a testimony that glorifies God.

Chapters 12 and 13 are timeless and apply directly to our lives today. It is easy to look at the world around us and dream of a simpler time - "*the good 'ole days* - when society in general seemed to be closer to God. But the Lord has seen fit to put us here, and now, for, **"...such a time as this..."** (Esther 4:14b). He didn't elect us to be born at a time when mankind was more obedient and our lives as believers would be easy. He has entrusted us as His ambassadors in a hostile land and just before a great battle ahead. So may our mantra be, **"...Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."** (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Lesson # 44, The Book of Romans - Chapter 14 verses 1-23

Quick Recap:

Chapter 13 was very interesting. Paul starts by commanding us to **"...Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities..."** (Romans 13:1). As difficult as that may be to accept in today's society, Paul gave us this direction immediately after telling us to **"...Bless those who persecute you..."**. (Romans 12:14). But let's remember, Paul said all of this in the context of love, because **"...God is love..."** (1 John 4:8) and therefore we need to show love in every situation so the world can see the love of Jesus through our lives. The Psalmist reminds us **"...love covers all sin..."** (Proverbs 10:12). A fact expressed no more clearly than in the most iconic verse of salvation, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."** (John 3:16) As believers, our primary role in society is to show God's love by spreading the gospel to a world racing to hell at breakneck speed. Of course we could protest and get caught-up in endless political rhetoric, but as Erwin Lutzer says in his book, "Cries From The Cross" – *"Have we forgotten that God's power is more clearly seen in the message of the cross than in any political or social plan we might devise?"*

So why is this increasingly true in today's society?

Because:

- *"We could debate with politicians until we're out of breath and never change their mind. But if we can lead them to Jesus they'll change their own mind."*

Introduction to Chapter 14:

Paul speaks here of living with one another without quarreling (Romans 14:1). We need to remember he was speaking to people from different backgrounds and cultures who were living in a totally hedonistic society (sound familiar?) For them, just as it is for us today, unity in the church and amongst believers is something we must seek and nurture. It is also something the enemy will seek to destroy through conflict and discord. Therefore, **"Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."** (14:19). This is something we should pay close attention to today.

Now, let's continue with Paul's guidance on living a testimony for Jesus.

I felt it was best to cover all 23 verses of chapter 14 in a single lesson. Granted, it's a lot of verses, but taken together they form a single complex thread of thought. So let's dig a little deeper to see what Paul has to say.

Romans 14:1-23

Verses 14:1-4

Let's start with a little context. In chapter 12 Paul talked about love. Even commanding us to **"...Bless those who persecute you..."**. (Romans 12:14). He follows right behind that in chapter 13 with the direction to **"...Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities..."** (Romans 13:1). I thought those two verses were worthy of mentioning again because they put us in the right frame of mind for chapter 14. Paul's discussion of love, particularly when shown in the context of a sinful government, stresses something we should all seek – Unity amongst believers. Admittedly, in today's world that goal seems impossible, but imagine for just a moment (and this is really a far stretch) that there were no partisan politics because all politicians worked together - in unity - for the common good of the people; and... they did so within the Biblical boundaries set by God for man's behavior. Well, as difficult as it is to imagine that type of unity in civil government, we're reminded daily we don't even have that type of unity within the church. There is increasing division within the "church" in general, but often within a single worshiping body or between two well-meaning believers. Paul addresses several examples of this in his epistles, but two thousand years later the condition has not improved. Disunity in the modern church comes in many shades. Sometimes it's significant, with differences in theology, and most specifically over the doctrine of salvation. But disunity might also result from more mundane disagreements, such as Christian music style, or the clothes people wear to church. But sadly, people will be people, and will often find a way to disagree if they can. That's why the Psalmist yearned for a day when Brothers and Sisters would be in unity, **"...Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"** (Psalm 133:1).

The apostle Paul ministered to a group of people from very different backgrounds. On one hand were the Jews. People coming from a culture focused on being hyper-religious and self-righteous, and raised on generations of sacrament and rituals. These traditions would be very hard to pull away from for a new convert to Christianity. On the other hand were the Gentiles, who for the most part had been idol worshiping pagans who were now worshiping the One True God. You can imagine the confusion and possible disunity when these two groups came together as one body but with such different backgrounds. What Paul sought as a unifying element was to equip all believers in the same way so they could collectively spread the gospel in unity. He reminded them of this in Ephesians 4:11-13, **"...And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..."**.

The **"...equipping..."** he talks about is teaching believers to achieve spiritual maturity so, **"...we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God..."** He did this to help us act, **"...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;..."** (Ephesians 4:2-4). His goal was to teach the church to **"...keep the unity..."** as **"...one body..."** while **"...bearing with one another..."**. But this was a difficult task in a congregation with such diverse backgrounds and perceptions.

So Paul starts by telling us what to do, **"1. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things..."**, and, what not to do **2. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him."** In Paul's case, the Jews had a difficult time letting go of their traditional festivals and rituals. Certainly, there was nothing wrong with observing these events as long as they didn't see them as a path to righteousness. On the other hand, the ex-pagan Gentiles had performed sinful religious traditions such as giving offerings of meat to their false idols. This of course could not continue and was even addressed by the Jerusalem Council in their guidance to the early Gentile church, **"...For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols..."**. (Acts 15:28-29). Compliance to this request would seem simple enough, but for a church living in a society where food offered to an idol may have later been sold in the open food market, it was probably a bone of contention. Paul talked about this issue in more detail in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, where he discussed meat offered to false gods and the left-overs sold for food. A "weak" believer might be afraid to eat the meat because it had been used in pagan worship. Somehow thinking it carried with it some evil spell. Whereas a "strong" believer might see no risk in eating the meat because they knew the idol had no power and the meat possessed no evil. This could certainly cause confusion and division between believers with different perceptions, particularly if the weaker saw the stronger do something they thought was sinful. So Paul warns the strong believer not to confuse the weak believer through their actions, and for the weak believer not to judge the strong believer for what they do that may seem sinful when it's not.

So let's think of a contemporary application in today's church. Historically, the "church" (true, Bible believing, Christ centered believers) have been recognized for our conservative, Biblical direction. In other words, we try to live as God directs through His word. But today some view the church as divisive and hateful simply because we stand firm on what the Bible actually says. For example, our stance against abortion and gender-fluidity is viewed negatively even though we are simply upholding clear directives from the One who creates life and establishes gender. We honestly don't

have any malice or hatred against those who believe those things are ok, but our faith is clear on how we believe God directs us to view these issues. So when we resist what is happening, we must do so with love so that our attitude doesn't confuse those who are weaker in their knowledge of God's word, or drive others away from Jesus. Instead, we need to help them understand what God's word really says. Particularly those who claim to be believers but distort God's word to support their own opinion. That's why Paul addressed the issue of eating meat offered to idols by saying, **"...If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat again..."**. (1 Corinthians 8:13). His point was not changing his diet, but to make sure his actions did not confuse those who are weaker in their faith.

So here in Romans Paul uses a common dietary disagreement as a way to discuss the need for unity in the church. A Spirit filled unity he discussed with the church at Corinth, **"12..For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14. For in fact the body is not one member but many."** (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). That's why I added a disclaimer at the beginning of each lesson in chapter 8 and 9 relative to the ongoing debate over the topic of "election",

- *"...To me this is a secondary issue at best. If we believe that salvation comes from faith-alone in Christ-alone, then we should be in unity. How God applies that grace should not be a bone of contention. My prayer is that we can study these chapters without debate."*

I wanted to make sure that topic did not present a platform for disunity.

I think Paul is basically saying the same thing here in Romans. His singular focus was teaching about salvation so people would recognize Jesus as the Messiah and then live their life for Him. He wanted them to understand as believers we **"...are one body..."** as part of the body of Christ. And just as a body's hand should not slap its own face, believers should not be in disunity with one another. Instead, the stronger, more spiritually mature believer, should help the weaker, less spiritually mature believer grow in their faith. The outcome? More spiritually mature believers and fewer disagreements.

The writer of Hebrews uses a similar teaching element to illustrate his readers lack of knowledge of God's word. **"....For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; [His word] and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe..."** (Hebrews 5:12-13). This is a pretty abrupt comment but he was addressing a group who should have been equipped by now, but they were not. The writer calls them **"...babes**

in Christ... [spiritually immature], after he discussed the fact they should be equipped to teach God's word to others, but they can't. That lack of maturity in God's word can easily lead to disagreements and disunity amongst believers. Paul used a similar example with the church at Corinth to highlight the fact they even disagreed whether they should follow Paul or Apollos, ***"...And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?"*** (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). To me, all of these examples are summarized in 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, where Paul highlights their differing backgrounds and perspectives, but emphasizes the fact they should all be focused on the gospel. ***"...For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."***

In one way or another all of these examples point to spiritual immaturity. Not because they weren't saved, but because they were not understanding the ***"...solid food..."*** of God's word because they were still drinking it's ***"...milk..."***, like a baby. Paul's concern is the same as ours. The less equipped our congregation is in handling God's word, the less equipped they will be in using it to handle life. That's why Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, ***"...All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*** The more spiritually ***"...complete..."*** we are, the more equipped we will be to address issues from the same doctrinal position, and in doing so, avoid disunity.

Let me be transparent and give you a real-life example. Several years ago we began to shift from traditional church hymns to more contemporary Christian music. Honestly, I had a hard time with that. I was raised in a traditional Baptist church who sang traditional hymns of worship. My thought was simply, *"If it ain't broke don't fix it."* So one Sunday morning we were in church singing a contemporary song and evidently the look on my face must have reflected my silent opposition. Just at that moment I turned and looked at Sarah, who was probably 10 or 12 years old, and she looked at me and said *"This music makes me feel good."* My heart melted. Here I was scowling at something I thought was wrong while the same music brought joy to my daughter. Then I recalled what the word said about the exuberant worship of David,

- 2 Samuel 6:14-15, ***"...Then David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet."***

- Or Psalm 33:3, **"...Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy..."**.
- Or, 2 Chronicles 5:13, **"...indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever," that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud,..."**

In my case Sarah was the stronger and I was the weaker. Yet, instead of causing **"...disputes over doubtful things..."** she simply told me how God used the music to touch her heart. We were now in unity, and the Lord's house **"...was filled with a cloud..."** as I reflected on worshiping Him.

So that should be our focus. Using the strengths and weaknesses of each other to bring unity amongst believers. But in doing so our ultimate goal should be working together in unity, to, **"...preach Christ crucified..."**. (1 Corinthians 1:23). We need to set aside needless debates and focus our attention on telling our lost world about Jesus. Nothing else would have a greater impact on our society, and nothing would bring more unity across the church than that.

Verses 14:5-9

Here Paul expands his discussion on unity to include the potential disagreement over religious observances. Jews in particular were accustomed to observing specific holy days, events and festivals. Gentiles did too, but theirs had been sinful pagan festivals. So Paul's point again is to focus on Jesus as we **"...observes it to the Lord..."**. His point is, whatever you do or don't do, do it **"...to the Lord..."**. He repeats this over and over for emphasis. Let's think about this by using my earlier example. If people disagree over the style of worship music are they approaching the issue with their focus **"...to the Lord.."**? I wasn't. I was approaching it from my own biased perspective but not considering what it meant to truly worship the Lord with a different style of singing. Or what about disagreements that have split churches over what a person wears to church? Some contend you should come as you are, while others believe you should "Dress to the nines". But either way we should both understand, **"...For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."** (1 Samuel 16:7). What we need to consider is whether or not these debates result from tradition, personal preference or because we believe there is a clear Biblical direction for our opinion? Generally, in this case I think it's mostly tradition and often legalistic tradition. But either way, a secondary issue like this should not be a source of disagreement between believers. That's Paul's point. If a "weak" (Biblically immature) believer listened to two "strong" (Biblically mature) believers argue over such mundane issues would it be confusing to them? I'm

sure it would. I would hate to think what a lost person would think if they listened to some of the heated theology debates that occur over issues like this. They'd probably run as fast as they could to get away from Christians.

So Paul clarifies what our attitudes should be, **"... For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."** Or said another way, we should not live within our own will, but seek to live according to God's will. If we do that we will not foster disunity through debates over mundane issues. That way we will **"...live to the Lord..."** and when we leave this earth we will **"...die to the Lord..."**. What greater epitaph could there be? So, Paul reminds us why we should do this. **9. "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."** Jesus came and died and was resurrected victorious over our sin, and He is our Lord whether we are living or dead. That's the gospel we should share – in unity!

Thank You Jesus.

Verses 14:10-13

Here Paul reminds us not to judge each other for our actions (unless they are sinful and must be dealt with Biblically - see Matthew 18:15-17). Instead, he reminds us we'll all stand before the Bema Seat judgment when Jesus will review our life as a believer to see what we did with our salvation, **"...For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that..."** (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is not the Great White Throne Judgment where those who died without Christ are sentenced to hell. (Revelation 20:11). Instead, this is the judgment of believers to critique our lives. Not for sin, because our sin was already judged on the cross. This will be a judgment to review:

- What we did with our salvation,
- How we applied the gifts God gave us to use for Him
- How we accomplished the tasks He assigned us to bring Him glory
- And how well we brought encouragement and edification to the unity of the body of Christ

This judgment will occur in the future when Jesus will review our life as a believer to see what kind of follower we were and whether or not we were obedient to Him. It will be a judgment of how well we were equipped and how faithful we were to be used. Every believer will stand there so that Jesus can look at us, and say... **"...Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you a ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."** (Matthew 25:21) Or, you might hear Him say, **"You wicked and lazy servant..."**. Both of these examples are believers who will go to heaven. But one will enter as an obedient servant effectively

used by Jesus, but the other will bow his head in regret when they stand before the Lord.

But Paul seems to go a bit further than the believers judgment by quoting Isaiah 45:23, **"...*As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.*"**

This speaks of total and complete unity in the body of Christ, but also reminds us of the glorious Millennial Kingdom when Jesus will reign supreme on earth and literally every knee shall bow to Him.

- A time spoken of by Paul in Philippians 2:8-11 **"...And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."**
- It will be a time when Zechariah declares. **"...Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." ' "** (Zechariah 8:23)

This speaks of the post-Tribulation unity of believers in the Kingdom of Jesus on earth. This is the time Jesus pointed to by giving us a vision of the future when He taught us to pray, **"...Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven..."** (Matthew 6:10). So in that context of total unity in Jesus, Paul reminds us again, **"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way."** He implores us to be one in heart. The heart of Jesus. So that we can share that heart with a dying world. Otherwise, our grumbling can result in a **"...stumbling block..."** to others which could confuse the spiritually weak or drive the lost away from Jesus.

In closing, Paul gives us actions to guide our paths towards unity.

Verses 14:14-18

By saying **"...convinced by the Lord Jesus..."** Paul is letting us know this is not just his opinion, but is the result of the Holy Spirit working in his heart. Paul's writings became God's word, which simply means his words were directly inspired by God. As Peter says, **"...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit..."** (2 Peter 1:21). Paul confirms this for himself in Galatians 1:12, **"...For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ..."** In other words, we need to

take this guidance, and all scripture very seriously, as coming directly from the Lord. Paul's mention of **"...unclean..."** reminds us of a hard lesson taught to Peter in the Acts 10 about his vision of clean versus unclean things. In his vision God clarified both Jewish believers (that Peter saw as clean) and Gentile believers (that Peter saw as unclean) were both clean in God's eyes, **"...And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleaned you must not call common.'" (Acts 10:15).** God created nothing unclean. Our uncleanness is a product of our sin, and our only cleanliness comes through our faith in Christ. Just as the multitudes before the throne in Revelation, we are those who, **"...washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."** (Revelation 7:14). But then Paul warns us, **"...but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean..."**. In other words, if something seems sinful to you then don't do it, because you could become a stumbling block to others. So, if your heart tells you to avoid something that is not sinful, but the fact you do it may confuse others to stumble or sin themselves, then consider it **"...unclean..."** and avoid it.

So Paul reiterates, don't confuse your Brother with actions - that are not actually sinful - but in themselves could be confusing to someone of weaker faith. As an example I go back to the seemingly endless debates over theological issues like "election". In studying for my lessons on chapters 8 and 9 I probably spent over one hundred hours reading and watching theologians debate (heated at times) these topics to prove their own theological interpretation. Is this sinful? No, not really. But if an immature believer or a lost person were to watch those debates it might cause them to stumble. In that case, the theologian's time would have been so much more Kingdom fruitful if they spent that energy and emotion spreading the gospel. So Paul reminds us **"...the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men."** Our goal should be sharing **"...righteousness and peace and joy..."** with those around us, because these actions bring glory to God. Now, given that context, go back to Paul's direction: **"...Bless those who persecute you..."**. (Romans 12:14), and **"...Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities..."** (Romans 13:1). Doesn't that now make more sense when you think about how our actions can cause others to stumble. Even the methods we use to resist our declining morals can be seen by others as discord and hate. And when our actions appear to be hateful they can certainly stumble weaker believers or cause the lost to want nothing to do with Christianity.

Verses 14:19-21

In this chapter Paul used examples of dietary disagreements to make his point, but he could have used many other examples that cause disunity or confusion. That's why we must always remember, the world is watching us to see how we will respond, and what they see can either draw them to Jesus or push them away. That doesn't mean we

shouldn't stand our ground against sinful issues, but political rancor and heated debates are the type of actions that often make Christians look like hypocrites. That's why Paul says we should avoid **"...anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak..."**. In today's culture words are often meaningless. That's why our actions to **"...Bless those who persecute you..."**. (Romans 12:14) will stand the test of time.

Verses 14:22-23

So what is the root of all this? **"...faith..."**. Here Paul hits below the knees and asks **"...Do you have faith?..."** Or maybe said another way, **"...Do you really believe God is in control?..."** Sometimes I wonder what we really think. If you take a few minutes to watch how issues are contested in our society, it's like a circus. Everybody running around with their hair on fire, yelling, pointing fingers and condemning each other. And it doesn't seem to matter whether you're on the left or right side of the track, everyone seems to fall into the same hateful pattern. It's comical, but oh so tragic. I think sometimes we think what's happening in the world takes God by surprise. Like maybe, His whole plan is coming apart at the seams and we have to help glue it back together. But in reality, this is His plan. God is very clear how mankind will end-up, so what we see happening is the sinful downside to get them there. Why? So that Jesus can retrieve His bride, take His own vengeance on those who reject Him, and then create an eternal home for His faithful followers.

So... **"...Do you have faith?..."** Are you confident God knows what He's doing and is fully in control? If so, then **"...Have it to yourself before God..."**. Share His love, share the gospel, and let the world know who they need to turn to.

Before we leave this lesson let's focus on another benefit of being in unity. We obviously live in a troubling society and it's so easy to become frustrated or even fearful. Instead, we have something the rest of the world doesn't have. The ability to lean on or support Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Proverbs 27:17 says, **"...As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."** I believe this applies to Brothers or Sisters as we come alongside one another for strength and encouragement. Those who are physically stronger should help those who are physically weaker. Likewise, those who are spiritually stronger should help those who are spiritually weaker. We need to face our troubling world shoulder to shoulder, lifting each other's burdens, deflecting each other's fears and ministering to those who need help spiritually. If you look around you'll see a world fighting over every issue you can imagine, and as they do they divide and segregate into more and more self-centered segments of society. But not us. We need to be in Christ and in unity so that we can represent Jesus on this earth, standing tall without fear.

So...turn off the depressing news and open the encouraging word of God. You will find no better weapon to defeat your fear.

Lesson # 45, The Book of Romans - Chapter 15 verses 1-13

Quick Recap:

We studied all of Chapter 14 in one lesson because all fourteen verses dealt with a single complex topic – Unity. Paul started his discussion with an odd statement, **"...1. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables."** (Romans 14:1-2). To a first century Roman reader this would make perfect sense. Paul probably used this as a real-life illustration because meat was sold in the food market after it had been used as an offering to pagan idols. His point was, a weaker believer might feel it was sinful to eat this meat because it was used in pagan worship and may have some imparted evil. On the other hand, someone with stronger faith might buy the meat because they knew the idol was a false god and has no power. Yet, in eating the meat the spiritually stronger believer might confuse the spiritually weaker believer because the weaker might see it as a sin. Paul's point in using this example is that mature believers should be careful not to allow their actions to confuse less mature believers. A situation that might result in disunity. – Can you think of something you do that might confuse a less mature believer?

Paul's focus on unity is to help us understand the Psalmist desire, **"...how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"** (Psalm 133:1). So, he asks **"...why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother?"** (Romans 14:10). This is something many Christians do even today that can quickly create disunity in the body. Paul then reminds us why this is so important, **"...For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ..." "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."** (Romans 14:11-12). This is talking about the Bema Seat Judgment every believer will go through so Jesus can review how we lived our life as His followers. (See 2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul's point seems to be our efforts to bring unity (or create disunity) in the body will probably be a topic of discussion between us and the Lord.

So, to help us achieve unity in the body Paul provides several commands:

- 1a. **"Receive one who is weak in the faith..."**
- 1b. **"...but not to disputes over doubtful things..."**
- 13. **"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore..."**
- 16. **"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil..."**
- 19. **"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."**

Introduction to Chapter 15:

Paul reminds us of our reliance on God's word and our hope in Christ, **"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."** (Romans 15:4). He further emphasizes unity among believers by asking us to be: **"...like-minded toward one another..."**, and to **"...be with one mind..."** as we, **"...abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit..."**. (Romans 15:6,7,13).

Paul then shares his desire to come to Rome. But first he will return to Jerusalem to carry a donation given for them by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Apparently the church at Jerusalem was going through a difficult time so churches in other regions offered to help. He also speaks here of his desire to go to Spain (Tarshish) with plans to stop in Rome along the way - possibly for their assistance (Romans 15:24). He then asks for prayer for the difficult mission ahead. A difficulty that would be much greater than he now anticipated.

Let's begin Chapter 15 where Paul continues his instructions for living as a follower of Christ.

Romans 15:1-13

Verses 15:1-3

Paul continues his discussion on unity amongst believers by using the terms **"...strong..."** and **"...weak..."** as a measure of spiritual maturity. He directs those who are more spiritually mature to be patient and helpful with those who are not. Here Paul uses two words that merit a little more attention to gain their full meaning:

- **"...bear..."** – The Greek word is *"Bastazein"* which means *"To take up - To carry"*. We often think of the word to mean *"to put up with"*, *"to endure"*, or *"to tolerate"*. For example, *"Please bear with me."* But it means much more than that. It tells us we should take up and help carry the weaknesses and burdens of others.
- **".. scruples..."** - The KJV uses the word *"Infirmities"*. The NIV uses *"failings"*. In either case the root word is translated from the Greek *"Asthenemata"* which means *"To be weak - Without strength"*. The root of the same word used in Romans 14:1, **"...Receive one who is weak in the faith..."**

So, looking at the verse from this context tells us to do more than simply put up with or tolerate the spiritual weaknesses of others. Instead, we should **"...bear..."** them, by coming alongside the weaker believer to help shoulder the weight of their weakness and

help them grow. And we should not do this to **"...please ourselves..."** but to bring **"...edification..."** to each other. This is basically the same thing Paul said earlier, **"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."** (Romans 14:19). To edify is to lift up and encourage. So as we **"...bear..."** another's weakness we should also encourage them. Paul then reminds us we learned this lesson from Jesus. **"...3. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.'"** Here Paul quotes from Psalm 69:9 as an example of the ridicule and shame Jesus accepted for us. It reminds us that Jesus did not come to the world to **"...please Himself..."**. He came to die for the sins of the world, and in doing so, fulfilled God's plan of redemption, **"...because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent me."** (John 5:30). Jesus is certainly the stronger and we are the weaker, yet He **"...who Himself bore our sins in His own body..."** was willing to give His life for us. (1 Peter 2:24a) But in doing so, He also accepted the punishment that should have been ours. Likewise, we do not help each other to **"...please ourselves..."** but to do the will of God and to show the love of Jesus.

Verses 14:4-6

Christians in the Church Age are not under the Old Testament Law, but the moral and spiritual guidance provided by the Law has not changed. Likewise, all Scripture is provided to help us. As Paul tells Timothy, **"...All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). For the most part **"...Scripture..."** in Paul's day was the Old Testament. Certainly they had some of the more recent writings and letters from Paul and others, but generally when they made reference to Scripture it was the Old Testament. So here in Romans Paul reminds us, **"...whatever things were written before [in the past] were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."** What an amazing statement. Reading God's word not only enables our **"...learning..."**, but it gives us **"...patience..."**, **"...comfort..."**, and **"...hope..."**. These attributes will provide what we need in order to **"...bear..."** one another's burdens and bring unity to the body. How is that possible? Because, **"...All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..."** (2 Timothy 3:16). The original Greek term in this verse for **"...inspiration..."** describes Scripture as **"Theopneustus"**, or, **"God breathed"**. The very breath of God. That's why it brings us **"...patience..."**, **"...comfort..."**, and **"...hope..."**, and...that's why these elements might be missing in your life if you are not in God's word every day. Paul then reminds us our Lord is **"...the God of patience and comfort..."** who will **"...grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus..."**. This is the unity we seek. To be **"...like-minded toward one another..."**. But not of ourselves, but **"...according to Christ Jesus..."**. This unity in Christ is what allows us to be of **"...one**

mind and one mouth...", in other words, what we think and say, as we seek to ***"...glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** This is why gathering as a congregation for worship and fellowship is so important. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, ***"...And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, [edifying] not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, [in unity] and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."*** (Hebrews 10:24-25). This verse confirms that gathering in love brings the unity Jesus desires us to have. That's what Jesus meant when He said, ***"...For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*** (Matthew 18:20). As believers, Jesus is always with us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, but, when we are gathered together in corporate worship with ***"...one mind and one mouth..."***, and ***"...in My name..."*** Jesus works in and through us as a body to bring unity. And when that happens it's a beautiful thing.

Verse 14:7

"7. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."

Paul continues his theme of unity in Jesus:

- 12:9 - ***"Let love be without hypocrisy..."***
- 12:10 - ***"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..."***
- 13:10 - ***"Owe no one anything except to love one another..."***
- 14:1 - ***"Receive one who is weak in the faith..."***
- 14:19 - ***"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another..."***
- 15:1 - ***"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak..."***
- 15:2 - ***"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good..."***
- 15:7 - ***"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us..."***

So in that context Paul encourages us to accept one another ***"...just as Christ also received us..."***. So, let's think about that. How did Jesus receive us? Well, with all of our failures and weaknesses. Remember, ***"...But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** (Romans 5:8). Jesus not only accepted our weaknesses but He took our weaknesses to the cross that through Him we could have the power of God in our lives. So given that. What does unity mean? It means that we accept one another as Christ accepted us - failures and all. And in doing so, we show the love of Jesus that is in us to build each other up, bear each other's burdens and help each other grow in the knowledge of our Lord. In that way our unity is ***"...to the glory of God."***

Thank You Jesus!

Verses 14:8-12

One of the chief lessons of Paul's letter to Rome is the fact Jews and ex-pagan Gentiles are one body in God's eyes once we are saved, **"...For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."** (Romans 10:12). But here, Paul reminds his readers Jesus was born a Jew, as **"...a servant to the circumcision..."**, and as such He was circumcised under the Law given to Abraham (Luke 2:22 / Genesis 17:10). He came as a Jew because God had initially called Israel to be His messengers to the world. **"...To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."** (Isaiah 49:6). It was their task to carry God's message of sacrificial redemption but they failed. Instead, they hoarded the knowledge they were given and added complicated Rabbinical teaching to the point they did not recognize the Messiah when He came. Because, **"...He came to His own, [Israel] and His own did not receive Him..."** (John 1:11). So Jesus came as a Shepherd to regather His sheep. **"...to the lost sheep of the house of Israel..."** (Matthew 15:24). To restore them to their intended role of messenger. Instead, they crucified Him. But, even so there were **"...promises made to the fathers..."** that would not change. God had declared to Abraham, **"...And in you all the families of the earth (Jews and Gentiles) shall be blessed..."** (Genesis 12:3). And that promise still stood **"...that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy..."**

- To remind us of this Paul then quotes several Old Testament passages - **"...as it is written:"**
 - 2 Samuel 22:50 / Psalm 18:49 - **"For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name."**
 - Deuteronomy 32:43 - **"10. And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"**
 - Psalm 117:1 - **"11. And again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"**
 - Isaiah 11:10 - **"12. And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope."**

By quoting these Old Testament promises Paul confirms God's timeless plan for unity amongst believers. The point being, if it was His plan to consolidate hyper-religious Jews with ex-pagan idol worshipping Gentiles, with vastly different and ununified backgrounds, then it is clearly His desire for us to have unity within the body of Christ. He then ends this passage with a beautiful prayer of hope and unity, **"13. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."**

But what about you? Do you seek to glorify God by promoting unity amongst believers?

Let's examine ourselves:

- Do we criticize?
- Do we find fault in others?
- Do we look for something to complain about?
- Do we gossip?
- Do we listen to gossip?
- Do we simply tolerate those of weaker faith or knowledge?
- Do we lack the real love of Jesus?
- Do we look down on others?
- Do we fail to forgive?

Or,

- Do we encourage and edify?
- Do we find the good in others?
- Do we help resolve issues rather than criticize them?
- Do we ask others not to share gossip with us?
- Do we help those of weaker faith learn to be stronger?
- Do we, **"...love without hypocrisy..."** (Romans 12:9)
- Are we, **"...kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love..."** (Romans 12:10)
- Do we, **"...love one another..."** (Romans 13:10)
- Do we, **"Receive one who is weak in the faith..."** (Romans 14:10)
- Do we, **"...pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another..."** (Romans 14:19)
- And do we, **"...receive one another, just as Christ also received us..."** (Romans 15:7)

It's probably a good idea to occasionally have a Bema Seat Judgment in our own mind. Just to assess how we're doing and then self-correct as needed.

Lesson # 46, The Book of Romans - Chapter 15 verses 14-21

Quick Recap:

In the first part of Chapter 15 Paul continued his discussion of **"...strong..."** and **"...weak..."** believers to contrast those who are spiritually mature and those who are less spiritually mature (Romans 15:1). His purpose is to create unity between believers with different backgrounds and perspectives. He asks the stronger believers to **"...bear with..."** those who are weaker (Romans 15:2). This doesn't mean to simply tolerate them, but instead to help **"...bear..."** the weight of their weakness and to help them grow in the faith. To do this we are to **"...please his neighbor..."**, by encouraging and edifying one another (Romans 15:2). Paul then reminds us this is exactly what Jesus did when He took our punishment on Himself to save us. He went to the cross with all of our failures and **"...bore our sins in His own body..."** (1 Peter 2:24). Paul then reminds us our ability to unify the body comes from God's word where we receive **"...learning..."**, **"...patience..."**, **"...comfort..."** and **"...hope..."** (Romans 15:4-5), so we can be of **"...one mind and one mouth..."** (Romans 15:6).

Most importantly, Paul reminds us to **"...receive one another, just as Christ also received us..."** (Romans 15:7). This is a reminder that Jesus went to the cross for our sin and failures in order to redeem us so that we can be in unity with Him. That's why it's so important to be in unity with each other.

Now, let's continue as Paul begins to bring his letter to a close.

Romans 15:14-21

Verse 15:14

In chapter 1 Paul started his letter to the church in Rome by declaring, **"...First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."** (Romans 1:8). That's such an amazing statement. A church in one of the most pagan and hedonistic cities in history had faith so strong the Apostle Paul said it was spoken of **"...throughout the whole world."** There are a couple of thoughts on why Paul might have said that. He could have been reflecting on their strong devotion to Jesus and the outpouring of their ministry. But it's also possible they were known for being persecuted and surviving in such a hostile environment. We know from Acts 18:1-2 Aquila and Pricilla, along with other Jews and Christians, were driven out of Rome by Emperor Claudius about 49AD. That was just a few years before Paul wrote his letter to Rome. Which means the Christians living there were probably in a place they were not wanted. In fact, it was only a few years later, around 64AD, when Emperor Nero began widespread public execution of Christians - including Paul. The

point is, whatever the reason for Paul's comment, I think we can learn something from a church in such an inhospitable place whose **"...faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."**

What an amazing testimony.

But when I think about a church that is faithful under persecution I think of Smyrna. A church recognized by Jesus as having great faith under pressure. As Jesus said of them in Revelation 2:9-10 , **"...I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days [meaning for a short time]. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."** Pay close attention to what Jesus says about them, **"...you are rich..."**, in the same sentence where He recognizes their **"...tribulation, and poverty..."**. In other words, their spiritual wealth was not measured by their facility, the size of their membership or even their influence. Their wealth is measured by their faith and endurance under persecution. That's important for us to recognize, because of the seven churches listed in Revelation, only two were faithful; Smyrna and Philadelphia, who were faithful despite persecution.

But I also think the characterization of the churches at Philadelphia, Smyrna and even Rome could be applied to churches in any age who remain faithful to Jesus during great trials. That's because endurance under persecution can come in many forms.

Let's think about a few examples:

- What about churches who remain faithful when they are struggling financially?
- Or, churches dealing with sickness and death in their congregation?
- Or maybe churches that hold-to solid Biblical truth during doctrinal disagreements?
- Or, churches who survive major leadership changes?
- Or, churches who feel pressured by living in a fallen society, yet they stay true to God's Biblical direction?

All of these examples could be viewed as churches who survive and maybe even prosper during times of great trial. Churches who stayed true to God's word and were an effective witness to the world. I'm sure Paul would be proud of them all.

But we know why Paul recognized the church at Rome for their outstanding faith. Because they were, **"...full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."** These are the characteristics that enabled their strong faith to persevere:

- **"...goodness..."**
 - They do good to one another
 - They are in unity
- **"...knowledge..."**
 - They have the knowledge of God's word. In fact they are **"...filled..."** with it.
 - That means they are diligent students and teachers.
 - It also means they can stand on God's word during times of great trials.
- **"...admonish..."**
 - They encourage one another to help each other get through tough times and to stay in unity.
 - It also means they could encourage each other to stay spiritually strong in an environment overrun by the temptation of sin.

This is exactly why, in these troubled times, we are seeking to Biblically equip the church at Southside. So that our faith will endure and prosper during difficult times like these.

Verses 15:15

Here Paul explains the intent of his letter using a word translated in English as **"...boldly..."**; *"Telmeroteron"* in Greek. A word that means *"freely and with confidence..."*. Paul held nothing back. Although he had never been to Rome he wrote to them in a way to give them what they needed in order to truly understand salvation. Remember, for the most part Paul was writing to people who had previously been self-righteous Jews or ex-idol worshipping pagans. Both came with a lot of baggage that could easily cause them to stumble. Particularly under the pressure of living in a very sinful society. So in his letter to Rome Paul presents a very detailed explanation of the gospel in order to dispel their prior notion of salvation through religion or works. This would be a tough pill to swallow for some, but God knew that, so He inspired Paul to write a letter so powerful that after 2,000 years it still stands as the pinnacle thesis on salvation. Paul knew how important it was to share a clear and detailed story of God's redemptive grace. That's because of all people God could have chosen to be an Apostle, He selected a man who killed Christians. This meant Paul knew first-hand just how powerful grace really is, **"...because of the grace given to me by God..."**. The grace he spoke about to Timothy, **"...And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."** (1 Timothy 1:12-14). This is grace that would forgive even him, a murderer of Christians,

and give him the **"...grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name..."** (Romans 1:5)

Verse 15:16

Here Paul uses two words to describe his role:

- **"...minister..."**,
 - "Leitourgon", in Greek which describes a public servant role.
- **"...ministering..."**,
 - "Hierourgouta", in Greek, which is used nowhere else in the New Testament, and means an *"Administrator of sacred rights"*

Paul certainly had a unique role as a "Pastor-Servant". As his choice of words imply he was both a servant and one chosen to clarify the sacred truths of salvation. Recall, when Jesus selected Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles He said, **"...he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."** (Acts 9:15-16). This role would be unique from two perspectives. First, Paul, a Pharisee Jew and hater of Christians, would be the Lord's primary witness to the Gentiles, but also, because Paul was told right up-front he was going to suffer. He would have clearly understood what that meant because he had been a source of so much suffering amongst Christians. Yet Paul was obedient and did as the Lord commanded to accomplish his unique calling. Like a Levitical priest, Paul was **"...ministering..."** (*Hierourgouta*) for God by figuratively bringing an offering to God in the form of converted souls of Gentile believers. So that an **"...offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."** What a unique way to look at witnessing. As a believer we share the gospel of Jesus and *"lead people to the Lord"* where they come before His throne of grace for salvation. Further, in this later part of his letter Paul provides instructions for Christian living. This would have helped them to grow spiritually as they were **"...sanctified by the Holy Spirit..."**.

Verse 15:17-21

Paul is not boasting about himself. He made that clear to the church at Galatia, **"...But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."** (Galatians 6:14). Instead of boasting about his own efforts Paul is giving the glory to Jesus for what He had done through Paul so that **"...he who glories, let him glory in the Lord."** (2 Corinthians 10:17). This is not boasting about any success of his own, but is boasting **"...in the things which pertain to the Lord."** He sought only to glorify Jesus so **"...in**

all things He may have preeminence." (Colossians 1:18b). He summarizes his intent by confirming, ***18. "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient..."***. Paul was focused only on the work of Jesus through him and not through any ***"...word and deed..."*** of his own. Paul's task was to bring the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, but his primary mission was to do what Israel had failed to do -- take the message of God's redemptive grace to the world. Paul sought no titles or accolades for the work he did, but sought only to let the Holy Spirit work in and through Him to declare the gospel.

Paul then reminds us that God worked through the Apostles ***"...in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God..."***. In the days before there was a complete written word God gave early messengers the ability to show God's power. These ***"...signs and wonders..."*** (miracles) were no longer needed after the canon of scripture was revealed because scripture itself fully reveals the power of God without the need for extra proof. In any case, miracles could sometimes be easily misinterpreted and even distract people from the true message. Jesus had multitudes of people follow Him for healing, ***"...and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan."*** (Matthew 4:24-25). Yet, even though multitudes followed Him to seek healing, very few probably believed that He is the Messiah. In fact, after all the miracles He did the Jews still demanded His execution. Likewise, when Paul was in Lystra he ***"...stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."*** (Acts 14:3). The ***"...signs and wonders..."*** Paul was able to do were used to illustrate God's power as they were sharing ***"...the word of His grace..."*** (the gospel). But sometimes people misunderstood what Paul was doing. For example, when he healed a lame man, ***"...Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes."*** (Acts 14:11-13). Paul and Barnabas were sharing the gospel but when the people saw Paul heal the man they interpreted that to mean Paul and Barnabas were gods. In other words, they missed the whole point of what Paul was saying. — Certainly God still heals today and God still does miracles, but be very wary of anyone who claims to have apostolic gifts. God's word is now completely revealed to us, with all of His powers and promises fully explained. So we do not need people to prove God's power through some miraculous sign. The only sign we need is our faith in the work of Jesus on the cross. That's why Paul says ***"...For Jews request a sign, and Greeks***

seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified,..." (1 Corinthians 1:22-23a). If we need proof, then we don't have faith. Because ***"...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*** (Hebrews 11:1)

During his ministry Paul traveled throughout the Mediterranean region. From Israel, to modern day Turkey, Greece and Italy he spread the gospel and planted churches across a wide segment of the known world. And as he did he met with great opposition, ***"...Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches..."*** (2 Corinthians 11:24-28) Paul wasn't complaining or seeking sympathy. Instead, he was showing the power of God in his life that enabled him to endure the suffering and say, ***"...I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."*** Here he relates that his difficult journey took him to ***"...Illyricum..."***. An area in his day that was also known as "Dalmatia". Interestingly, this is a region located north of Greece in what is today Albania, Croatia and Serbia. His description ***"...from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum..."*** is about 1,400 miles. But that was only part of his ministry that some estimate took Paul over ten thousand miles. Most on foot and much of it without adequate food or a place to live. Why such a long route? ***20. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,..."***. In other words, Paul was seeking "unreached people groups" ***"...not where Christ was named..."***, in order to take the gospel to places it had not been heard before. As an Apostle his role was more than just building on another person's ministry, but was to seek new, unplowed ground to tend and to plant the initial seeds. To help explain this goal he quotes from Isaiah 52:15, ***21. "...but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."***

And that is the reason our mission effort at Southside has shifted to focus on unreached people today. So, ***"...those who have not heard shall understand..."***. As Paul had stated earlier in his letter,

- ***"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"*** (Romans 10:14-15 / quoting Isaiah 52:7) ---- And so we go...

Lesson # 47, The Book of Romans - Chapter 15 verses 22-33

Quick Recap:

In the previous section of Chapter 15 Paul acknowledged the strong faith of the church in Rome. A church that existed in one of the most sinful and bloodthirsty societies in history. Paul recognized the fact they were **"...full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."** (Romans 15:14). This is remarkable considering the social environment they lived in and the broad differences in their Jewish or pagan backgrounds. But it also reflects the unity Paul sought to inspire in these early believers. Paul saw his mission being unique because he viewed each convert to Christianity as an **"...offering of the Gentiles..."** presented before the throne of God (Romans 15:16). Even so, Paul did not see his success as a result of his own efforts. Instead, he clarifies, **"...For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient..."** (Romans 15:18).

Now, let's read the remainder of Chapter 15.

Romans 15:22-33

Verses 15:22-24

Here Paul references back to his prior comment about his extensive ministry travels, **"...from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum..."** where he **"...fully preached the gospel of Christ..."** (Romans 15:19). Paul's ministry took him throughout the Mediterranean region, from Israel to Greece, Turkey, Italy and the surrounding countries. A journey of many years, many miles and many sufferings as he sought to carry God's message to unreached people. He explained his intent to do this in verse 20, **"...I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named..."**. This reflects a desire to spread the gospel to places it had not been preached before. A plan he backed with scripture by paraphrasing Isaiah 52:15, **"...To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."** (Romans 15:21)

Paul's comment in verse 22 is very interesting. He says he was, **"...much hindered from coming to you..."**. In the original Greek the word **"...hindered..."** "enekoptomen" means to "impede, detain, interrupt, hinder - "by introducing an obstacle that stands sharply in the way of a moving object". I find it fascinating that Paul was somehow **"...hindered..."** from going someplace he wanted to go. Back in Lesson # 6 we briefly reviewed a timeline of Paul's extensive travel, from his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus until the time of his death. A span of time from approximately 35 AD to 68 AD. Then in Lesson # 9 we discussed a statement made by Paul directly related to his comment here in verses 22-24.

For that discussion let's go back to an excerpt from Lesson # 9.

- **"...13. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles...."** Apparently Paul had desired to go to Rome for some time but had been, **"...hindered..."** over and over. We don't know the details but Paul was obviously prevented from traveling to Rome even though he had planned to go, **"...often..."**. Later in chapter 15 he will explain his desire to come through Rome on his way to Spain. Although several early church manuscripts and writers indicate Paul traveled to Spain, the Bible is unclear whether or not he ever got that far west. But what is clear is that he hoped the church in Rome would assist him in his efforts to get there (Romans 15:23-25). And yet, even though he had, **"...a great desire these many years to come to you,..."** (Romans 15:23) at least for now he had been prevented from going. But prevented how and by whom? Paul isn't clear, but I think it's probably safe to assume it was not God's will for Paul to go to Rome - at least not yet - even though he kept trying and hoping, **"...now at last I may find some way in the will of God to come to you."**
- I find his failure to achieve his desire to be very encouraging. How many times are there in our own walk with Christ when things don't go exactly like we planned? Maybe a ministry you were part of, or a service you provided just didn't pan out like you wanted. But why? You were doing it for the Lord - right? Well...maybe, and maybe not. Maybe you were doing it correctly but it was not something God had planned for you - at least not at that time. Obviously Paul's desire to go to Rome was honorable as he sought to bring the gospel to a new area, but as we will see later, it eventually happened in God's timing and in God's way. It is in these times in our own lives when we have to prayerfully step back from our own plans and seek the plan God intends for us to do. (Jeremiah 29:11). But what I also find interesting and encouraging, is apparently Paul didn't know why either. Here is a man called by God, trained by Jesus, taken into heaven, and yet, he had tried many times to go to Rome but, **"...was hindered.."** from doing so. It would seem that Paul, of all people, would know exactly what God wanted him to do. But obviously he didn't. Yet he didn't give up. He continued in his desire to go even though his efforts had been thwarted many times.
- But why did he want to go so badly? **"...that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles..."**. His comment, **"...among the other Gentiles."** may indicate the intended purpose of his epistle was aimed primarily at Gentiles, but in either case his desire was to, **"...have some fruit among you,..."**. This is the intended fruit of his ministry - any ministry - to bring

lost souls to Jesus and to encourage and disciple their faith. To Paul the city of Rome must have seemed like an amazing mission field. Millions of lost souls with a vibrant young church already faithfully rooted in their midst. This is the harvest he sought. A harvest just like Jesus spoke of when He said, **"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few, therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold I send you out as lambs among wolves."** (Luke 10:2-3) Or the Lord's promise of a fruitful gathering, **"I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"** (John 4:35) This is the harvest Paul sought and he viewed the city of Rome as a fertile field for the picking. That's why he didn't give up trying to get there. Because he knew, **"...in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."** (Galatians 6:9)

It's unclear whether or not Paul ever made it to Spain, but he certainly had **"...a great desire..."** to go to Rome for **"...many years..."** but as we have seen he was **"...hindered..."**. In Acts 16 we get a little more insight into what (or who) the hindering barrier might have been. **"...Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia** [Asia Minor - modern Turkey]. **After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them."** (Acts 16:6-10). What an amazing story. Paul, Silas and Timothy clearly intended to travel through Asia Minor, but **"...they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit..."**. Then they tried to enter Bithynia, **"...but the Spirit did not permit them..."**. How interesting. Paul wanted to go to these two areas but the Holy Spirit **"...hindered..."** them and would not let them go. The Bible doesn't tell us how or why, but clearly the Holy Spirit was correcting their course to send them where He wanted them to go. Why? Because God knows all things, so by preventing Paul from going to Asia Minor he went instead to Macedonia in Greece, which is in Europe. And from there - just as the Lord knew it would - the gospel spread from Europe throughout the world. It's very possible the same thing may have happened when Paul was **"...hindered..."** from going to Rome, so he was prevented until God's timeline was revealed.

But eventually Paul made it to Rome, although probably not in the way he intended. He went in chains as a prisoner of the Roman Empire. He finally arrived after a long arduous journey that included a shipwreck, when he was washed ashore on the Island of Malta and from there was sent on to Rome (Acts 27-28). There he became a prisoner but as a Roman citizen he was placed under house arrest and allowed to meet with other believers. It was during this time of imprisonment when Paul is believed to have written his "Prison Epistles", Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Phillipians.

We should probably think about this lesson from Paul. Maybe there are times in our own lives when it seems there are barriers restricting our plans. It is in those moments when we should be alert to God's direction, because He might want us to change our course like He did Paul's.

Verses 15:25-29

We know from Acts 16:9, Acts 20:1 and 1 Thessalonians 1:7, Paul ministered in both the Macedonia and Achaia regions in north and south/western Greece. It was there Paul collected offerings from the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth and other churches, to be used to support fellow believers in Jerusalem. Paul recorded this event in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. This is a beautiful lesson on Christian giving and the love shown for other believers who were in need. The Christian church in Jerusalem was located in the strongest area of Jewish culture and would therefore be outcasts. The fact Paul describes them as **"...poor among the saints..."** gives us an indication of their poverty. The gift to Jerusalem, given in love, was accepted by Paul and Titus (Romans 15:26). A story he now relates to the Romans. In a sense Paul saw this action as paying a debt because the, **"...Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things."** In other words, the Gentiles had benefited from the Judeo-Christian **"...spiritual things..."** (the Law, God's word, the Messiah) and now they are showing their love and appreciation through **"...material things..."**. This is a task Paul wanted to complete before traveling to Rome on his way to Spain.

Verses 15:30-33

Paul now asks for prayers. As always, his journeys were risky but going to Jerusalem may have been the most risky of all. We see this in Acts chapter 20, **"...And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."** (Acts 20:22-24). The Holy Spirit had warned Paul **"...chains and tribulations await me..."**, yet he went anyway. Their prayers were answered. The gift was delivered and Paul was not killed. But he was imprisoned for causing an uprising. An event that would eventually lead him to Rome. But not as he intended, **"...with joy..."** and to **"...be refreshed together with you..."**. Instead, he finally made it to Rome – in chains.

Lesson # 48, The Book of Romans - Chapter 16 verses 1-16

Quick Recap:

In chapter 15 Paul continues his plea for unity amongst believers. He started by reminding mature believers to be patient with those who are less spiritually mature, **"We then who are strong [spiritually] ought to bear with the scruples of the weak."** (Romans 15:1). He reminds us that even Jesus **"...did not please Himself.. "** (Romans 15:3) but sought to do the will of the Father. Just as we should do. He further reminds us that God's word will give us the **"...learning, patience, comfort and hope..."** to be **"...like minded toward one another..."** and **"...with one mind and one mouth..."** glorify God. (Romans 15:4-6).

Paul then reminds us of his ministry to the Gentiles, which in reality was the task God had originally assigned to the disobedient nation of Israel. To illustrate this point he quotes from 2 Samuel 22:50, Psalm 18:49, (Romans 15:9), Deuteronomy 32:43, (Romans 15:10), Psalm 117:1 (Romans 15:11) and Isaiah 11:10 (Romans 15:12). All of these passages should have been recognized by Israel as describing their role as God's messengers to the world.. But to this day they remain blinded. A condition that grieved Paul.

Near the end of the chapter Paul recounts the breadth of his ministry, **"...from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum..."** (Romans 15:19). A journey of many years, thousands of miles and severe persecution. Even so, Paul informs his readers of his intent to finally visit Rome after he returns from Jerusalem to take offerings to the believers there who were in poverty. Eventually he would make it to Rome, but not as he intended. — He would go in chains.

Introduction to Chapter 16

Paul concludes his beautiful letter by commending several people who were part of his ministry. These included Phoebe from Cenchreae, near Corinth, a faithful servant of the church, and Priscilla and Aquila, exiles from Rome with whom Paul lived and worked (Acts 18:1-3). Paul mentions his friend Epaenetus, who was apparently the first Christian in Achaia. He then mentions many other people. All identified in some way with supporting Paul and his ministry. In citing all these names Paul shows his true love for people. At one time in his life he would have killed them all for following who he thought was an upstart Carpenter, but now he praises them and shares with us today, those who were near to his heart.

Romans 16:1-16

Now, let's begin the final chapter of Romans.

Paul begins to close out his letter, **"16. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you."** A letter that would become known as history's most important study of salvation. A timeless letter that has probably led millions to Jesus as they journey with Paul down the "Roman Road" and explore the meaning of God's amazing grace. To both Jewish and Gentile readers Romans clarifies the true essence of the gospel - that the poor, homeless Carpenter from Nazareth is in fact the Messiah, and therefore is God. Now at the end of his letter Paul wants us to recognize those who were instrumental in his ministry. Of the hundreds or thousands of people Paul met along the way, these few are the ones who braved persecution and hardship to support Paul's tireless efforts to spread the gospel to the world. These are the people who became Paul's friends and co-laborers in a very difficult task. They were his flock and they are representative of the unity he so eagerly sought.

So let's see what we can learn from these faithful warriors and missionaries:

"1. I commend to you..."

- **Phoebe**
 - **"...our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2. that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."**
 - Her name means "bright and radiant", and based on Paul's description that's exactly what she seems to be. Listed first and with significant accolades she obviously meant a great deal to Paul. She was from Cenchrea which was a city near Corinth and is the same place Paul took a vow when persecuted by the Jews (Acts 18:18).
 - Paul calls Phoebe **"...a servant of the church..."** using the Greek word for **"...servant..."**, "Diakonon" which can mean **"...a servant, waiter, administrator, "one who kicks up dust running errands..."**. It is the same root word used in 1 Timothy 3:8 for **"deacon"**.
 - Since Paul is asking the church in Rome to **"...receive her..."** it is likely he sent her there. Possibly to deliver his letter.
- **3. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila,**
 - **"...my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4. who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5. Likewise greet the church that is in their house."**

- As we've discussed earlier in our study. Priscilla and Aquila were Jewish converts to Christianity who were exiled from Rome by decree of Emperor Claudius about 49 AD (see Lessons 4 and 9). They met Paul in Corinth and were tent makers just as Paul was. To me this is no coincidence but is a reflection of how God works in the details of our lives to bring people together to serve Him. Paul stayed and worked with them, probably the whole time he was in Corinth (Acts 18:3).
- Later they traveled with Paul to Ephesus where he left them while he traveled on to Jerusalem. It was then when Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos, a Christian convert, who having been a follower of John the Baptist preached a partial gospel because he was not yet aware of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 18:24). Priscilla and Aquila shared the true gospel of Christ with him and Apollos became a prominent pastor at Corinth who **"...vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the scriptures that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah]..."** (Acts 19:1).
- Obviously Priscilla and Aquila were under persecution because Paul says they, **"...risked their own necks for my life..."**. The Bible doesn't give any more details than that, but obviously something significant happened when Priscilla and Aquila kept Paul from being killed. In fact, it was while in prison in Rome that Paul encouraged Timothy to greet Priscilla and Aquila.
- Acts 2:46 tells us the early church met **"...from house to house..."**, which was the custom prior to establishing separate Christian meeting facilities. Priscilla and Aquila did the same thing because Paul asked his readers to **"...Likewise greet the church [its members] that is in their house..."**. Paul then clarifies this in 1 Corinthians 16:19, **"...Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house..."**. I can only imagine what it must have been like to attend one of those prayer meetings.
- **"Greet my beloved Epaphroditus,**
 - **"...who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ."**
 - Epaphroditus is the first of four people Paul calls **"...my beloved..."** (with Amplias, Stachys and Persis), using a Greek term *"Agapeton"*, meaning *"divinely loved"*. The same word used to describe God's love for Jesus in the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12:6, **"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.'"**
 - Here Paul describes Epaphroditus as **"...the firstfruits..."**. Some commentators believe this means he was the first Christian in the region of Achaia. This is the same term Paul used to describe the household of

Stephanas in Corinth which may indicate Epaenetus was a member of that family, or possibly their house church.

- **6. "Greet Mary,**
 - **"...who labored much for us."**
 - Nothing more is known of Mary, but given the trials and tribulation Paul experienced we can only imagine what Mary did to be identified as **"..who labored much..."** in Paul's eyes.

- **7. "Greet Andronicus and Junia,**
 - **"...my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."**
 - Perhaps they were a married couple, but in any case, the term **"my countrymen..."** ["kinsmen"] probably identifies them as Jewish. The fact they were **"...my fellow prisoners..."** indicates that at some point they were imprisoned, and possibly with Paul. Interestingly, they were **"...of note among the apostles..."** and were **"...in Christ [saved] before me..."**. This may indicate they were early converts to Christianity, before Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, and may have been known to the apostles of Jesus.

- **8. "Greet Amplias,**
 - **"...my beloved in the Lord."**
 - No more of him is known, but he was another of **"...my beloved..."**

- **9. "Greet Urbanus,**
 - **"...our fellow worker in Christ,**
 - No more is known other than he was **"...our fellow worker..."** which speaks volumes about who he was and what he did,

- **"...and Stachys,**
 - **"...my beloved."**
 - The third of **"...my beloved..."** and obviously very close to Paul's heart. His name is unusual in that it means **"ear of corn"**. No more is known of him.

- **10. "Greet Apelles,**
 - **"...approved in Christ."**
 - Sadly, no more is known of **"...Apelles..."**. It would be interesting to know why Paul identified him as **"...approved in Christ..."**, a word that in

Greek can mean *“tried, proven and genuine”*. Clearly, something in his walk made him stand out.

- ***"Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus."***
 - Why doesn't Paul recognize ***“...Aristobulus...”*** instead of his ***“...household...”***? Does that indicate ***“...Aristobulus...”*** was not a believer but his household was? Or maybe, the fact Paul mentions his family assumes he was a believer as well. We simply don't know. William MacDonald in his commentary on Romans believes ***“...Aristobulus...”*** was the grandson of Herod the Great. The king who killed the baby boys of Bethlehem in his efforts to destroy Jesus (Matthew 2:12-18).
- ***11. "Greet Herodion,***
 - ***"...my countryman."***
 - Like ***“...Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen...”*** we can assume ***“...Herodion...”*** was a fellow Jew. Some commentators believe the title could even indicate a family relationship. His name may also indicate he could be a descendant of the Herod clan of kings.
- ***"Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus***
 - ***"...who are in the Lord."***
 - Again, Paul mentions another family. The ***“...household of Narcissus...”***. As with ***“...Aristobulus...”*** this may indicate the family were believers but the patriarch was not, or it is his way of describing a family of believers.
- ***12. "Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa,***
 - ***"...who have labored in the Lord."***
 - Some commentators believe these were sisters because their similar names mean *“delicate”* and *“dainty”*. Likewise, the similarity in their names may indicate they were twins. In any case, they are known for their hard work for the ministry.
- ***"Greet the beloved Persis,***
 - ***"...who labored much in the Lord."***
 - The last of the ***“...beloved...”*** who for whatever reason was endeared to Paul. Her name, from the root word *“Persikos”* may indicate she was of Persian descent. Even so, she ***“...labored in the Lord...”***. What greater epitaph could anyone be given.
- ***13. "Greet Rufus,***

- **"...chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine."**
 - The fact he was **"...chosen in the Lord..."** may indicate some God-given gift or skill. Possibly, because he may have been the same **"...Rufus..."** who was the son of Simon of Cyrene (in North Africa) who helped Jesus carry His cross to calvary. **"Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross..."** (Mark 15:21) This is not confirmed by scripture but is indicated by several commentators. But if that is true, and Rufus was present at the crucifixion, can you imagine the stories he could have told Paul about our beloved Savior.
 - Paul's comment **"...and his mother and mine..."** probably does not indicate a blood relationship, but that Rufus' mother at some point showed great love for Paul. As if he were her very own son.
- **14. "Greet Asyncritus,**
 - **Phlegon,**
 - **Hermas,**
 - **Patrobas,**
 - **Hermes,**
 - **and the brethren who are with them."**
- **15. "Greet Philologus and Julia,**
 - **"...Nereus"**
 - **"...and his sister,"**
 - **"...and Olympas,"**
 - **"...and all the saints who are with them."**
 - Here Paul recognizes what may be two congregations, the **"...brethren..."** and **"...saints..."**. Both are terms describing bodies of believers. In this case he mentions specific names of those who may have been the leaders and supporters of these churches. Possibly in Rome.
- **16. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you."**
 - It's interesting to consider at an earlier time in his life Paul would have gladly imprisoned or killed all of these people for following who he thought was an upstart Carpenter. But now he praises them and shares with us those who were near to his heart.
 - Paul closes with a beautiful phrase of love and unity and asks his readers to **"...Greet one another with a holy kiss..."**. Think of how reassuring this would have been for people living in the Roman Empire who had converted from Judisum and Paganism to the new religion of Christianity. In many ways they would have been persecuted outcasts from society and

maybe even from their family. Undoubtedly, some would go through severe persecution and even death as both Jewish and Roman administrators fought against them.

But they endured and persevered as they carried the gospel to the world. And yet today, we who live in a society headed to hell at record speed can feel alienated by our own society as they fall farther and farther away from God. So we too should “...**Greet one another with a holy kiss...**”, a smile, a hug and a handshake, as we reaffirm with one another the promise we have in Jesus and the strength we draw from being His – in unity.

Lesson # 49, The Book of Romans - Chapter 16 verses 17-27

The Last Lesson

Quick Recap:

In the first part of Chapter 16 Paul began to close his letter to Rome. In doing so He recognized a long list of people who aided and supported his ministry. These believers probably went through many of the same persecutions Paul did but they endured and will forever be known for their faithful service. In describing these faithful servants Paul uses terms like **"...beloved, fellow worker, labored much, fellow prisoners, approved in Christ, my countrymen, and chosen in the Lord..."**. These are terms of endearment that define for us the character of those the Lord called to carry the gospel during the earliest days of Christianity. Paul ended his first section of recognition with a beautiful phrase, **"...Greet one another with a holy kiss..."** (Romans 16:16). A command we would do well to follow today.

Romans 16:17-27

In chapter 15 Paul stressed the importance of unity amongst believers. There he reminded us to:

- 15:1a - **"Receive one who is weak in the faith..."**
- 15:1b - **"...but not to disputes over doubtful things..."**
- 15:13 - **"Therefore let us not judge one another anymore..."**
- 15:16 - **"Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil..."**
- 15:19 - **"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."**

Now at the closing words of his letter Paul warns us to be alert to **"...those who cause divisions and offenses,..."**. Particularly as it relates to **"...the doctrine which you learned..."**. Disunity in the church never glorifies God. Gossip, back-biting, and complaining can quickly break the bonds of friendship and bring discord to the body. That's why Paul spent considerable time in his letter discussing love and unity. But here Paul focuses on an even more damaging type of disunity that happens when people infiltrate the church with false doctrine. When that happens Paul tells us to **"...avoid them..."**. Those are pretty harsh words coming from a man who wrote a great deal about love, but Paul knew the risk of false doctrine is much worse than simple disunity. False doctrine will confuse, corrupt and even worse, pull people away from the truth of God's redemptive grace. This is a problem that still exists today. Particularly the expansive growth of "prosperity gospels", and the false message of sacrament and works-based theology. Paul warns us about the seriousness of this issue because,

"...those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."

Today, all you have to do to hear ***"...smooth words and flattering speech..."*** is go on social media where there seems to be no end to self-seeking, self-serving teachers and preachers who, ***"...deceive the hearts of the simple..."*** as they prey on the spiritually immature. This was a constant concern of Paul's just as he warned Timothy, ***"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*** (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The ***"...time..."*** Paul was talking about when man's ***"...itching ears..."*** will desire to hear ***"...fables..."*** instead of the truth of God's word, is now. Just listen to the media and you'll hear plenty of fodder for ***"...itching ears..."*** focused on ***"...their own desires..."***. And when that happens the enemy will ensure there are plenty of ***"...teachers..."*** who will ***"...turn their ears away from the truth..."***.

This problem is so serious that Paul gave similar warnings to other churches. Let's look at a few:

- To the church at Ephesus:
 - ***"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."*** (Acts 20:28-31)
- To the church at Galatia:
 - ***"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."*** (Galatians 1:6-9)
- To the church at Corinth:
 - ***"For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and***

Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1
Corinthians 1:22-24)

These warnings are exactly why we work so hard at Southside to be doctrinally sound and to focus on,

- ***"...equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."*** (Ephesians 4:12-16)

Equipping the saints is more than just teaching people about the Bible. It is also preparing them to walk boldly in a fallen world with the truth of Jesus firmly in their hearts. It is this equipping that will help us deal with life's issues in a way that glorifies God while we share His message with the world. Never underestimate the power of being spiritually equipped, and never underestimate the enemy's desire to keep you confused in spiritual darkness. That's why we must be in God's word every day.

After his warning Paul commends the church at Rome, ***19. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. 20. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."***

In chapter 1 Paul recognized the faith of the believers in Rome with high praise, ***"...First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world..."*** (Romans 1:8). He followed that in chapter 15 by citing the fact, ***"...Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."*** (Romans 15:14). High praise indeed for a church in such an inhospitable environment made up of members from such diverse backgrounds. But Paul had taught them well and through his epistle gave them the tools they needed to share the gospel with either a self-righteous Jew or a pagan Gentile. But he wanted them to be ***"...wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil..."***. In reading this I think of a quote from Erwin Lutzer — *"...When the world sees a Christian, they should be surprised, taken aback, and forced to take note. We should live as though we're from another country,*

with a different set of values, different aspirations, and a different interpretation of life itself." ----- Paul wants us to look at life like this. From the perspective of living for **"...good..."** and avoiding **"...evil..."**, because that's how we glorify God and present Jesus to the world. Our Lord intends for His children to live with a character of **"...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."** (Colossians 5:22-23). When we live like that in our society we may stick out like a sore thumb. But that's ok, because that's how God expects us to live. So let's try to live that way and show a doubting world that Jesus is real.

Now Paul recognizes another important group. The people who are with him in Corinth.

- **"21. Timothy, my fellow worker..."**. Much could be said about Timothy. A young minister who worked with Paul and was the recipient of two instructional letters (1 / 2 Timothy- see also 1 Corinthians 16:10). Probably from the town of Lystra or Derbe in Asia Minor, (Lycaonia Anatolia) in modern day Turkey - Timothy had a Jewish mother who was a Christian convert and Gentile father. **"...Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey..."** (Acts 16:1-3). As they traveled together their relationship grew very close. To the point Paul called him, **"...Timothy, a true son in the faith..."** (1 Timothy 1:2) and **"...Timothy, a beloved son..."** (2 Timothy 1:2). Timothy's father was Gentile - and possibly pagan - but Timothy was greatly influenced by his mother and grandmother who were believers, **"...when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice..."** (2 Timothy 1:5). By the time Paul met Timothy he was already known for his strong faith. Timothy became a leader in several churches, including Ephesus where Paul again stressed the importance of unity and refuting false doctrine, **"...As I urged you when I went into Macedonia — remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith."** (1 Timothy 1:3-4 - see also 1 Corinthians 4:17 / Philipians 2:19)
- **"...Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you..."**
 - **"...Lucius..."**
 - May be the minister from Cyrene who is listed in Acts 13:1.
 - **"...Jason..."**
 - May be the same person mentioned prominently in Acts 17:5-9, **"...But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of**

Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go...". — If so, he is one of the men with Paul *"...who have turned the world upside down..."*. That's amazing.

- *"...and Sosipater, my countrymen,..."*
 - Like some of the others *"...Sosipater..."* was a *"...countrymen..."* indicating he was probably a Jew.
- ***"...22. I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.***
 - It is believed Paul used a secretary to write some of his letters as he dictated them. This may indicate he had poor eyesight because in Galatians 6:11 he says, *"...See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!..."*, or maybe Tertius was a better writer in the Greek language than Paul was. Either way, Paul gives him an opportunity to greet the church in Rome as a fellow believer, *"...in the Lord..."*.
- ***23. "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you..."***
 - This may be the *"...Gaius..."* who was a companion of Paul's and came under attack with him during the Ephesus riots, *"...So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions..."* (Acts 19:29). He is also mentioned in Acts 20:3b-4, *"...And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia..."*
- ***"...Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you,..."***
 - It's interesting that a member of Paul's inner-circle was a government official. The term used here to describe his occupation, *"Oikonomos"* can mean "steward", "manager of a household" or as interpreted here, "a treasurer of the city". He may be the same person mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:19-20, *"...Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 20. Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left*

in Miletus sick..." and in Acts 19:21-22, "...When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time."

- ***"...and Quartus, a brother..."***

- Another believer and supporter of Paul. Early church history (although not substantiated by the Bible) indicates he may have been one of the original seventy disciples who were sent out by Jesus, ***"...After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves." (Luke 10:1-3).*** But again, his inclusion in this group is according to ancient church history. Not scripture.

- ***24. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."***

- Paul often used a salutation at the beginning or ending of his letters to express his love to those he was writing to.
- Here are a few examples:
 - To the church at Corinth,
 - ***"...To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)
 - To the church at Philippi
 - ***"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy..."*** (Philippians 1:1-4)
 - To the church at Galatia,

- ***"...Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.***
(Galatians 1:3-5)
- To the church at Thessalonica,
- ***"...We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)***
- To Titus,
- ***"...To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior."*** (Titus 1:4)
- To Philemon,
- ***"...Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:..."*** (Philemon 1:1-2)

These beautiful greetings should be an example for us to use with our own brothers and sisters in Christ.

"25. Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26. but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith

Now Paul proclaims ***"...to Him who is able to establish you..."*** affirming it is in ***"...Him..."***, (in Jesus), we are to have a firm foundation in our faith and Biblical doctrine. This makes us steadfast, solid and immovable. As Paul told Timothy, ***"...All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*** (2 Timothy 3:16). It is our study of God's word that makes us spiritually ***"...complete..."*** and ***"...equipped..."***. Not only for the tasks God gives us, but also to endure as the world implodes around us. Without that Biblical equipping through solid doctrine we will be ***"...tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the***

cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting..." (Ephesians 4:14). Being a Christian in the world today without a solid foundation in God's word, is not a place you want to be. It is our sword in battle as we seek to live in a failing world (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

Here Paul reminds us that the doctrine he teaches is, **"...according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ..."**. The use of the word **"...my..."** doesn't mean Paul has his own gospel or a different gospel. The message Paul taught is salvation through Christ-alone by faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross. Not the traditional Jewish belief in righteousness through religion or the Gentile focus on works. It is the only gospel. Foretold by the prophets and now **"...made manifest..."** and revealed in Jesus. But another reason Paul used the term **"...my..."**, may be in reference to the unique way Paul was taught the gospel. Paul's personal training in the gospel did not come from other apostles or the church. Paul was taught by Jesus Himself, **"...But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after [from] man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."** (Galatians 1:11-12). As we have discussed earlier in our study this **"...revelation..."** probably occurred when Paul was trained by Jesus in the Arabian desert. **"...15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days."** (Galatians 1:15-18) And yet, the gospel revealed to Paul should have already been obvious to at least his Jewish readers. For as Jesus told the doubting disciples on the Road to Emmaus, **"Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. - Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"** (Luke 24:25-27 & 31-32)

And that's exactly what Paul wanted his readers to understand; that **"...all the Scriptures..."** from **"...Moses and all the Prophets..."** [the Old Testament] were about Jesus. He wanted them to see what they should have already known and he wanted their hearts to burn as he **"...opened the Scriptures to us..."**.

"27. to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen." And with these encouraging words we end our study of Romans. A timeless story told through an

epistle of unequalled depth in the study of salvation. Words every believer should study continuously because it firmly establishes in us the truth that the poor, homeless Carpenter from Nazareth is the Messiah; Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world. In doing so it discounts any notion that salvation can be obtained, gained, earned or bought through any religious experience or any level of personal works. Instead, it confirms true salvation comes only through faith in the life, death and glorious resurrection of Jesus. This message, so critical in Paul's day, may be even more critical in our own time. As we watch the church fall prey to the enemy's offered fruit of prosperity, sacrament and works-based gospels he cunningly draws the world further and further from Biblical truth to a point where our society seeks for a reality that may be more ungodly than has ever been seen before. Harsh words for sure, but as society seeks to normalize sin they run head-long down a dangerous slope Jesus has already told us about, **"...But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."** (Matthew 24:37-39). So why did Jesus compare the last-days to the **"...days of Noah..."**? Because Genesis describes Noah's days as a time when, **"...the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."** (Genesis 6:5). That's what we see happening in the world today as leaders and politicians seek to establish sin and wickedness as the norm, and as our society falls head-over-heels after every new sinful pleasure.

And that's why the Book of Romans is so important and timeless. As believers we must be equipped to share the eternal hope of God's redemptive grace to a world falling quickly into oblivion. Most will not listen, but those who do will be snatched from the fires of hell by the example we live and the gospel we proclaim.

I pray our study has prepared you to be a warrior for Jesus in the days ahead.

Thank You Lord for giving us the honor of studying Your beautiful Word.