



Arch of Titus in Rome Celebrating the Conquest of Jerusalem

ROMANS

by Charles Speer

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

ROMANS

BY CHARLES SPEER



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Romans

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**Dedicated to Richard Rogers,
my teacher at Sunset School of Preaching**

After a class with Richard Rogers at Sunset School of Preaching in 1972, a classmate of mine remarked, “All this and heaven, too!” Richard had a way of bringing Scripture to life, and the Book of Romans lived for me that year.

Since 1989, I have been privileged to teach this great book to hundreds of students in different departments of Sunset International Bible Institute. I never tire of learning and teaching its great truths. Thank you, Richard, from me, your son in the Faith, and from all your spiritual grandchildren.

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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and in distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now in printed form, that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students, thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff, and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a videotaped course. The voice track of the videotape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Bible Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott, who began the video course series in 1989; to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio; to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division, who

wrote the study guides; to Darlene Morris and the staff of Sunset Translation Center, who edited the manuscripts; and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

In addition to the English version, this book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible study library that can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.

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Introduction

Introduction

The Book of Romans throbs with the very heart and soul and the theology of Paul the apostle. Brother RC Bell said many years ago, ‘If you get Romans, God gets you.’ This significant statement has been carried down through the ages and should be remembered. Romans is not like a Gospel book that tells about the life of Jesus. Paul has gathered more in this book than any other book in the New Testament. It tells of the out-growth of the Gospel and the results of that growth. It tells about the justification which comes out of the cross and the blood that Jesus shed on Calvary. It tells how Christians can participate in that. Think about the Book of Romans and survey it to see all the elements of Paul’s heart and soul.

The Nature and Character of Romans

Paul talked about sin and the darkness and ugliness of sin in Romans 1–3. It is difficult to read, because you are reading about your own life and how you were before you became a Christian. Surely Paul was reflecting somewhat on his life in Judaism as he was against the cross, as he tried to put Christians to death, and as he opposed the veracity of the Christ (cf. Acts 8:1, 9:1–2). Later Paul did become a Christian (cf. Acts 9:3–31), but he reflected on where all men have been in the ugliness of sin. Then as he transitioned into justification by faith in the second half of the book he focused on the theology of justification by faith apart from works of the law (cf.

Romans 3:28). He talked about justification, propitiation, and redemption. He talked about all those great words that describe salvation. He talked about the fact that Christians are sanctified and saved. Not only are our sins taken away, but we become like Christ in our lives. In the difficult ways that we struggle with sin, Paul talked about how Christians can conquer those things (cf. Romans 8). He went on to say that he had come out of Judaism and God loved him and gave him salvation. In the same way, whether a man is a Gentile or a Jew, God still loves him (cf. Romans 9–11). Paul said that everyone needs to recognize that and believe that God offers salvation to all men.

In the last part of the Book of Romans, as was typical with Paul, he focused in on the practical application to say this is how the Christian should live: stop doing that, start doing this, and accentuate this in your life (cf. Romans 12–15). He ended the book with a grand relationship chapter, talking about all the people he had loved through the years who were in Rome at this time. Even though Paul did not plant this church and, as far as scholars and students of the Word know, he had never been to Rome, he knew, related to, and loved a lot of Roman Christians.

Occasion and Purpose for Writing the Book

The Book of Romans is just as applicable for present-day Christians as it was for the Christians in the church in Rome. Before someone begins to study this book he needs to look at what is called “Sitz im Leben.” This may be a new term to some. It is actually a German term which means “situation in life” or “life situation.” It is important to consider what is the setting and the occasion of the book. In other words, why was the book written? The Book of Romans was not written in a vacuum. It was not just written for the ages to come for Christians to study. It was written originally to a particular group of people in a particular situation, just as Paul had done

with his other books. It is important to know the situation in Rome, the setting, the occasion, and the purpose for which Paul was writing because we may face the same situation in a present day congregation.

Most of Paul's letters are structured the same way. In the first part of the book there is a theological section where he develops this great theological truth which in essence is the theme of the book. Romans 3:28, “. . . *a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law*” (NASB) is accepted by scholars as the theme of this book. It is important to know why Paul would use this theme as he was writing to the Romans. Why would Paul choose this particular theme to write to this particular group of people on this particular occasion? The answer to this question is found in the second half of the book in the practical application part of the book. Paul told the church in Rome what they should do. These things were very important specifically for the Romans. He did not say the same things to the Colossians that he said to the Romans. He did not say the same things to the Galatians that he said to the Romans, even though the theme of those two books is exactly the same.

The practical application of the Book of Romans tells the occasion and purpose of this book in Romans 12–16. The occasion is defined as what is going on with the author and what is going on with this church that would precipitate the need for Paul to write this book. Romans 15 relates what is going on in Paul's life and actually tells exactly when this book was written. When he finished this practical application, he began:

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the

gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit . . . So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain . . . (Romans 15:14–24).

Paul was the kind of pioneer who went into an area to start churches. He liked to plant churches and often times he would spend perhaps two to three years there, but then he would move on to plant other churches. The Book of Acts reveals that on his three missionary journeys he planted new churches as he went on his way. Then he would come back to see how those churches were doing. In this particular case Paul was on his third and last missionary journey. He had already established the churches he wanted to and wanted to move on to other areas where the Gospel had not been preached before. He said he was on his way to Spain.

If Paul was headed to Rome, then why did he say he was headed to Spain? In Romans 1 Paul said he had wanted to come to see them many times but had been hindered from doing so until now. It had not been God's will up to this point that he travel to Rome. Now he apparently perceived it was time to go to Rome, and he was going to do it as he was on his way to Spain (Romans 1:8–15). If Spain was Paul's ultimate destination, then why did he write a sixteen-chapter book to the church in Rome just to tell them that he was coming? Why not

just send them a short note to say, “I am on my way?” In Romans 1:11–13 Paul said:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong — that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

Apparently, he wanted to spend some time in Rome to build up the church, to have them also encourage him, and to have a harvest there among the Gentiles as he had in other places. As Paul did wherever he went, he wanted to evangelize while he was in Rome. It sounds as if Paul was going to spend a short time with the Roman Christians, but then he wrote a sixteen chapter book. Does it take the heavy theology of the first eight chapters to tell them he was stopping by on his way to Spain?

Paul was in Corinth finishing his third missionary journey as he was writing the Book of Romans. The Book of Acts also reveals that he had collected the funds that churches had promised while he was on his second missionary journey for the Saints in Judea who were struggling mightily because of the famine. Corinth was his last stop on that journey, and he was ready to head to Jerusalem. In Romans 15:30–33 he said:

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul was headed to Jerusalem to deliver the contribution from other churches. He wanted the Roman brethren to pray that the Judean Christians would gratefully accept the gift. Some of that money had come from Gentile Christians, and there might be a little bit of prejudice from the Jews who could say, “We started the Church and we gave the Gospel to you.” Paul knew the Judean Christians needed the money and the Gentiles had given from their heart and reached into their pocketbooks to help take care of the Judean brothers. Once the gift was graciously received, that would free Paul to head to Rome, as a stopover, and then head on to Spain.

Once again, why did Paul write such a long book to the Romans? Romans 16 leaves the impression that there were house churches that may have gathered together from time to time as a group. It is hard to discern exactly what the format was and what the essence of this church was in regard to assemblies and meeting places in groups. It does appear that Paul knew this group well enough to speak boldly to them concerning things he had heard from people who reported the Roman church’s problems to him.

The Book of Romans was written because there was a severe problem in the Roman church. When a person goes to the doctor, it is usually because there is a sense of something that is wrong. The doctor does tests and comes in with a diagnosis that may indicate where the problem is. This was true in the Roman church. They had the symptoms of a major illness. It is important to know what the problem is rather than zeroing in on just the symptoms. What was the problem in Rome that caused Paul to write this book with its particular theme that it has to try to correct the problem? The answer to this question can be found in Romans 12:

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you:
Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in
accordance with the measure of faith God has given*

you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:3–8).

Paul was telling the Roman Christians they needed to use the gifts they had been given by the Spirit. God had given them gifts to be used to build up the Body. He urged them not to be arrogant about their gifts. Paul did not just list the gifts, he told them to get busy using the gifts. The implication is that some might not be using their gifts from the Spirit to build up the Body. Can you think of situations where a church is filled with good people but some are not using their gifts to bless the Body?

I can recall a particular occasion in a church where I preached a number of years ago where a man had the gift of teaching. He became upset with the elders and the congregation. He was the best Bible class teacher we had, but he decided he was not going to use that gift. He decided he was going to withdraw, but he did not have the right to do that. That is an example of why someone would not use their gift. I wonder what the situation was here in the Book of Romans.

Beginning in Romans 12:9 there is an extended section from Paul on love:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be

lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:9–21).

This whole section about love is as beautiful and poignant as 1 Corinthians 13, which Christians consider the best description about love. As Paul talked about these aspects of love, he said Christians should not have a retaliatory spirit: "*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil . . . 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him . . .'*" Christians should overcome evil with good. Just as the Corinthians needed a wonderful chapter on love, the Romans probably needed an extended section on love because they were not loving each other like they should. Paul said the Romans were not using their gifts; they were not loving one another. Were these the main problem with the church in Rome or were these just some of the symptoms?

In Romans 13:1–7 Paul continued with this practical application, telling the church in Rome that they needed to submit to the government officials. The Emperor at this time

was Nero. Paul the apostle says Christians need to be in submission and obedient to the government because God has established them. He repeats this fact several times. Why would Paul say these things unless they needed to hear it? Is it possible that people in the Roman church were having difficulty deciding to submit to the governmental authorities? The New Testament reveals that Jews often had a hard time submitting to authorities who were not Jewish.

In the next section of Romans 13 Paul said they did not need to go back to the lifestyle they used to live. Romans 13:8–10 sounds very Jewish, and Romans 13:11–14 sounds very Gentile-ish, as if he were describing the life of that person before they became a Christian. The Gentiles would tend to be involved in evil things, perhaps orgies, drinking bouts, and such like. They had come out of the nastiness in Rome just like what Christians faced in Ephesus or Corinth. They may have been tempted to go back to their old ways of immorality and idolatry. The Jews were used to a legalistic approach to their religion. Paul was addressing the temptation for them to go back to their old way of life. It may have been hard for the Jews to feel comfortable in Christ. They may have been tempted to think that the way they had lived in Judaism was better.

What could be going on in the Roman church that would cause them to be tempted to throw away the grace of Christ and return to their past lives? There were people not using their gifts, not loving each other, having trouble submitting to the governmental authorities, and some who might have been tempted to go back to their old way of life. These were symptoms of a big problem that Paul talked about in Romans 14–15. Paul gave the problem extended treatment and focused on the main problem going on in Rome in Romans 14:1–15:6. Consider the following verses:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose

faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him (Romans 14:1–3).

This was a heterogeneous church with Jews and Gentiles who had come together in one Body in Christ. That was the mystery of God, the eternal purpose of God (cf. Ephesians 1:3–24). They had come together as one Body, but they were having trouble getting along. They were arguing about whether or not they could eat meat and should this day be sacred or not. They were not just arguing about it, they were looking down on each other. Paul said they were condemning each other on the basis of different beliefs and different approaches to these issues. It was so serious that they were writing each other off as Brothers in Christ. There was disunity in this Body. This church was about to come apart at the seams. That is why there were people who were not using their gifts; that is why Paul needed to talk to them about loving one another, because they did not love each other. That is why there were Jews who needed to be told to submit to governmental authorities. That was one of the ways Jewish people particularly would show their disgust for Gentiles. That is why people needed to be warned not to go back to their old way of life, because they were not getting along with their Brothers. No one likes to come to the Sunday assembly and sit with people they despise. Maybe they did not even believe some were Christians because they had condemned them all over the issues of food and days.

Consider what Paul said in Romans 15:5–6:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a prayer statement, but it is also a statement of purpose in the book. Paul's letter to the Roman Christians was about unity in the Body of Christ. He urged them not to act this way because there was too much at stake. They needed to understand that God's purpose, as it was prophesied over and over again in the Old Testament, was to bring Jew and Gentile together into the Body of Christ, to bring about a unity in Christ. They were about to break apart the Body of Christ and form an Eastside and a Westside congregation in Rome. Did they understand what that would do to the cause of Christ in Rome?

As a twenty-first century Christian, think about this. You probably know of churches that have had trouble getting along. You may know of places where the church has split. I can think of several. I remember one place where we went on a campaign when I was a student at Sunset School of Preaching. The church had split just a few weeks before. How much effect do you think we had knocking on doors and saying, "We are here to share the love of Christ and the gospel message"? They surely thought, "Aren't you from the Church of Christ that just split a few weeks ago? You can't get along and you are telling me I should become a part of the Body where you are."

There is a lot at stake in this book because Paul said in Romans 1:8, ". . . *I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*" This Roman church had so much influence in the Brotherhood all of the world during that day and time. What would happen if that church ripped apart at the seams? What would happen if they split? Not only would it affect the evangelistic approach and the effectiveness of the people in Rome, but it would also have a ripple effect in the influence of the Church all over the world. It was important that this church stay together to encourage other churches to stay together in the fight with the purpose for which they existed.

This book was written to bring these two groups, primarily the Jews and the Gentiles who were at each other's throats and

about to split, together again in unity. It was written to bring about unity so they could praise God because of their unity and love. This church needed to be the light, a beacon, to the world of Rome which needed the Gospel so badly.

Paul said Christians must be united as the Body of Christ. He used the theme and the theology of “*justification by faith*” to persuade them to lay aside their grudges, to put away their pride, and to come back together as a united Body of Christ. This theme speaks to Christians in the twenty-first century because there are bodies of Christ in this same situation — Christians who do not get along as they should. They may need a dose of the Book of Romans to bring them back to unity in the Spirit and in the love of God.

The Background and Setting of the Book of Romans

Paul wrote the Book of Romans to the Roman Christians to try to correct the unity problem so that when he arrived in Rome he could have an effective ministry for the short time that he planned to be with them before he headed on to Spain. He was concerned about how this church going forward was going to maintain their unity, because he knew that their ability to evangelize and their ability to reach out to the people in their community would be affected by their unity. The fact that their faith was known around the world would also be affected by whether they were united or not. Other churches would be encouraged or discouraged by whether this church was healthy. John Schaall had the following to say about the Book of Romans:

Romans unfolds the deep things of God. It shows the wonderful way in which God leads the individual sinner from a life of deep misery and sin to joyous salvation and redemption. This book goes on to show the Christian that out of his redeemed life must come sacrificial service to the praise of God in everyday existence.¹

¹. Schaall, John H., *The Royal Roman Road* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1972), p. 11–12.

This book is full of wonderful things that a lot of people embrace. There are encouraging things and challenging things. It is not just a book about theology; it is also a book about practical application, so it has something for all Christians.

The Structure of the Book of Romans

Studying the structure of the book as a unit will help the reader to see that Paul progressed through this book as he did for a reason. He began with his typical introduction in the first few verses, but then in Romans 1:8–17 he iterated a rather extended prologue. These first seventeen verses are longer than most of his introductions because he was trying to gain credibility with the Roman church. As an apostle, he had written a sixteen-chapter book to a church that he did not plant. He was an apostle, but not everyone in Rome knew him personally, not everyone was converted by him, and he had never visited the church in Rome. They surely had heard the stories about him being run out of this town and persecuted by that town. They had probably heard about churches that did not like him. They may have questioned what right he had to write a letter to the church in Rome telling them what to do or how to think. There might have been some resistance. The prologue, these first seventeen verses, were an introduction for credibility so that he could say what he needed to say.

Most scholars consider the first section of the book, Romans 1:18–3:20, to be a treatise on the doctrine of condemnation. Paul said that outside of Christ everyone is a sinner. Not only is everyone outside of Christ a sinner, but each one is responsible for his sin. He is condemned for his sin. Paul talked about the Gentiles first and then the Jews, and they are all in the same category. He charged, “You have no excuse for your sin” (cf. Romans 2:1).

Then there is the good news in Romans 3:21–4:25. The essence of what Paul was saying here is that now that the

Christian is in Christ, he is justified. First there was the doctrine of condemnation, and now this section is the doctrine of justification. In Romans 5:1–8:25 there is the doctrine of sanctification. Once a person is a Christian, once he has been justified by faith in the Gospel of Christ at Calvary, he can become like the Savior Himself in his attitudes, in his thinking, and in his lifestyle. These chapters are particularly about what blessings and opportunities God has afforded the Christian to be able to live that way. Many of us may have wondered if we can live the Christian life. In Romans 8 Paul said you can. Not only is there no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but God has provided the Holy Spirit to help you live that way.

Romans 9:1–11:36 is where Paul said God still loves the Jews and wants them to be saved. He had talked directly to them in a number of different ways in the first eight chapters that might be considered rather strong. The Jews can be saved if they choose to live by faith. Romans 12:1–15:22 is the practical application of the book. Based upon the fact that man was once condemned, that he can be justified, that he is moving toward Christ-likeness in sanctification, and now here are some ways that the Christian can live that will glorify God and bring unity back to the Body of Christ. In Romans 15:23–33 Paul talks about where he is on his journey. He was at the end of his missionary journey and on his way to Jerusalem. After he finished that task he wanted to come to Rome on his way to Spain. Romans 16:1–27 is Paul's greetings to the many friends he had in Rome. He was probably trying to tell those in the church in Rome who did not know him that he did have people he knew in Rome and that he did love the church there. He did have a relationship with some Christians there, and he wanted to have a good relationship with the others.

The Author of the Book of Romans

Paul began this book, *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God*

(Romans 1:1). Paul asserted that he was an apostle who had been set apart for the Gospel of God. He claimed from the very beginning that he was the author. Later in the book he said, “*I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry*” (Romans 11:13). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said:

For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews (Galatians 2:8–9).

When Paul was converted, God spoke to Ananias before he went to Saul of Tarsus: . . . “*Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name*” (Acts 9:15–16)

The Book of Romans itself claims that Paul was the writer. The apostolic fathers and church fathers such as Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Polycarp, and others all the way down through 300 A.D. agreed that Paul was the author of this book. Even the critical thinkers of the twenty-first century, who do not always believe that the New Testament is the Word of God, believe that Paul was the writer of Romans.

The Recipients of the Book of Romans

In Romans 1:7 Paul said, “*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.*” The recipients of this book are the Christians in Rome. Yes, this was a church that was having some trouble, but that does not render them non-Christians. Scholars do not know the origin of this church or who first planted it. It might have been the converts from the day of

Pentecost (cf. Acts 2) or others. Paul wrote this letter in approximately 56–58 A.D., so there were surely many Christians in Rome by that time. It is possible that there were multiple churches in Rome. Romans 16 indicates that some of them were meeting in house churches. The format of how the churches were meeting and how they were relating to each other is unclear. We do know that there was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. That comes through clearly as we read this book. Romans 1 is a Gentile chapter and chapter 13 clearly has a Gentile section. There are sections of this book related to the Jews. This was a heterogeneous church made up of Jews and Greeks.

Where and When Was the Book of Romans Written

From the information in Romans 15 it seems that the Book of Romans was written in Corinth:

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed (Romans 15:30–32).

Paul was at the point of collecting the funds that these Gentile churches said they wanted to give to the Saints in Judea who were undergoing a famine. As he was planting churches on his second missionary journey, he told these churches about the trouble that was going on in Jerusalem. Paul was collecting those funds on his third missionary journey. When he reached Corinth he had completed that task, and he needed to return to Jerusalem and deliver the contribution. Then he was heading to Spain but planned to stop in Rome.

Because this was on his third missionary journey, it is easy to figure out the date of this writing. The date is approximately

56–58 A.D. Before this time Paul had written some other letters. This is one of his earlier letters, but he had already written 1st and 2nd Thessalonians and Galatians. He had already written 1st and 2nd Corinthians on his third missionary journey.

The Occasion and Purpose of the Book of Romans

The occasion of this book was the problem of disunity in the Roman church at this time and Paul's intention to stop in Rome on his way to Spain. The purpose of Paul's visit to Rome was to create unity in the Body of Christ:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5–6).

United in Christ, this church would be a strong witness for the Gospel of Christ to the community. The church in Rome would also be an encouragement to other churches who looked to them because of their faith.

The Theme of the Book of Romans

The theme of a book is the **major theological truth presented by the author** that, if accepted by the recipients, will cause them to correct the existing problem. That is the connection between the theme and the problem that is going on. The theme of Romans is:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:16–17).

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify (Romans 3:21).

Paul was talking about justification by faith apart from the works of Law in which the Christian could trust. How could Paul correct the problem? Paul could not correct the problem, but he could persuade the church in Rome to correct the problem. **The problem was disunity.** Paul presented the following persuasive points to the church in Rome:

- Once, they were **lost**.
- But now, they were **justified** (everyone in Christ Jesus is justified and everyone in Christ Jesus is saved).
- There is **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- They all had the same goal of being **sanctified** in Christ.
- They would all make the same choice to be **united** in Christ.

Paul destroyed their pride by talking about their past lives. They had no basis on their own to trust anything about themselves. They could only trust Christ and His grace. Paul said, “*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded*” (Romans 3:27). They could not boast about their past life. They could not boast about their life in Christ either because they, in and of themselves, had done nothing to save themselves. Once their pride had been destroyed, they could come together and be united. There was disunity, and the purpose of the book was to create unity. Paul used justification by faith to persuade the Christians in Rome to be united in Christ once again.

Theological Terms

It is important to have a complete understanding of the biblical meaning of the theological terms that Paul uses in the Book of Romans. Sometimes the Christian's view of these terms is a little bit skewed. These terms will recur throughout the study of this book, so their definitions are presented here and then they will be re-emphasized later on.

Descriptions of “Sin”

If you ask what is the definition of “sin,” most Christians would say that it means “missing the mark.” That quick little phrase probably comes from an illustration of what “sin” is. “Sin” is when a man takes an arrow and puts it in his bow, shoots it, and misses the target. “Sin” is missing the target, but what is the target? Consider Romans 3:23, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” That is a parallelism in which Paul was saying, “You have sinned, so let me tell you what sin is.” “Sin” is missing the glory of God. “Sin” is missing the desired purpose for our lives. “Sin” is transgression of the law of God. First John 3:4 says, “*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.*”

“Sin” is also missing the dream that God has for His children. Think about Adam and Eve in the Garden. God had a desired lifestyle for them; He did not want them to eat of a particular tree, and when they did all kinds of complications came out of that. The idea of “sin” is not just “breaking God’s law;” it is that, but it is also failing to live up to the dream that God has for us. “Sin” is falling short of the glory of God. God has this glorious state of being for us, and when we “sin” we fall short of that. That makes “sin” very personal. It is not just that we are crossing some barrier that God has set down in Scripture.

There are also other terms that are synonyms for “sin” in Scripture, such as “trespass” and “transgression.” The term transgression is used in Romans 4:7, “*Blessed are they whose*

transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.” That is actually a quote from Psalm 32:1. “*Transgression*” (or trespassing) is crossing a boundary that God has set in place. That is the connotation of “*transgression*.” Just like “*sin*” is missing the dream of God, “*transgression*” has the idea of passing over a barrier that God has put in place.

The third term for “*sin*” is “*iniquity*.” It is another term in Scripture that is used to talk about breaking God’s law. This term is used in Isaiah 59:1–2:

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

“*Iniquity*” has the idea of wickedness in general; it has the idea of doing evil.

The Definition of “Faith”

The theme of the Book of Romans is justification by “*faith*” apart from works of law. Romans 4:12–29 talks about a saving “*faith*.” What is the kind of “*faith*” that God requires? It is easy to say “*faith*” is trust or “*faith*” is belief. That really is not full enough. “*Faith*” is really a vague term because it is such a big term in Scripture. In Scripture “*faith*” is used in a subjective way and in an objective way, and this is determined by the context in which it is used. The subjective use of “*faith*” can be seen in John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes [or has “faith” in him] shall not perish but have eternal life.*” “*Faith*” is the subjective part; it is a choice that is within man. “*Faith*” is something that happens inside of man. The objective use of the term “*faith*” is found in Jude 3 and Acts 6:7:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write

and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

These verses use the objective term “*the faith*.” A few times in Scripture the whole body of Christian doctrine is summed up in the term “*the faith*.” There are some other terms that are used in regard to that; but when it is used this way, as “*the faith*,” it is talking about that body of truth that is revealed in Scripture that must be subjectively believed in.

In a general way, what is “*faith*”? A biblical “*faith*” is acknowledging the truth of what God says; it is acknowledging from His Word that He is saying things and He is requiring things. The writer of Hebrews says, “*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*” (Hebrews 11:6). “*Faith*” is accepting that God is true. He is speaking to His children, and we must accept that as true. It is an acceptance of the Word of God; it goes beyond that. It is not enough to say, “I believe in God,” there is more to it than that. There must be trust plus obedience. There must be calling upon those truths as absolutely true; not just that God said it and it came from God, but that I am putting my whole life down on it. The Christian must trust that it is true, obey it, and then live that way (cf. James 2:14–26).

The Definitions of “*Law*”

The term “*law*” is a broad term used in a number of different ways in the Book of Romans. One definition of “*law*” is a code or system of regulations which is the expressed and binding will of some authority. In the Book of Romans pay particular attention to how the term is used in the context every time. Sometimes it is hard to tell what “*law*” exactly means

depending on whether the article “*the*” is there or not. Often times in the English it is hard to tell whether or not the “*the*” is actually there so you have to go to the Greek. The most important thing about the way Paul uses the word “*law*” in the Book of Romans is to know that most of the time he will use the word to mean a “*law*” system. “*Laws*” have been set down, and in this case most of the time in Romans the word refers to the Old Testament “*law*,” the “*law*” of Moses, which God gave. It is a godly “*law*,” it came from Him, it is holy, it is righteous, it is good, and it is true.

“*Law*” is not a bad thing at all, it is a good thing; and Paul is going to argue that in the Book of Romans. He argues against man trusting his law-keeping in order to save himself or in order to think that he deserves salvation. If that is man’s approach, then he is living under a “*law*” system rather than living under “*grace*.” The Book of Romans says a Christian has a choice: you can live by trusting law-keeping or you can live by trusting the grace of God. You must make a choice; you cannot do both. “*Law*” in the Book of Romans is often talking about a “*law*” system and an approach to salvation that is not a good thing. “*Law*” is a good thing, but not when man trusts his law-keeping rather than the grace of God.

The following passages zero in on what the “*law*” means and what its purpose was, particularly the “*law*” of Moses that God put in place:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Romans 3:28).

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (Romans 3:20).

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Romans 5:20).

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet” (Romans 7:7).

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23–24).

Trusting the works of “law” brings trouble. This was a particular problem for the Jews.

What Does “Grace” Mean?

“Grace” is the opposite of trusting in the law. Christians should not trust anything but God for their salvation. Paul’s teachings on “grace” in the Book of Romans come primarily out of Romans 3, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:23–24). We are “*justified freely by his grace.*” Romans 6 says:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? . . . For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (Romans 6:1, 14–15).

It is interesting that the word “grace” is very similar to the word “joy” in the Greek. The “grace” of God brings the “joy” of the LORD. “Grace” is the free gift of God of salvation through Calvary. If I wanted to use a mathematical equation, I would say “Grace” equals Calvary. It is God’s gift of salvation to Christians through the blood of Christ shed on Calvary. That

is what we are supposed to trust, completely one hundred percent. If we trust Christ on Calvary 50% and our law-keeping 50%, that is not trusting the “*grace*” of God.

The Term Legalism

Legalism is a hot-button word that is thrown around by a lot of people. A lot of times it is used to mean you disagree with me about some doctrinal matter; therefore, you are a legalist. That is not the definition of legalism. It is important to get this word straight from the very beginning. Legalism has to do with trusting anything other than the cross of Jesus Christ completely for my salvation. Legalism is trusting anything other than the grace of God for my salvation. The Christian must really test himself and ask if that is what he does or does he trust Calvary completely. In Philippians 3:8–9 Paul said:

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

He understood that he used to be a legalist when he was living as a Jew, but he was no longer a legalist.

“Righteousness” and “Justification”

“Righteousness” and “justification” are really in essence the same word in the Greek language so, treat them as very similar concepts. An often-heard phrase for “justification” is “Just As If I’d Never Sinned.” That is perhaps a good catchphrase, but “righteousness” and “justification” have a much deeper meaning than that. “Righteousness” is not only that which God gives us in order to be saved, but it is also part of

the essence of who God is. Christians have the ability to participate in the divine nature of God:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3–4).

God gives of Himself in order to make us like Himself.

“*Justification*” is a legal term. God declares us “not guilty.” It is a courtroom term. We are in the courtroom on trial for our sin, and God is sitting on the bench as the Judge and He says, “You are acquitted because of the case that has been presented for you through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Prologue and Theme of Romans

The introductory work for the Book of Romans was covered in chapters one and two. The reason this book needed to be written was because of what was happening in the church in Rome. The problem was their disunity. A look at the background for the book reveals that Paul was the author and that the book was written in Corinth in 56–58 A.D.

The Prologue (Romans 1:1–17)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1–6).

This introduction sounds a lot like Paul's greeting to many of the churches to whom he wrote, but it is also different. Remember that he did not plant this church and he had never been there, so he must introduce himself. Imagine sitting in the assembly in Rome and someone says, "We have received a letter from the Apostle Paul." They might bristle a little bit and

ask, “Who is he to say anything to us? He has never visited here and does not know us.” They might look at him as an outsider or even an intruder. Notice how Paul starts this book and how he reveals something about how he feels about himself and his identity in Christ. This is very important to Christians.

I want to prime this a little bit. I like to ask Christians, “Who are you?” Often times they tell me their first name or maybe their first and second name. Sometimes men and women tell me what their name is and what they do for a living. That is how people introduce themselves in the United States, particularly. Visiting and then living in New Zealand I would try to get to know people, and I would talk to them for a while. I might know their first name, but normally I did not know their last name or what they did for a living. I might know how they became a Christian, I might know with whom they were studying to become a Christian, and I might know some of their struggles in their Christian life. That is what they thought was important to their identity. Paul’s instructions in this letter reveal his identity. Christians can gain from that. We need to find our identity in what God says about us, not in what we think we are or what the world tells us we are. We are who God tells us we are.

As Paul opened this letter to the Christians in Rome, he needed to gain a little credibility so he could talk to them in a way that he could get his message across. He started by saying, “*Paul.*” He did not say, “Saul of Tarsus.” Saul of Tarsus was his old life, but that was not who he was now. He received his name in Acts 13:9 while he was on his first missionary journey. Saul was left behind, and Paul was his name from there on. Paul was his Christian name, and that was his identity. He could have started this letter with “Paul, an apostle of Christ,” but that is not how he started. He started with “*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.*” The word “*servant*” is really the word “*slave*.” The Greek word is *doulos*. Paul was a slave of Jesus Christ. The word “*slave*” was offensive. It was unbecoming

and low, but not as far as Paul was concerned. He introduced himself as a “*slave*.”

Paul did not begin his introduction by saying he was an “*apostle*.” He was going to say he was an “*apostle*,” but first he wanted the Roman Christians to know that he was a *doulos* of Jesus Christ. There are a lot of texts that relate to being a “*slave*” of Christ Jesus. Consider the following:

- *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake* (2 Corinthians 4:5).
- *Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible* (1 Corinthians 9:19).

Even to the lost, Paul would say, “I am a slave.” To the Christians he would say, “I am a slave.” This was his identity. It is acceptable to be a slave to Jesus Christ.

“*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God*” (Romans 1:1). The word “*called*” means set apart, selected because I am different. Paul was set apart by the Lord Jesus Christ for a particular reason—because He wanted Paul to be saved, He wanted Paul to be His.” Called to be an *apostle*” — apostle is the word *apóstolos* in the Greek. It sounds just like the word in English. “*Apostle*” is the term that refers to the twelve and then also to Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas. Then later Paul became one of the other apostles. These men were set apart in specific ways to Christ Jesus. There were certain qualifications that they had to have to be called an apostle. It is interesting that in the Greek language this particular word has a generic meaning. It simply meant “one sent on a mission.” Isn’t there a sense in which all Christians are “ones sent on a mission”? It is not preferable that Christians walk around calling themselves apostles because that would be misunderstood, but it is appropriate that we understand that our identity is “I am one who has been sent on

a mission.” We have been called by the Lord Jesus Christ not only to be saved, but to be sent on a mission.

Paul was “*set apart for the gospel of God.*” He wanted to tell these Christians exactly what his mission was. His identity was not just connected to who Paul said he was. It was also connected to what he did. He was Paul, “*a servant of Christ Jesus.*” He was Paul, “*called to be an apostle.*” He was Paul, “*set apart for the gospel of God.*” He had a mission that was given to him by God. Is not this the mission of all Christians? Are we not also “*set apart for the gospel of God*”? Christians need to challenge each other to find our identity in who God says we are and to find our identity in what God says we are to be doing. Christians need to get away from finding their identity in things that are not lasting. Our identity should not be found in the things that men say are important.

Consider what Paul said about “*the gospel of God.*” Paul said he “. . . *was set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand . . .*” (Romans 1:2). The word “*promised*” is often connected to the Abrahamic promise. This “*gospel*” goes all the way back to Genesis 12 (Paul talked about that in Galatians 3). This promise was not just through Abraham. Paul also said, “*the gospel he promised before hand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.*” Men can go to the “*Holy Scriptures*” and find all these prophecies of the coming Messiah in the Old Testament. We can find prophecies of the coming of the Kingdom, the Church. Christ and His Church are prophesied hundreds of times in the books of the Old Testament. Paul said, “This Gospel, of which I am a part, is long-standing; it is not brand-new. I did not make it up and it is not just a Jewish thing. It is a God thing that is long-standing.”

Paul said, “This Gospel is about Jesus”:

Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of

God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:3–4).

Paul said, “*regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David*” (Romans 1:3). That is really the essence of the Gospel. It is a Gospel about Christ. Then Paul mentioned some things about Christ that are important. He said, “. . . *who as to his human nature was a descendant of David.*” Was Jesus human? Yes, He was! He was one hundred percent man in the flesh: “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). Paul noted that Christ was “*a descendant of David.*” Anytime we connect David to Jesus, we must remember that David was a king. Jesus was the Messiah. The Old Testament prophesied that David was going to have a child someday in his lineage who would be a King, and He would be the Messiah.

Still focusing on Jesus, Paul said, “*who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 1:4). Not only was Jesus the “*gospel of God,*” He was totally “*human*” and “*a descendant of David,*” and He was also Divine. He was “*declared with power to be the Son of God.*” He was Deity. That declaration was made by the Holy “*Spirit.*” The supreme proof of Jesus’ deity was “*his resurrection from the dead.*” John 20:30–31 says: “*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples . . . these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God . . .*” But the supreme miracle, the ultimate miracle that proves beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus is the Son of God, is that he was raised from the dead.

Paul continued by saying:

Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all

*the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.
And you also are among those who are called to
belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:5–6).*

Paul worked through this passage of Scripture to say this to the Roman Christians:

- This is who I am: my mission is about the Gospel.
- Let me tell you what the Gospel is:
 - It has been promised.
 - It has been prophesied.
- The Gospel is about Jesus Christ:
 - He was a man.
 - He was also Deity.
- This is my part in the Gospel:
 - Through Him, the Christ.
 - For His name's sake, it is because of Him.
- Let me tell you what I do: my mission is about the Gospel.
- My apostleship is to call people from among all peoples, and especially the Gentiles —
 - To come to believe the truth about Jesus as the Son of God.
 - To become a Christian, to be faithful and an obedient person.

Paul used an interesting phrase at the end of Romans 1:5, “. . . call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” Paul actually ended the Book of Romans by talking about “*the obedience*” of faith. Do not misunderstand. When Paul uses the word “*faith*” in the Book of Romans, he understood that “*faith*” includes obedience. It is not just a mental assent to God being this or God having

done this without any real commitments or to obedience of following truth. Paul said, "I call people to the obedience of faith" (This sounds a lot like James 2). Paul talked about himself in these first five verses of Romans 1.

In Romans 1:6 he said, *"And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."* He was telling the Roman Christians they were also *"called to belong to Jesus Christ."* Paul, as an apostle, was not the only one who was *"called."* They belonged to Jesus as much as he did. They were slaves of Jesus Christ just as Paul was. And in some sense they also had a mission, an apostleship in regard to the Gospel. The Gospel that Paul was a part of, they were also a part of. Paul and the Christians in Rome were in this mission together. They were one. Paul was trying to take away any sense in their minds that he was somehow claiming superiority due to the fact that he was over them as an apostle who could hand down these dictates, say these things to them, and tell them what to do and how to behave. He did not have a real connection with them as fellow Christians. Paul was trying to establish a connection to them.

Romans 1:7 says: *"To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."* Paul had told the Roman Christians who he was, and in this verse he was telling them who they were. They were *"loved by God and called to be saints."* The word *"saints"* is the most-used term in the New Testament to describe those who are Christians. Paul used it quite frequently. It comes from the word that is translated *"holy"* and from the word that is sometimes translated as *"sanctified."* It refers to one who has been set apart and made holy by God for a particular purpose. There are a lot of definitions for the word *"saint"* in the religious world that are not correct. All Christians are *"saints"* according to Paul.

Paul opened most of his letters by saying, *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus*

Christ.” Because he was talking to fellow Christians, he wished for them to have more “*grace and peace.*”

Paul’s Prayer and Desire (Romans 1:8–13)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong — that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles (Romans 1:8–13).

Paul talked about several things in this passage of Scripture. First he said, “*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you.*” It is easy to pass over this first phrase because Paul used this in many of his letters, but Paul’s prayer life was extraordinary. Did he or did he not pray for all these people? Seeing Paul saying this to all the different churches and people, we might think, “How much time did this guy spend in prayer?” And that may be a good question for us. Paul said I pray “*for all of you.*” He prayed for these Christians and for people in other places whether they cared for him or not. He prayed for the Christians in Rome because their “*faith is being reported all over the world.*” Paul was excited for this church, even though he did not plant this church. There was no jealousy here. He cared about this church and their faith. I don’t think this faith in Rome had anything to do with holding up under

persecution. I don't find anything in the Book of Romans that indicates that at this point in history Nero was pushing Christians down and trying to hurt them. All of that came later. I am reflecting on a similar passage from Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:7–8:

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Paul was saying that these churches had shown their faith in God by sharing the Message. They were evangelistic and were reaching out to people, and people around the Brotherhood were hearing about it.

Paul prayed for the church in Rome, but he really wanted to be able to come see them. He was praying for an open door. Paul wanted to come see the Christians in Rome because “*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong — that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith*” (Romans 1:11–12). The words “*spiritual gift*” could indicate that as an apostle Paul wanted to go to Rome to lay hands on them and give them some miraculous gifts. The language here in the Greek is very similar to other places where miraculous gifts are referred to. However, I tend to think that he was talking about wanting to share spiritual things. Notice what he says in Romans 15:14, “*I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*” Spiritual gifts are for revealing the Word and for backing up the veracity of the Word, to prove that the Word is from God. Paul said they had what they needed; they already had the full range of gifts. It is possible that the gifts were carried back to Rome from the beginnings in Acts 2 when the apostles laid hands on Christians, or some apostle could have come through Rome at a later date. I think they already had the

miraculous gifts. Based upon what Paul said in Romans 1:12, he intended for them to mutually encourage one another in the Faith. He wanted to come to them to share himself and his teachings with them, and he also wanted them to share and build him up by their own faith.

Paul also wanted to “. . . *have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.*” Paul wanted to come and encourage them. That was about edification. And he wanted to “*have a harvest among*” them. That was about evangelism. He knew that he needed to build up the Body so that it could carry out its function. Paul would not be one to go into a city without evangelizing. He would find a market place or a synagogue where he could find people to teach. That was who Paul was. He wanted to encourage and evangelize. That was his giftedness. He wanted to teach the Gentiles in Rome just as he had taught in other places.

Romans 1:14–17 is a marvelous passage containing the three “*I am . . .*” statements of Paul:

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:14–17).

- “***I am obligated*** both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.” “***Obligated***” is a very strong word in the Greek language. It is “I owe you” or “I ought to” or “I am in debt to you.” Notice what Paul was saying. He said he was “. . . ***obligated*** both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.” He was

talking about being obligated to the lost in Rome. He was obligated to his brothers in Christ in Rome, but he was obligated to share the Gospel with the lost people. This is a unique and challenging thought. Sometimes Christians think that out of the wonderfulness of our hearts and the overflowing grace that is in us they will share the Gospel with the world. That is probably true, but the language Paul used here is a little bit different — “*I am obligated*” to teach. In what sense do we feel indebted to anyone? Most of the time we feel indebted because someone has given us something: children may feel indebted to their parents, people may be indebted to a bank that loaned them money, or a Christian may feel indebted to the person who led them to Christ or who has been their mentor through the years. It is because someone has given you something that you may feel you owe them something. In that regard, what does Paul owe the lost? The lost have kicked him out of cities, beaten him up, sent him on his way, and even bad-mouthed him. In what sense was he obligated to preach the Gospel to them? Christians need to pray that they will have this spirit as well. We need to feel this deep sense of debt to the lost. No wonder Paul said, “*Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible*” (1 Corinthians 9:19) when he wrote to the Corinthians.

- “*That is why **I am so eager to preach** the gospel also to you who are at Rome.*” Paul was anxious and ready to preach the Gospel to those in Rome. The word “*eager*” is a strong word that has the idea of heat or fired up. The English word “thermos” comes from this Greek word. Sunset used to have a student who would come into the classroom and say, “Are you fired up for Jesus?” It was a funny thing, but in a way he was right. Christians need to be fired up for the right reasons. It was obvious that Paul wanted to preach the Gospel.

- ***“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”*** Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the one Message that is the power of God to bring righteousness and salvation to every person on the face of the earth. Why would anyone be ashamed of the power of this one Message? Libraries are full of self-help books that fired people up twenty years ago that are now collecting dust. The books from the 1600's are just collecting dust. One Message has been applicable from 33 A.D. to the present day and can save all people in all ages at all times and in all places. It is the Gospel.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul asked the Brethren to pray for him:

Pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:19–20, NASB).

This would indicate that Paul was not always so full of energy and perhaps there were times when he may have been intimidated.

The Gospel has the power to save people. What kind of people? From what ugliness did the Gospel save you? How many sins did you pile up before you became a Christian? How did you shame the name of Christ? How did you put Him down? How did you put down other Christians before you decided to become a Christian? Think about people in the headlines with all kinds of sins in their lives. Maybe they are murderers or thieves or

rapists or whatever they may be. We look at some and think that is a horrible sin. Is the Gospel strong enough to save even those people? People from other lands, people from other cultures, people in their older years through those who may be just coming into their teens? One Message to save all? No wonder Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel. Paul said, "*first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*" The overarching theme is — the Gospel is for all! There is a song that says, "Of one the Lord has made the race, Thro' one has come the fall; Where sin has gone must go His grace: The Gospel is for all."²

In Romans 1:17 Paul continued to talk about the Gospel: "*For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'*" Paul did not talk about the term "*salvation*" in this book. He used the terms "*righteousness*" and "*justification.*" He said this "*gospel,*" this Message about the Christ on Calvary, this Message that is about the taking away of your sins, is about the "*righteousness from God.*" It is about the perfection of God that He is giving to you when you become a Christian. It is about ". . . *him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Not only does He give us "*righteousness,*" but we "*become the righteousness of God.*" Again, it is no wonder that Paul was "*not ashamed*" of the Gospel of Christ because it has the "*righteousness of God*" in it. That "*righteousness*" can be ours as children of God. This "*righteousness*" has been "*revealed.*" God has not kept it a secret. He wants everybody to know. That was the point of Jesus saying to His apostles and to all Christians, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark

2. Howard, Alton H., *Songs of the Church* (West Monroe, La: Howard Publishers, 1977), no. 88.

16:15, NKJV). “*Every creature*” needs to understand the “*righteousness of God.*”

The “*righteousness of God . . . is by faith from first to last.*” One becomes a Christian by faith, by the acceptance of the Gospel of Christ. His life in Christ continues to be “*by faith.*” In the Greek it says “from faith unto faith.” The New International Version translates it, “*by faith from first to last.*” Paul ends this prologue by saying, “*the righteous will live by faith,*” which is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4. This is not a new doctrine; righteousness has always been “*by faith.*” Justification has always been “*by faith.*” It was true before the Law of Moses came on Mt. Sinai and during the times when the Law was in place for the Jews. People have always been “*justified by faith.*” Paul said this is still true, all men are “*justified by faith.*” Now man can see the Christ who has been revealed, and all men can be “*justified by faith.*”

The Doctrine of Condemnation

Romans 1:18–32

The main argument of the Book of Romans begins in Romans 1:18. Romans 1:18–3:20 is called the Doctrine of Condemnation, or Righteousness Needed. This section of the book describes lost people. Paul was writing to the Roman church. He was not trying to persuade them that they were lost. He had already called them “*saints*” in Romans 1:7. He was not telling them that he needed to evangelize among them. This church was dis-united. The Jews and the Gentiles were pulling apart at the seams. They were at each other’s throats. Paul wanted to bring them back together so they would be united and so they could be the Lord’s instrument in Rome to the utmost degree. Paul built a series of arguments to bring the Christians in Rome back together.

God’s Revelation of Himself to Man

Romans 1:18–20

Paul’s first argument was to remind the Roman Christians of who they used to be. He wanted to remind them of their previous lives. Since there were Jews and Gentiles in this congregation, he began by talking generically about who the Gentiles used to be. Then he did the same thing with the Roman Jewish Christians, who were a bit uppity for the most part, thinking that the Gentiles wallowed in the mire of immorality and idolatry. As Jews, they knew they had been lost, but at least they had been law keepers following the Law of Moses. Paul put the Jews and the Gentiles on even footing in

this section of Scripture. He concluded that before they became Christians, they were all lost because they had all sinned. They had all been separated from a relationship with God.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:18–20).

In this section Paul was talking to the Gentiles about what they used to be. He introduced the fact that God had indeed already revealed Himself to all mankind. Paul zeroed in on several ways that God has said He exists, He is here, and man needs to pay attention to Him. Paul was not talking about the Word of God here, which is the ultimate way God reveals Himself to mankind. The Scriptures are sometimes called Special Revelation. There are other generic ways, which are called General Revelation, in which God says, “I am here, I exist, and I am the Creator of this universe.” Paul did not start by talking about creation. He started with “*the wrath of God is being revealed.*” “*Is being revealed*” is not past tense, it is an ongoing thing. In what sense would the Lord be revealing Himself through His wrath? Think back to the Old Testament when over and over, God judged the Jews and other nations because of their sin. The first chapter of the Book of Amos is a good example, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel have sections where the LORD talked about God coming in judgment on a nation by destroying them because of their sin — “*The wrath of God is being revealed.*” The Book of Revelation talks about “*seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God*” (Revelation 15:7) being poured out upon the Roman Empire in

the New Testament days. The “*wrath of God*” relates to the fact that mankind is in sin and has committed all kinds of moral crimes and idolatrous acts against God, and that He is going to punish them for those sins. That is the “*wrath of God*” being revealed. Paul was saying the “*wrath of God*” did not just happen during the Old Testament time, but it also was happening during his time. Nations were experiencing the “*wrath of God.*” There is an interesting passage in the Old Testament that says: “*My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness*” (Isaiah 26:9). That does not mean that men always pay attention when God brings His judgment upon nations. Revelation 16:10–11 says:

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

God has revealed Himself to mankind and He wants people to repent and come back to Him. However, that did not always happen.

Notice some of the terms that Paul used in Romans 1:18:

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the **godlessness** and wickedness of men who **suppress the truth** by their wickedness (NIV).*

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all **ungodliness** and **unrighteousness** of men, who **hold the truth in unrighteousness** (KJV).*

- “*godlessness*” — The Kings James Version uses the word “*ungodliness*” which is a term that simply means wickedness of all kinds.
- “*Unrighteousness*” — This is also a term that is used in the King James Version. In the Greek it is *adikía*, which also means wickedness of all kinds.
- “*suppress the truth by their wickedness*” or “*hold the truth in unrighteousness*” — People want to shut their minds to the fact that they are doing things that are wrong.

Many people who are doing wrong do not want to hear that they are doing things that are wrong. They do not want anyone to bother their conscience. They want to wipe out the fact that they are sinning. When people are doing bad things and nations are falling into sin, they like to suppress the truth. They want to put the truth out of their minds. This is the Catastrophic Argument that God exists: He does wrathful things in nature and to nations to get people’s attention.

In Romans 1:19 Paul said, “*since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.*” God has made His power and His divine nature plain. Some think this means that God puts a sense of morality into man when he is born, indicating that God is in every man. Some commentators are persuaded of this, but I am not sure that is the case (The same possibility comes again in Romans 2:11–15). Some take the position that God is saying that man is inborn with some sense of God and some sense of moral structure. Some call this verse the Moral Argument. I think that Romans 1:19, “*since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them*” is setting up the Creation or Cosmological Argument in Romans 1:20:

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

“For,” in this way God has made it plain, *“since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities,”* — (God’s) *“eternal power and divine nature,”* can be clearly seen through the things that have been made.

God says that man only has to look at the things He has made to figure out who God is and that He exists. Psalm 19:1 says, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”* Man should be able to look at nature, even without using the Bible, and conclude there must be a God. The things that are finite around man have to be made by someone who is eternal. Someone had to make this world. That which is finite cannot create that which is finite. One who is able to create the finite has to be One with incredible power, strength, and wisdom. Creation had to come from some One who is ingenious, considering how well everything is put together. However, matter did not make matter, so everything that is made had to be made by One who is infinite and deity.

Paul started this first section giving the Roman Christians some general ideas of God revealing Himself. I gather from this that God holds people responsible for coming to the following conclusions from seeing nature and looking at what God has made in nature and creation. Whether it is in the heavens, on the earth, or even within man himself, man ought to conclude the following: God exists, God is eternal, God is powerful, and God is deity.

Man’s Response to These Revelations

In Romans 1:21–32 Paul seems to focus on the typical sins of the Gentiles who were not Christians. These could be seen in the Old Testament cultures that existed around Israel. They were also evident in the New Testament cultures where Paul and other apostles and teachers of the Gospel went, whether it was Corinth, Rome, Philippi, or Ephesus. They found this kind of behavior among the Gentiles everywhere. Even though they

were religious, their religions, include some of these things that they were involved in:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:21–32).

Faulty Thinking

Notice the things in this section that Paul said the Gentiles were guilty of before they became Christians. He was reminding the Romans that they, too, were like this in their general nature. He began by telling these Christians that their minds were messed up:

For although they knew God . . . their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened
(Romans 1:21).

The people Paul was writing to “*knew God*” from the general ways God had revealed Himself, but they did not worship Him. They knew God, but they seemed to put Him out of their minds. They were thinking in ways that were not rational and were not correct. They were not thinking the way man should think with the evidence that was put before him. In Romans 1:18 Paul said, they “. . . *suppress the truth by their wickedness.*” If man is able to “*suppress the truth,*” he has to do something in his mind to change the way he is thinking about things. He did not want his conscience bothering him so he suppressed the truth that was telling him he was doing something wrong. He rationalized and changed his thinking about what he was doing. In some ways, he changed his value system to make himself think this was not all that bad and not necessarily wrong.

Paul continued in Romans 1:21, “. . . *but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*” Paul said their thinking did not lead to the right conclusions. “*Futile*” means that it was vain and did not really make sense. It did not lead anywhere. Not only was their rational thinking messed up, but their emotions, their hearts, were messed up. Consider what Paul said to the Ephesians:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of

their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more (Ephesians 4:17–19).

Paul was talking about “*the futility of their thinking*” for the Ephesians also. They had lost their “*sensitivity*” and given themselves over to “*sensuality*.” Their hearts were darkened so that their feelings were messed up. Their whole inside man was messed up. Paul was pointing out that when man gives himself over to evil, he has to rationalize or make his thinking such that it is in agreement with the way he is behaving. He also has to adjust his feelings so that what he feels says his actions are okay.

One of the most descriptive statements in regard to “*the futility of their thinking*” is in Romans 1:25, “*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.*” “*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie!*” — They were switching “*the truth of God*” for what they wanted to believe so they could feel good about what they were doing in their lives. In one of his early books, “*No Wonder They Call Him Savior*,” Max Lucado has a marvelous illustration in this regard:

It seems a couple of prowlers broke into a department store in a large city. They successfully entered the store, stayed long enough to do what they came to do, and escaped unnoticed . . . Instead of stealing anything, they changed the cost of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged . . . The \$5.95 sticker on a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor . . . The store opened as

usual. Customers began to shop. The place functioned as normal for four hours. Some people got some great bargains. Others got fleeced. Hard to believe? It shouldn't be — we see the same thing happening every day. We are deluged by a distorted value system.³

This is illustrative of what Satan has done in the world. When God created this world and made it the way He wanted, He set the right price tags on things. He said by His Word, “This is valuable and this is not as valuable. You need to give a lot of attention to this and do not give as much to that.” Satan came in with his lies, for “*he is a liar and the father of lies*” (John 8:44); he changed the price tags, and mankind believes that. That which the Lord says is very valuable, man says is not all that valuable. That which the Lord says to give less attention to, man has given himself over to it and paid high prices for it. This gives a good view of what Paul was trying to say. Man has changed the price tags of what he considers important and good and worth giving himself over to. Romans 1:28 is another verse in regard to how man thinks: “*Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.*” One more time, Paul said they did not think it was worthwhile to think the right way, so God basically said, “If that is the way you are going to think, then you are giving yourself over “. . . *to do what ought not to be done.*”

Faulty Worship

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him . . . (Romans 1:21).

³. Lucado, Max, *No Wonder They Call Him The Savior* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1986), p. 29–30.

What is glorifying God? What is giving thanks to Him? That is worship! Worship is what He deserves if He is the One who created this magnificent universe and earth and mankind. If He created these wonderful surroundings for us, what is the normal response? What is the normal response from a created being to its Creator? Psalm 148 says all creation praises God. Why? Because that is what a created being does. Creation reflects the glory of the Creator, and it also gives thanks to the Creator who made it. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul said, “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*” Christians learn to reflect the glory of God and increase in His glory more and more all the time. Yet these people had decided they did not want to glorify God or give Him thanks.

Paul continued his focus on wrong worship, saying they participated in idolatry:

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles . . . They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen (Romans 1:22, 25).

These people did not worship the Creator but instead worshiped what the Creator had made. They worshiped the created things. How foolish is that? One of the great passages in Scripture about idolatry is Isaiah 44:6–20. In this particular passage Isaiah told the Israelites, and any others who would listen, how ludicrous it was to cut down a tree and shape some part of it into an idol and make that a god. They would bow down and worship the idol, while they used other parts of the tree to make a fire to warm themselves or to cook their bread. Part of the tree became their god, and the other part of it they burned to make

their food. What can a tree do to save man? What can stone or metal do to save man? Do they hear? Do they have ears? They cannot hear. They cannot respond because they are not gods. There is only one God! The Gentile world in the past and even during the New Testament times worshiped a multiplicity of gods. These were not Jehovah God.

Faulty Living

The third thing Paul wrote about for those in Rome was wrong living. In Romans 1:24–32 Paul said they were into all kinds of “*wickedness*,” but the two main things were idolatry and immorality. Often times in cultures these two things seem to go together. That may even be true in the present-day cultures. If man can rationalize the truth of his wickedness, if he can change his way of thinking so that he accepts sexual immorality, which he normally considers to be immoral, with idolatry as part of worship, he becomes “*filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity*.” Often times that is what happened in the Old Testament to the Israelites. That was part of the idolatry of the nations that surrounded Israel. Israel often accepted these actions so that they were worshiping gods who somehow were included in and who encouraged sexual relationships with priestesses at the altars or temples of those gods.

In Romans 1:24, 26–27 Paul said:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

Sexual immorality of all kinds was a part of the immoral lifestyle of the Gentiles in the first century. This is still true of some cultures in the twenty-first century. There is not one specific kind of sexual immorality that Paul focused on. He focused on all of it and said that often times people have given themselves over to immorality, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual immorality. They both fit in the same category as far as God is concerned. Paul does focus on homosexual immorality to say that it is not “*natural*.” The word “*natural*” here is *fusikeén* in the Greek.

It seems from my word study of the word “*natural*” that in some New Testament contexts it means “inherent, inborn.” Other times it means “the way God determined that man should behave.” The latter does not necessarily infer that we were born that way but that man is to behave in a certain way. Thus, I am cautious about using this passage to say we were “born” in a certain way. I prefer to lean on the meaning of this word that instructs us to behave in a way that God determined and commanded that we should. It does not have anything to do with how we were born, but rather how God wants us to behave. For example, a fetal alcohol baby is predisposed to alcoholism when it gets older. The same is true for a baby born to a mother who uses cocaine. However, both offspring are not to give in to what they were “born with.” The argument that homosexuals make, “I was born this way,” is not a sufficient reason to give in to one’s desires in that way. Rather, we are to obey God’s ways, regardless of the desires of our birth.

There is a lot being said in the homosexual world today about, “I was born with these tendencies, I was born with this.” Honestly, I am not sure where science goes on that, and I am not sure that Paul commented one way or the other on that in this passage. Paul certainly states in this passage that this is not the way God intended it to be.

Paul was not talking about same-sex attraction and heterosexual attraction to someone who is not your mate, but

this is the same temptation, the same lust, that man has to deal with. When man is in a lustful situation and he plunges into the practice of that, then he has plunged into the actual sin. That is what Paul was talking about in Romans 1:26–28. He was talking about the person who has given himself over to the practice of immorality.

Paul also said at the end of this passage that there is a built-in penalty for homosexuality: *“Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”* Actually, there is a built-in penalty for any sin. There is a built-in penalty for worry. There is a built-in penalty for heterosexual sins. There is a built-in penalty for anger. Paul was not saying that the built-in penalty was unique to homosexual sin, he was just commenting on it. I do not know if our culture will ever admit that there is a built-in penalty, or remuneration as the word might be in this verse, for sin, but it is there.

Paul continued in Romans 1:28–32 to list all kinds of sins:

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Paul said all these sins fit into the same category. There are not categories of sin that are more condemning than others. Idolatry, immorality of all kinds, and all of these sins are in the

same category. What do these sins do to a man or a woman? They condemn. Gentiles were into all of these particular sins.

Paul ended this passage of Scripture saying “. . . *they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*” The Gentiles not only gave themselves over to the sins, but they encouraged others to be involved in those things as well. How bad is that, to encourage others to be involved in a sin that I know deep down is of a condemning nature? What is God’s response to this kind of behavior? How does He respond when people give themselves over to sin the way Paul has described here in Romans? Three times Paul recorded God’s response to these sins:

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another . . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts . . . Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

Does the statement “*God gave them over to*” mean that God gave up on them? Does that mean they did not have a chance to repent or change? Think back to the Old Testament, where in Exodus 4:18–14:31 there is the story of Pharaoh and the Israelites. There are a number of references to “*Pharaoh’s heart.*” There are passages that say “*he hardened his heart.*” Then at the end, as it is talking more and more about his resistance to God, the Scripture says, “*the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart.*” What an incredible thing that Pharaoh resisted God and all those plaques in Egypt to the point that God said, “If that is the way you are going to be, then I am going to harden your heart.” Here and in other passages there is the sense that if man resists God over and over again and shows that he wants no part of what God is trying to do to

influence man to adore Him, then God is going to say, in essence, “Go roll in the mire of your life. Just go live in that cesspool.” Hopefully, the sinner will see that it is a dead-end street. It does not give him real joy, real life, or real relationships. At that point, hopefully, the sinner will return to the Father in penitence like the prodigal son. When the prodigal son went into the foreign country, he realized that was not the life he wanted to live, and he came home to his father. Perhaps that is what the phrase “*God gave them over*” means more than anything else. Perhaps God was saying, “I am going to back off and give you some room and I am not going to try as hard to bring you back. If you have decided to live this way, then just do it. I will be here waiting for you, ready for you because I love you and want to forgive you, but you will have to turn around.” God was saying to the Gentile culture, “If you are going to resist creation, and My wrath, and My Word, then I am going to tell you to do whatever you want to do. Hopefully, that will send you to a dead-end street where you will say, ‘This is not life. I have to find something else.’” That is exactly what the Roman Christians did. They had been living this kind of lifestyle, and they woke up when they heard the Gospel and said, “This is the alternative, this is what I am looking for. This brings real life.” They chose to become Christians.

The Doctrine of Condemnation — The Guilt of the Jews

Romans 2:1–29

It is important to remember that Paul was talking to Christians in the Book of Romans. He set the stage by introducing himself to build rapport with his readers many of whom he had never met. Then he began to build his argument in Romans 1:18–3:20. This section is often called the Doctrine of Condemnation. He was not telling the Saints in Rome that they were lost, but he was reminding them of their past life before they became Christians. First he talked to the Gentiles in Romans 1:18–32 about their idolatrous and immoral lives. Paul knew that the Jews might have been thinking that they had never lived that crazy, messed up kind of life, so beginning in Romans 2:1 he told the Jews they had no excuse either for their sin.

Principles of God's Judgment Romans 2:1–16

Remember that in Romans 1:20 Paul said, *“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”* The Gentiles had no excuse for their sins. Beginning in Romans 2:1 Paul said the same was true for the Jews:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."

When a man sins, whether it is a lot of sins or a few sins, whether it is on your bad list of sins or it is on your less important sins, it is sin and the result is still condemnation. Talking to the Jews Paul wanted to remind them that before they became Christians they were lost because of their sins. Paul claimed the Jews knew God and had the Law of Moses, but they were still lost because they were doing the same things as the Gentiles.

Paul talked to the Jews in a generic way to say these are the reasons why you are lost; these are the ways in which God judges a man. The following list includes the principles of God's judgment as Paul described them from Romans 2:1–16:

- *"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things"* (Romans 2:1). The Jews were condemned based on personal guilt. Man is not judged on the basis of what somebody else does or does not do. He cannot ride the coattails of his grandmother, his father, or his friend into the Kingdom of God. Judgment is on a personal basis according to the things he has done in the flesh (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10). Judgment is related to the things about his own life not somebody else's life. According to this verse, even his ability to point out the sins of somebody else does not free him from his own personal guilt of sin.
- *"Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth"* (Romans 2:2). God's judgment is according to *"truth."* There is not a *"the"* in

the Greek text here, so this is not “*the truth*,” meaning the Gospel. Paul was saying that God’s judgment is related to reality. A person might want to rationalize that he has not done so badly, but his judgment is based on the fact that he has done certain things and God knows that. That is reality, and he cannot wash away or rationalize concerning those things. Judgment is based on reality.

- “*So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?*” (Romans 2:3). Judgment is inescapable. The Jews were good about pointing out the sins of the Gentiles. They were always condemning others, but they could not escape judgment. Judgment would catch them, too. God would know where they were and what their sins were. In an Old Testament context of judgment, Isaiah 2:19 says, “*Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth.*” Man cannot escape God’s judgment. On the final day when God comes in judgment, do we really think that we can escape? Everyone will appear before the judgment seat of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 14:10–12).
- “*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?*” (Romans 2:4). Judgment will consider a personal response to God’s goodness. How will we personally respond to God’s generosity, His kindness, His tolerance, and His patience? How will man respond to God’s revelations through nature? How will those who are not Christians respond to His providential kindness trying to get them to respond obediently to Him? Those who have rejected those advances from God, those who have resisted, God will hold accountable.

- *“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed”* (Romans 2:5). The judgment of God is future. Paul gets visual here — man is storing up wrath. In other words, instead of man piling up his works or his faith in his works for God to consider, man is piling up all his sins, storing them up, and all he will receive at the end is God’s wrath because He knows what man has done in his life. He will bring wrath upon those who know not God and know not His Gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9).
- *“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done’”* (Romans 2:5–6). God’s judgment is based upon His divine justice. Judgment is not according to anybody else’s way of looking at things. Judgment is not according to anybody else’s rules. Nobody else’s law is going to come into existence so they can say, “I am going to use my own laws as the basis for judgment.” *“Righteous judgment,”* the justice of God Almighty, has the final say because He is the Judge. No one else has the right to hold man responsible for what he has done. God is the ultimate Judge, and His judgement will always be righteous.
- *“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”* (Romans 2:7–10). The judgment of God has rewards and regrets. Just to clarify, do not get the idea

from these verses that man can pile up enough good works in order to secure salvation on his own merits. The entire Book of Romans says the Christian is saved by justification by faith apart from trusting in his own works. This passage has to harmonize with the rest of the Book of Romans. In this context Paul is saying, “If you want to look at the big picture of judgment, those who respond to God in doing good, in persistence in following Him, and in living a faithful life, then you will be the one who will receive eternal life from God. But if you reject Him, if you are self-seeking, if you do not follow the truth, if you follow evil, if you follow the bad things, then what is going to be left for you? There will only be the judgment of God.” Judgment has an end. Everybody’s life is going to be responded to by God in one way or another. Either it is going to be a reward for a faithful response to Him or it is going to be regret for the rejection of Him.

- “*For God does not show favoritism*” (Romans 2:11). The judgment of God is impartial in its scrutiny. The Jew and the Gentile will be judged according to God’s righteousness and justice. There will be no favorites when it comes to judging. God will not sit on the throne and say, “I just really like the Jews more than the Gentiles.” He will not say, “I like you better than that person.” He will not say, “You are prettier or you are nicer.” His judgment will be righteous and impartial. Some may think that God is going to be partial to some people or to some nation or some ethnicity one over another. The Book of Romans says everybody is on a level playing field when it comes to God’s judgment.
- “*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law*

who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)" (Romans 2:12–15). The judgment of God takes into account obedience to "*the Law*" and is by the standard of the "*law*."

The word "*law*" is used several times in this passage. In the New International Version and in most of the English versions of the Bible the word "*the*" appears before the word "*law*," but actually in the Greek "*the*" is not there most of the time. It is important to determine from the context which "*law*" Paul was talking about. Was it a "*law*" system in general like the moral "*law*" system that was in place before "*the Law*" of Moses? Or was it "*the Law*" of Moses? Context is really the only way to determine which "*law*." Most of the time in the Book of Romans Paul was talking about "*the Law of Moses*" or a "*law*" system.

In this particular case, Paul said, "*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.*" Remember in this section, he was talking about Jews and Gentiles. In the first phrase, "*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law*," he was talking about the Gentiles who had sinned apart from the "*law*" of Moses, because "*the law*" of Moses really had nothing to do with the Gentiles during the Old Testament time. Did they sin? Yes, they did (cf. Romans 1:21–33). The Gentiles sinned, thus they broke the "*law*," but they were not going to perish under "*the law*" of Moses because they were under their own "*law*."

And then Paul said, "*. . . all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.*" In this sentence Paul was talking to

the Jews, who were under “*the law*” of Moses, and they would be judged by that “*law*.” Whether the Roman Christians had been under “*the law*” of Moses as a Jew or under the moral “*law*” as a Gentile, they were still breaking that “*law*,” and they were still sinning, and they were still condemned. It did not matter whether they had “*the Law*” of Moses or not. The point was, “Did they break ‘*law*’?”

“For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” (Romans 2:13). If one wants to be saved under any “*law*” system, whether it is “*the Law of Moses*” or any “*law*” system, you have to keep every law perfectly all of your life because a “*law*” system does not have a way to wipe away your violations. Under a “*law*” system there is no way to wipe away your sins by the blood of Jesus because His blood is not involved in the “*law*” system. Paul was saying that everybody outside of Christ is going to be judged under the “*law*” system because every one is under a “*law*” system if they are not under the blood of Christ.

“(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law . . .)” (Romans 2:14). The New International Version puts Romans 2:14–15 in parenthesis. The Gentiles did not have “*the Law of Moses*,” but they had the moral “*law*.” A “*law*” was put in place in the Garden of Eden for everyone. The “*law of Moses*” came later, and then, there was “*the law of Moses*” for the Jews and a moral “*law*” for the Gentiles. This is the passage of Scripture that some use to say that a moral law was put in place for mankind at birth, because they “. . . do by nature things required by the law.”

“(. . . since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing

witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)” (Romans 2:15). Once again, some say that “*written on their hearts*” is proof that a moral “*law*” was written on the hearts of the Gentiles when they were born. Remember though that “*written on their hearts*” does not have to be an inborn thing. In Jeremiah 31:31–34 the prophet prophesied about the coming of the Messianic Age and talked about the Gospel, the Law of God, being written on their hearts. In the New Testament “*written on their hearts*” has to do with being taught the Gospel. It was not something that was inborn for man, the Gospel is not something that man is born with the knowledge of, it must be taught. Man must be taught salvation by education. Paul was not implying that the Gentiles had some moral “*law*” that they were born with. “*Law*” is taught by parents, by society, by rulers, leaders, and teachers. The judgment of God takes into account obedience to the “*law*” and the standard of the “*law*.” The conclusion of God’s judgment is that man has broken the law whether he is Jew or Gentile and because of that man stands condemned.

- “*This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares*” (Romans 2:16). Paul said, “The judgment of God that I am talking about and the judgment by which all men are judged is actually verified in and spoken of in the Gospel that I am preaching to the Roman Christians.” The Gospel that Paul was preaching does not do away with the idea of judgment. There will be judgment. Everybody is lost under a “*law*” system. How can man escape a “*law*” system? Paul addressed that question over and over again in the second half of his book to the Romans.

Claims and Counterclaims of the Jews

Romans 2:17–29

The Jews typically reacted to being a Jew with a sense of entitlement. They had the sense of “we have a lot more therefore we **are a lot better** than the Gentiles.” Paul tried to tear down that argument and he could do that because he was a Jew and used to feel and believe that same way. He knew exactly how a Jew would think.

In Romans 2:17–24 Paul began by saying:

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Paul spoke to the Jews listing things that were known truths for the Jews. The New International and other versions of the Bible use the word “if,” but this word is sometimes translated “since.” “If you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God . . .” that did not make them better. They could call themselves “a Jew” because they were Jews. They could “rely on the law and brag about [their] relationship to God” because they did rely on the

"law." The nation of Jews did have a special relationship with Jehovah God in the Old Testament before the coming of Christ, before Calvary, and before the New Testament church. Even though Paul may have been saying, "*If . . . if . . . if . . .*" there was an element of truth to this list.

Several times in this list Paul was talking to the Jews about their relationship with the Gentiles: Were they "*. . . an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants . . . ?*" In a sense all of these had been responsibilities of the Jews in the Old Testament. They were supposed to go to the Gentiles and share Jehovah God with them. They did not do a very good job of this. Think back to Jonah in the Old Testament. He did not want to go to city of Nineveh. He was typical of the Jews during his day. The Jews in the New Testament in the time of Jesus hated the Gentiles so they did not want to share what they had with the Gentiles even though they were supposed to. They had an uppity attitude concerning the heathen Gentiles. They believed they were so much better than any body else. The truth is, they had advantages over the Gentiles, but that did not automatically entitle them to salvation.

Beginning in Romans 2:21, Paul was asking rhetorical questions: "*You who . . . do you not teach yourself . . . do you steal . . . do you commit adultery . . . do you rob temples . . . You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?*" Paul was confronting them with these strong statements as questions. They preached against stealing, and yet, they were thieves. There was a lot of truth to this list, but there was also a lot of responsibility that went with it. The question was, "What have you, the Jews, done with all of these privileges?" What had they done with all the privileges God had given them? In spite of all the privileges the Jews had and the privileges they claimed to have, they did not use their privileges to their intended end. God saw them as hypocrites.

Paul was not too far removed from the time of Jesus. Jesus spoke to "*the teachers of the law and the Pharisees*" and said, "You teach others, but you do not practice it yourself" (cf.

Matthew 23:). That was hypocrisy. Paul sounds like Jesus when he says, *"You who preach against stealing, do you steal?"* (Romans 2:21). Jesus accused these same Jewish leaders of stealing from their own parents. They had money that they said they were going to give to the Lord, but when their parents needed something, if they were hungry, they would usually make excuses that they had already devoted that money to God, *"Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God)"* (Matthew 15:3–9; Mark 7:6–13). This was supposed to be an extra gift that they had decided to give to the Lord. It was not something they had to give, and they could have used that money to take care of their parents. Jesus said they broke the laws of God because they wanted to be seen of men as religious. They would steal from their parents to make that happen.

Paul said, *"You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?"* (Romans 2:22). When the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce, He accused those who justified putting away their wives by writing *"certificate(s) of divorce"* of committing *"adultery"* (Matthew 19:1–9; Mark 10:1–12). There were examples in Jesus' time that continued in Paul's time where the Jews would say one thing and do something else. They would do it to be seen of men and Paul, too, called it hypocrisy.

Not only were the Jews hypocrites, but they dishonored God before others: *"You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"* Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:5 when he said, *"God's name is blasphemed."* This was an interesting context because in that day Israel was about to be carried into Babylonian captivity. When they were carried into Babylonian captivity what do you think all the heathen people were saying? What were the Babylonian and the Moabite people saying? They were probably saying, "Jehovah God cannot protect His people." So they blasphemed the name of Jehovah God. The captivity did

not happen because God did not have the power to protect the Jews. It happened because God was committed to the Covenant of Blessings and Cursings from Deuteronomy 28. God had to punish them when the time came. The Jews were carried into Babylonian captivity because that was exactly what God had to do. God took the blame from those who did not understand that concept. The same is true today. When Christians misbehave, when we do not do what is right, people look at us and say, “You claim to be a Christian, I bet your God is not really that special.” When we do not live in such a way to reflect that we believe His Word, then people do not want to be a part of Christianity. Christians have a tremendous responsibility to represent God in the right way.

In Romans 2:25–29 Paul said:

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements [this would refer to the Gentiles], will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.

Paul was telling the Jews they had a heartless religion. They went through the motions, they observed the physical laws such as circumcision, but they did not do that which was from the heart. Paul presented the hypothetical scenario of Gentiles who did not have “the law” of Moses, but kept the

"law" they did have. Even though they did not have *"circumcision,"* it was as if they were the ones who had been circumcised and were okay with God. The Jews who had been circumcised were breaking *"the law."* The Jews would have been aghast at that. Was Paul actually saying that the Gentiles who were uncircumcised could be in good with God, but the Jew who had been circumcised and had *"the law"* of Moses (but did not keep it) were not in good with God? That was exactly what Paul was saying.

The Jews needed to know what was important. It was not just keeping *"the law"* and being circumcised that was important. The heart must also be circumcised. Even in the Old Testament it was important for their heart to be right with God. God used the metaphor of circumcision cutting away that which was evil and bad. In that sense it was important that the Jew did not stop with circumcision of the flesh but that his heart had to be right with God.

Paul wanted the Jews to understand that it was not just because they possessed *"the law"* that made them right with God. They needed to understand that the judgment of God was going to consider all these things. Basically, the bottom line was if they were going to live under a *"law"* system, then they had to live perfectly. Who could do that? Nobody can do that. Everybody breaks law. The Gentiles probably understood this principle quicker than the Jews did. If a Gentile broke the *"law,"* where did that leave him? Lost! If a Jew broke *"the law of Moses,"* where did that leave him? Lost! If they were trusting their law keeping, they were lost!

The Doctrine of Condemnation — Therefore All Are Lost

Review

Paul had previously developed part of his argument. Remember that it was very important that Paul build an argument to take down the problem of disunity in the Roman church. There were Jews and Gentiles who seemed to be at each others' throats for various reasons. It was not just a small disagreement — they were not looking at each other as brethren in Christ. Even though Paul did not establish this congregation, he was the one writing them because he wanted to straighten out the problems before he arrived in Rome. Remember that he was only planning to pass through Rome on his way to Spain. He was on his way to virgin territories as far as the Gospel was concerned. The faith of this church was known through the Brotherhood and around the world (cf. Romans 1:8). Paul introduced himself in Romans 1:1–17. Then he started the argument, known as the doctrine of condemnation, calling for these Romans to remember what they used to be before they became Christians, they were lost. He reminded the Gentiles of their lives with all the immorality and idolatry and everything else that went with that lifestyle when they were not Christians. They were lost because of the way they lived. They had no excuse, and God held them accountable for their sins.

Beginning in Romans 2, Paul attacked the Jewish mind-set that they were better than the Gentiles:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things (Romans 2:1).

The Jews had done the same things as the Gentiles before they became Christians. Under a system where a “law” has been put into place, man must obey every law, every time, perfectly. Everybody who is not a Christian is under a “law” system, whether they are Jew or Gentile. A person cannot trust law-keeping to save himself. The Jew often tried to make law-keeping his plan of salvation. Paul had to attack that mentality. He talked to them about the way in which God judges people. He also talked about the fact that the Jews thought they were special. Finally he told them that they were hypocrites and that their religion was not real.

Jewish Questions or Objections Answered **Romans 3:1–20**

Paul continued his argument with the Roman Christians in Romans 3:1–20. He wanted to build these arguments for the Jews so they would be really convinced that they, too, were lost before God.

In Romans 3:1–8 Paul asked a series of questions with short answers. It is especially important to know that these questions are Jewish in nature. Paul, who grew up in Judaism as Saul of Tarsus, would have known the kind of arguments that a Jew would put forth. A Jew might argue back, even perhaps push back at Paul for having made the arguments that he did in Romans 2. Knowing what might be an argument from a typical Jew, Paul formed those arguments into questions, and he gave the answers.

- *“What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God”* (Romans 3:1–2). The first thing a typical Jew might say as he pushed back would be, “You have really beaten the Jews up and demeaned us. You have knocked the props out from under us. You said all the things God gave us do not amount to anything, including circumcision.” The Jews might have asked the question, *“What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?”* “We thought we were the chosen people of God in the Old Testament. Does that mean something? Do we have a certain privilege or advantage?”

Paul used a specific word in a way that was very important. He used the word “*advantage*.” Paul’s comeback was to say, “There are many advantages to being a Jew.” Paul used the word “*advantage*,” but there is a difference in what Paul was saying and what the Jews felt, believed, or thought they were entitled to. They thought that since they were the chosen people of God in the Old Testament and that because they had circumcision, they were automatically entitled to a saved relationship with God. Christians might say, “Once born into the family of God — always saved.” Paul said that was not correct. What was correct was that having been born Jews they had a lot of “*advantages*” that the Gentile did not have. Paul mentioned some of those in Romans 2:17–20: they were Jews, they had come from Judah, they were the praised ones, and God loved them like He loved no other nation. In that sense, God had given the Jews privileges and “*advantages*” that no one else on the face of the earth had received.

Consider the following passages from the Old Testament: *“He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the Lord”* (Psalm 147:20). This did not mean that the Gentiles did not have “*laws*.” That

has already been established. The Jews had so much more to their “*advantage*.” Look at Amos 3:2–3: “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins. Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?*” God and the Jews had walked together since Mount Sinai in a very special way. Isaiah wrote: “*The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight . . .*” (Isaiah 5:7). There were great “*advantages*” to being a Jew — “*Much in every way*.” Paul said to the Jews, “. . . *they have been entrusted with the very words of God*.” “*Entrusted*” is an interesting word in the Greek. It comes from the word “*faith*,” ***pisteuo***. God had “*faith*” in Israel to trust them with the “*law of Moses*,” which was far beyond any other “*law*” that any other nation had. There is a great “*advantage*” to having the Word of God, and that was just one of the “*advantages*” that the Jews had.

- “*What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge’*” (Romans 3:3–4). Paul was phrasing these questions as if the Jews were talking to him. So the Jew might have asked, “Paul, you are saying that the Jews stand condemned before God because they were not faithful to Him? I will grant you that as truth, for the sake of the argument. If the Jews did not have faith, does that nullify God’s faithfulness?” The reasoning behind that kind of question is found in studying the Old Testament carefully. The typical Jew and the Jewish nation as a whole believed that God was going to bless them over and over again, no matter what. That was only part of the Covenant of Blessings and Cursings found in Deuteronomy 28–30. The writer of that book said if the Jews were faithful, then

God would bless them; but if they were not faithful to the “*law of Moses*,” lots of cursings would come. The prophets like Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, and others made it very clear that the Israelites did not understand. They thought they were entitled to blessings only. That was probably what Paul meant in this second question. If a Jew was unfaithful, did that mean that God was not going to be faithful to His part of the covenant to bless Israel no matter what? They misunderstood what God’s faithfulness really meant.

Paul’s answer to that question was, “*Not at all!*” In other words, God will not be unfaithful to His covenant and to His promises. “*Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge.’*” Paul was saying, “If anybody is going to be called a liar, if anybody is going to be considered unfaithful, it will be man. It is never God.” In response to this question, Paul quoted an interesting text taken from Psalm 51:4. It is an example of the Old Testament saying, “If man is to be pitted against God, God is always faithful whether man is a liar or not. God is never a liar. He always holds his part of the bargain. He is always faithful to His Word. He does not break His covenant. Man may break his, but God never breaks His.”

Psalm 51 came at the end of David’s escapade with Bathsheba, after he had her husband Uriah killed, and after he had worked through some of the guilt from that sin (cf. Psalm 38). This psalm is part of David’s efforts to get back to God. Part of what he said in the beginning implied that even though he was the king it did not matter. Any time what a man says is compared with what God says, God is always the truthful one. When a man disagrees with God, man always comes out to be the liar. Israel needed to understand that God had never broken His promise, but Israel had. God is always faithful to His promises.

- *“But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?”* (Romans 3:5–6). Remember Paul is writing as if the Jew might argue this way: “Paul, for the sake of the argument, I will grant that the typical Jew is unrighteous, but you also know that God uses everything and anything to bring glory to Himself. Isaiah 26:9 says, *‘My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.’* So when people do evil and bad things, God, in His judgment upon them, presents His *“righteousness”* as if to say, ‘I will not stand for that. That is not the right behavior. That is not the way to proceed. Here is the standard of My righteousness. You will not get away with that.’” God did not let Old Testament nations who were Gentiles get away with it and He will not let the Jews get away with it, either. The argument is that if man is unrighteous and if God uses that opportunity to judge him, then does not that bring glory to His name? Does not that bring *“righteousness”* to the forefront? Why would God judge someone whom He uses to bring glory to His name?

Paul answered, *“Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?”* Once again, the Jew was thinking like this: “Paul, if you are saying that the Jews were unrighteous and that God used our unrighteousness to bring judgment on us, thereby bringing glory to His name as He exerted Himself and His authority and His God-hood against us in judgment, then why should we be held accountable? Why should we be condemned because we were an instrument of His glory?” Paul followed that thinking through a little further. If their thinking was true and if their reasoning was true, that would mean that God could not judge the world, either — the Gentiles, in other

words. The Jews probably had not thought about that. If God judges the Gentiles in their unrighteousness, would not they also be an instrument to bring glory to God? According to the Jewish argument, anything that brought glory to God's name should not be judged or condemned. The Jews did not think they should be judged, but if their argument was true, then God should not judge the Gentiles either. The Jews were not going to agree with that. Their argument was flawed.

- *“Someone might argue, ‘If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?’ Why not say — as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say — ‘Let us do evil that good may result’? Their condemnation is deserved”* (Romans 3:7–8). In this fourth question, Paul seemed to want to turn their argument, on himself and use himself as an example. Christians knew that the typical Jew had been after Paul as he preached from city to city. He was often thrown out of their synagogues. He was rejected by the Jews not just as a hypocrite, but as one who was going away from the truth. So Paul said, “If your argument is true that any unrighteous person should not be judged because they become an instrument of God to bring glory to Himself, then apply that truth to me. You say that I am one who teaches falsehood, and if my falsehood brings God’s judgment on me and He also uses it to bring glory to Himself, then why are you still after me?” Paul was turning this argument on its head to say, “You want me to let the Jews off the hook if God brings judgment on them, because your argument is that God uses every instrument, every nation, every person to bring glory to Himself even if He has to bring judgment?” If their argument was true and that let the Jews off the hook, it would also let the Gentiles off the hook and

in the same way, it would let Paul off the hook because the Jews called him a false teacher.

Paul finished with this answer: *“Why not say — as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say — ‘Let us do evil that good may result’? Their condemnation is deserved.”* One of the charges that was brought against Paul in his preaching of the grace of God through Calvary and the blood of the Cross was that he was presenting a Gospel that really did not call for obedience. It seemed to throw “law” out. He seemed to encourage people to sin according to the grace of God — *“Let us do evil that good may result.”* They accused Paul of teaching that they could do evil so that more grace could come in. Paul repeated that thinking in Romans 5 and 6. Once again Paul was saying, “You have accused me of being a false teacher. According to your argument, if I am a false teacher and God judges me, He should not judge me because I am an instrument of God to bring glory to Himself.”

These arguments and answers may seem a little intricate in their structure, but this is probably the way the typical Jew would think. This is one more way that Paul used to persuade the Jews that they, like the Gentiles, stood condemned. The Christians may have used the same arguments against Christianity before they became Christians. They, too, needed to remember that at one time they were condemned.

The Universal Condemnation and Corruption of Man as Established by Old Testament Scripture Romans 3:9–20

This next section of Scripture is still part of Paul’s argument on the doctrine of condemnation. In many ways, it

was still focused on the Jewish mind-set because of the kind of argument he had just finished. What would be the ultimate persuasive argument to use against the Jews to get them to believe what Paul was saying? Paul used references to the Old Testament because that was their standard, that was their “law” and their books.

Paul began this section with another question and his answer: *“What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin”* (Romans 3:9). This is not a well known verse in the Book of Romans, but it is crucial to this section. In this verse Paul told the Romans exactly what he wanted them to know after these first chapters. Were the Jews any better than the Gentiles when it came to their sins and condemnation? Paul answered, *“Not at all!”* Paul wanted the Roman Christians, the Jews and the Gentiles, to know that they were all in the same boat. As far as God is concerned, under a “law” system and outside of Christ, we are all under sin.

Paul said, *“We ‘are all under sin.’”* For the remainder of this study, think about using the wording, **“We are all under sin’s penalty.”** This should help distinguish something in Romans 6–8. What is sin’s penalty? It is condemnation. It is separation from God (cf. Isaiah 59:1–2). What did *“under sin”* mean as far as Paul was concerned? It was separation from God, it was not being in fellowship with God, and it was not being in a saved state. The reason I am adding the word “penalty” is because some Christians say, “I still sin. Am I not *‘under sin’*?” Paul was saying we are not *“under sin”* as he was talking about it here. In Romans 8:1–2 he said, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me from the law of sin and death.”* There is a difference between the penalty of sin and what Christians experience while they are in Christ. First John 1:7 says, *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all*

sin.” As Christians walk in the light, the blood of Jesus washes away all our sins. If the blood of Jesus is washing away all our sins, if there is not condemnation for those of us who have been baptized into Christ, then the penalty for our sins is gone. We are not held accountable for our sins if we are walking in the light. The people Paul was describing here were in a different category. He was saying, “All those who are outside of the blood of Christ are under sin’s penalty.” In other words, everyone is condemned, everyone is lost, everyone is separated from God, and there is no salvation outside of Christ Jesus.

At this point in his letter to the Romans, Paul launched into the scriptural argument to prove that all men are under sin’s penalty as he stated in Romans 3:9, “. . . *Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.*” He continued:

As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10–12).

This is a very interesting study as Paul selected passages from the Old Testament, which he said proved his point that we are all under the penalty of sin. Paul wanted to emphasize that what he was saying was not brand-new stuff, because it came right out of the Jews’ handbook, the Old Testament. First, Paul used Psalm 14:1–3 to sum up their character:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

The psalmist was discussing those who had come against him, his enemies, and those who did not believe and practice the way they should in their walk with God. Paul selected these three verses to tell the Roman church that this psalm said exactly what he had been saying to them, “There is no one who is saved. There is no one who is righteous. No, not one!” The Book of Romans is going to say, “You are either ‘*righteous*’ or you are not.” There is no half way point. There is not “a little bit of righteousness” or a “big part of righteousness.” The way Paul described it in these verses, no one was righteous, no, not one. He was talking about the person who was out of step in a covenant relationship with God. How many are righteous? None! Why? Because we are all under the penalty of sin — “*Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin*” (Romans 3:9). If everyone is under the penalty of sin, then there is no one who is righteous. Paul followed that thought with the fact that no one understood and no one was seeking God. The psalmist said, “. . . *there is no one who does good, not even one.*”

Consider the word “*good*.” That is a word that Americans use a lot in the English language: “he’s a good guy” or “she’s a good person.” A lot of times we use that word in a generic way, but when this word is used in Scripture, most of the time the word “*good*” equals the word “*righteous*.” Paul was saying, “Either you are righteous or you are not. You are good or you are not. You are saved or you are not.” Think about the way you use the word “*good*” in this present time. Sometimes it reflects our belief about something but is not quite accurate.

Remember when the rich young ruler came to Jesus in Luke 18:18–19: “*A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ [Jesus answered] ‘Why do you call me good? . . . No one is good — except God alone.’*” Jesus was trying to help the rich young ruler understand the principle that the word “*good*” is not someone who is halfway “*righteous*” or halfway “*good*.” A person is either all “*good*” or he is not “*good*” at all. He is either all “*righteous*” or he is not “*righteous*” at all. Jesus wanted the

rich young ruler to know that if he was calling Jesus “*good teacher*,” he needed to understand that He was God. Jesus was not telling the rich young ruler not to call Him “*good*,” He was telling him to be careful how he used the word “*good*.” Christians also need to be careful how we use the word “*good*.” If people are not Christians, they cannot be described as “*good*” as far as the Bible is concerned. They cannot be described as “*righteous*” as far as the Bible is concerned because when Paul described non-Christians, he said they are not “*righteous*,” they do not “*understand*” God, they do not “*seek*” Him, and they are not “*good*.”

Paul continued his description of lost people under universal condemnation by quoting from the Psalms in Romans 3:12–18:

- Romans 3:12 — “*All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.*” Quoting Psalm 14:1–3, 53:1–3.
- Romans 3:13a — “*Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.*” Quoting Psalm 5:9.
- Romans 3:13b — “*The poison of vipers is on their lips.*” Quoting Psalm 140:3.
- Romans 3:14 — “*Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.*” Quoting Psalm 10:7.
- Romans 3:15–17 — “*Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.*” Quoting Isaiah 59:7–8.
- Romans 3:18 — “*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*” Quoting Psalm 36:1.

After Paul had described those outside of Christ as not “*righteous*,” not “*good*,” and people who do not “*seek God*,” he listed some specifics. These verses talk about the conduct of the non-Christian. One of the first things Paul described had to do with their mouths. They did not have anything good to say, and what came out of their mouths was poison. It was like the

sting of a viper, which indeed tries to kill. This reminds me of James 3:8, “*but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison,*” which is an exhortation to Christians. Christians struggle with the control of their tongues, but they are not in the same category as these people, of whom Paul said that everything that comes out of their mouths is for the sake of hurting and killing other people. Paul continued this description with “*Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.*” Again this reminds me of James 3:9–12:

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Beginning in Romans 3:15, Paul discussed the conduct of those who were not “*righteous.*” Paul quoted from Isaiah 59:7–8. This chapter in Isaiah described the Israelites of the Old Testament and how their “*iniquities*” had “*separated*” them from God. Paul borrowed that passage to say that their conduct, their behavior, was to exploit, to take advantage of other people — in essence, to kill people. That was unacceptable. Their mouths were bad, their feet were swift to shed blood, and they had no desire to be in a peaceful relationship with one another.

Finally, Paul described the basic attitude problem that was really at the heart and soul of a non-Christian: “*An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes*” (Psalm 36:1). Those who do not “*seek God*” really do not want to have anything to do with God. They do not respect God, they have no desire to bow down and worship Him. They have no desire to know that they are lost. They do not want to do what God wants. They do not

want to please Him. *“There is no fear of God before his eyes.”* One more time, using the Psalms and Isaiah, Paul tried to prove to the obstinate and resistant Jew that even the Old Testament said that all are lost outside of a covenant relationship with God.

In Romans 3:19–20 Paul closed out this section of Scripture by summing up the doctrine of condemnation:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

A “law” system does two things. First, *“every mouth may be silenced.”* It says, “Silence! Hush! You have no more to say! You have no more to claim! You cannot say, ‘I have done these good works,’ because I know you were breaking the law and that nullifies any good works that you have done.” A “law” system says, “Stop! There can be no argument! It is all over! I’m right and you are wrong!”

The second thing a “law” system does is: *“the whole world [is] held accountable to God.”* No one is going to get away with sin. Paul has already said over and over that everyone outside the Body of Christ is lost. A “law” system does two things: it stops any further argument, and it holds *“the whole world”* accountable.

Did the *“law of Moses”* do any good? Why was it put in place? *“Therefore . . . through the law we become conscious of sin”* (Romans 3:20). This is a huge concept. The “law” was not put in place to save. In essence, *“the law,”* particularly *“the law of Moses,”* was put in place to make sure the Jews understood that every time they turned around they were sinning against God. The “law” was to make man conscious of sin. When he is conscious of sin, what will he do? He will

throw himself on the mercy of God, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” There is a parable that Jesus told in Luke 18:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:9–14).

The “law” had the right effect on the “tax collector.” He understood that he was lost, he understood that he had broken the “law,” and he threw himself on the mercy of God. The Pharisee did not take the “law” in the right way. Even though he knew the “law,” he turned it into a method of salvation. He used it to compare himself to other people, and he made himself saved on the basis of his own works. That was not what the “law of Moses” was intended to do.

The Doctrine of Justification — Justification by Faith Declared

Introduction

It is obvious that Paul has been leading up to this section of Scripture in his letter to the Roman Christians. The Doctrine of Condemnation passages were meant to be like looking in the mirror and seeing who you really were. A “law” system reveals that any man outside of Christ is a sinner and under the condemnation of God. Paul described the typical Gentile in Romans 1, and then the typical, and maybe overzealous, religious person in Romans 2–3. Neither of those pictures was very pretty; Paul ended by saying, “. . . *There is no one righteous, not even one*” (Romans 3:10). The “law” holds man accountable for his sins. Surely, as the Roman Christians heard the doctrine of condemnation, he must have felt relieved that he was no longer in that situation, because he was “now” a Christian. Paul began describing the doctrine of justification by saying, “*But now a righteousness from God . . .*” in Romans 3:21. “*But now . . .*” Paul was going to present the theme of the Book of Romans, describing what true “*righteousness*” means. The theme of this book is justification by faith apart from works of law. There are very few passages of Scripture that are as poignant as Romans 3:21–31. This section of Scripture really focuses on the “*righteousness of God*” and some of the effects of this “*righteousness*.”

The Righteousness of God

Romans 3:21–31

“A Righteousness from God”

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:21–24).

Paul used the phrase “*a righteousness from God*” twice in these verses. This “*righteousness*” is not man’s own. It does not come from any one else, and it is not from any other source. In fact, no one can rise up and give “*righteousness.*” In Philippians 3:8–9, Paul said:

“ . . . Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

As human beings, we do not have a “*righteousness*” of our own. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, “*It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption*” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christ has become the “*wisdom from God.*” Paul described that “*wisdom from God*” as “*our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.*”

One of the greatest passages in the New Testament that talks about *“the righteousness that comes from God”* is 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* This verse is instructive, because it has an extra element. God gives the Christian the *“righteousness of God,”* but not as something separate and apart from Himself—we *“become the righteousness of God.”* That means that we take on the very nature of God when we become a righteous person in Christ. God gives Himself. There is a beautiful passage in the Old Testament prophesying of the days of the Messiah. The prophet said:

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch [that is Jesus], a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel [the new Jerusalem] will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5–6).

The new Jerusalem, the Lord’s Church, will have another name: *“This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”*

“A Righteousness . . . Apart from Law”

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify . . . For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (Romans 3:21, 28).

Romans 3:28 really impacted Martin Luther, turning him away from the legalistic approach and toward understanding the grace of God and the justification that could be his through

faith. “*A righteousness from God*” that is the Christian’s is “*apart from observing the law.*” The word “*apart*” means without the intervention of, without association with, or independent of. In other words, the “*righteousness*” that Paul was speaking of is not something that could be obtained through trusting in law-keeping. That is what he has already said in Romans 2–3. The Jews leaned on their law-keeping to make them think that they were righteous. He said this in a negative way in the earlier chapters, but he said it in a positive way at this point. When Paul was talking about the “*righteousness . . . apart from law,*” he was primarily talking about the “*Law of Moses,*” because that was the way he normally talked to the Jews, but he was also talking about a “*law*” system in general.

A Christian cannot have the “*righteousness of God*” if he is going to trust his law-keeping. In that sense, it is “*apart*” from, separate from, a “*law*” system approach. Even the “*Law of Moses*” and the “*Prophets*” said the same thing — the “*righteousness of God*” does not come through “*law*” keeping (cf. Romans 3:10–18; Galatians 3:8; Romans 10:3). Deuteronomy 27:26 says, “*Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.*” The Old Testament “*law*” system said if man wanted to be “*righteous,*” he could not do it by “*carrying out*” all the works of the “*law.*” It is impossible to keep every “*law.*” Leviticus 18:5 says, “*Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.*” This is a positive statement that sounds good until the Jew stopped to think about keeping every “*law.*” The “*Law of Moses*” said if a man wanted to be “*righteous,*” he must keep all the “*decrees and laws.*” That cannot be done, so man must throw himself on the mercy of God. Moses said:

“Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the

LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you” (Deuteronomy 4:1–2).

“... love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 30:20).

“The LORD is your life!” “Life” is not “law” keeping! It is not trusting in the “law.” “Life” is not found in trusting what I have done in the works of the “law.” “Life” is found by trusting God Almighty. Man may want to say, “This is my wage. The righteousness that is due me is because I deserve it.” No one can say that by keeping the “law,” God owes me.

“A Righteousness . . . Has Been Made Known”

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify (Romans 3:21).

“A righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known.” Would you like to have lived before Jesus came? Would you like to have gone through some of those Old Testament adventures? Would you like to have been one who went to war with David? Or would you have enjoyed traveling with Abraham? When I think about that, I would not want to have lived before Jesus. The fullness of the “*righteousness of God*,” the fullness of time, had not yet come. The fullness of the Gospel had not been revealed. But with the coming of Christ, the “*righteousness*” that God intended to give mankind was “*manifested*,” it was made known.

The word “*manifested*” is used in some translations: “*But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets*” (Romans 3:21, ASV). When I lived in New Zealand, I lived next to a harbor. I could look across the harbor at the large container ships that would come in. One of those container ships would flip open the front and the back, and they would drive the cargo in and out on ramps. I was always fascinated and wondered what was in the hold. One of the members of the church would go over and inspect the ships as they came in. He knew I was interested, so he asked if I would like to go over and see one of these big boats that you can go down into. I went down, and it looked like this huge warehouse. I saw all the cargo that was being delivered. I would not have known what the cargo was had I not gone down into the hold. But I could have known what was in the hold if I had read the “manifest.” The “manifest” is the list of cargo. It had not been told what was in the hold, so to speak, in the Old Testament. The Gospel had not been told until the Gospel Message was “*manifested*” in the Gospel age. It is a beautiful thing to live on this side of Calvary to know what the trueness of the “*righteousness of God*” is.

Consider what Paul wrote to Titus and Timothy concerning the “manifestation,” the “*appearing*” of Jesus. The word “*appeared*,” *epiphaino*, is a very powerful word.

- “*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:8).
- “*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared*” (Titus 3:4).
- “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*” (Titus 2:11).

Christians live in the age where the “*righteousness of God*” is here. In some sense, we could say that the Old Testament said, “It is coming!” The New Testament Gospels say, “HE is here! The Savior, the Messiah is here!” The rest of the New Testament can be seen as an arrow pointing back to Calvary and to the life of Christ to say, “He came!” We are still looking at His “*appearing*” from that perspective. We are on the side of Calvary where the “*righteousness of God*” has been “*made known,*” “*manifested.*”

***“A Righteousness . . . to Which the
Law and the Prophets Testify”***

Paul continued with the “*righteousness from God . . . to which the Law and the Prophets testify*” (Romans 3:21). The American Standard Version translates Romans 3:21, “*But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.*” The “*righteousness of God*” was “*witnessed by the law and the prophets.*” I loved the television show Perry Mason when I was growing up, and I read some of his books. Hamilton Burger was the District Attorney (DA), and he liked to prosecute Perry’s clients. Often, Perry would turn the DA’s witnesses around in their testimony. When these witnesses were on the stand, Perry Mason would turn the prosecution witnesses into his defense witnesses. In some way, that is what Paul was saying: “You might think that what the law said, what the law recorded, in the Old Testament would be contradictory to the New Testament case for the grace of God.” Paul said quite the opposite; he could call the Old Testament to the witness stand and the Old Testament books would testify. The Old Testament writers would testify that the “*righteousness of God*” comes through faith and not by trusting in law-keeping.

A “*Righteousness . . . Through Faith*”

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference (Romans 3:22).

Think about the word “*faith*.” In some ways, it is a nebulous term. It is all-inclusive. There is the subjective and the objective faith, and Paul was talking about the subjective faith in this verse. It is the “*faith*” that Christians have in Christ because of what we know through the revelation of Scripture. It is a “*righteousness from God*” that is received “*through faith . . . apart from*” what? It is “*apart from*” anything else; it is “*apart from*” trusting in law-keeping; it is “*apart from*” works of merit. It is “*through faith*.” It is “*through faith*” at Calvary; it is “*through faith*” in the blood of Jesus; it is “*through faith*” in the Savior, the Lord Jesus. Paul did not expand on the story of the blood of Christ; that story is in the Gospels and he assumes that his hearers know and understand what that faith is in.

Since the word “*faith*” is so nebulous, it may be hard to understand what Paul was talking about. Consider a different approach, looking at what faith is not. Paul was not talking about faith in the law’s ability to save. It is not faith in the amount of goodness that a man has or in the good works he has done. It is not faith in his attachment to a group, nation, or lineage. It is not faith that since his grandparents and parents were members of the Church, he automatically has that faith. “*Faith*” must be personal; it is not something that is handed down.

It is not faith in a creed of right platitudes, it is not having all the right ideas, acknowledging them, and keeping a number of them to be good enough. It is not faith in your track record, history, or laurels. A Christian nearing the end of his life cannot look back and say, “I have had faith for this many years; shouldn’t that suffice for the rest of my life?” No! “*Faith*” is

an ongoing thing; it is not faith in what you have already done with your life, it is “*faith*” right now.

It is not even faith in the amount of knowledge that a person may have. A new convert as he comes up out of the water probably does not have a lot of knowledge in reference to Scripture, but he is as righteous and as saved as a person who has studied the Scriptures all his life. One may have more knowledge, but both must have “*faith*” in Jesus in order to be saved. It is not faith in how much one has been blessed with in this life. Some people may think they can test how saved they are or how good their relationship is with God by how many things He has given them, how much prosperity they have, or how blessed they are. Christians are often in the midst of trials and tribulation without a lot of good things. It is not faith in our own ability to do a lot of good. We may have a lot of talents and giftedness, but it is not faith in that either. It is not faith in a positive attitude: “I feel saved, so, therefore, I am saved and I believe.” “*Faith*” is based upon the revelation of Scripture, what Scripture says about the Christian, and what God says about us in His Word. It is not faith in how a person feels about himself.

And finally, it is not faith in the fact that I have “*faith*.” Faith in one’s “*faith*” is a legalistic approach. “*Faith*” must be completely in the Savior! “*Faith*” must be one hundred percent in the Savior. It cannot be fifty percent in Jesus and fifty percent in something else. It is not ninety percent and ten percent. A Christian’s “*righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ*” (Romans 3:22). In essence, Jesus was saying, “Will you accept this gift by accepting Me?” That is what “*through faith*” is.

A “*Righteousness . . . to All Who Believe*”

“*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference*” (Romans 3:22). “*This righteousness*” is universal. In other

words, it is available to the Gentiles and the Jews. It is for all men. Jesus came to save all people. Romans 4:3,11–12 says:

. . . “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” . . . And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Paul said Abraham “. . . is the father of all who believe . . .” and that included the Gentiles and the Jews. In John 3:16 Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Did He really mean “whoever”? Does that include everybody? Indeed it does. Matthew 20:28 says, “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus gave His life for “many.” How many are “many”? First John 2:1–2 says:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — 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.

The “righteousness” that comes through the cross of Jesus is for “the whole world.” In Hebrews 10:10, 12, the Hebrew writer said:

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . . But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

When it comes to the “*righteousness*” of God, God is not saying that only a few choice people, only the ones he likes, only the ones that he has chosen before time began, really can have this “*righteousness*.” No, this “*righteousness*” is “*for the sins of the whole world . . . once for all.*”

God has made this “*righteousness*” available through the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that everyone can be righteous. What a motivation for world evangelism — to take the Gospel into all the world as our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, charged His apostles:

. . . “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

. . . “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16).

That same charge comes down to Christians. The “*righteousness*” of God is for all mankind.

A “*Righteousness*” That Is Necessary

In Romans 3:23 Paul said, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” Sometimes people run these phrases

together, and there really needs to be a little bit of separation. First Paul said, *“For all have sinned . . .”* This phrase looks past tense in the English, and that is true. But it is also a tense that gives the idea that this is a done deal. *“All”* have done it; they have completed the act, and there is no question about it. That is what Paul has proved in Romans 1:8–3:20. He proved that *“all”* men are under the condemnation of sin. Remember, in Romans 3:9 he said, *“What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin”*—*“All are under sin”*—remember *“all are under”* sin’s penalty. Paul repeats that again here in Romans 3:23. It is past tense and complete.

Then Paul said, *“. . . and fall short of the glory of God.”* *“All have sinned . . .”* is a past event, but *“. . . and fall short . . .”* is an ongoing thing. *“Righteousness”* is not something that was just needed in the past when mankind sinned; it is needed now because man continues to sin. Man continues to sin because he is human, he is weak, and he gives into temptation.

Finally, all Christians have sinned and we are falling short *“. . . of the glory of God.”* Remember the definition of the word *“sin.”* *“Sin”* is falling short of the dream that God has for His children. Adam and Eve had *“the glory of God”* in the garden. Now that we have fallen, now that we have become Christians, and now that we are trying to live for Him, we are increasing in glory for Him — *“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit”* (2 Corinthians 3:18). In other words, we are becoming more and more like God than we used to be.

A “Righteousness” That Is a Gift

Romans 3:24 says, *“And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* Look at the words *“freely”* and *“grace.”* *“Righteousness”* is a gift that is *“freely”* given and it is *“by his grace.”* The word *“freely”* looks like it means that the gift does not cost you anything.

That is really not what that word means. Look at “*freely*” in other passages in Scripture (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 1:6). It has the idea that there is no reason or cause. In other words, there is really no “cause,” no reason, for God to give this gift. Think about it in this way — what have you done that is good enough to cause God to say that you deserve the gift? This “*righteousness*” is “*freely*” given.

This “*righteousness*” is “*freely*” [given] “*by grace.*” “*Grace*” is actually the word that means without cost. This “*righteousness from God*” is strong — it is a gift that is given without “cause” on man’s part, but there is cause on God’s part. God loves His children and wants to give us the “*grace*” of God. This “*righteousness*” is given without any cost to man; it cost God, the Father, because He had to give His Son. In terms of man’s cause or man’s cost, there was neither one. The “*righteousness*” of God is without cause or cost to man.

A “*Righteousness . . . through the Redemption That Came by Christ Jesus*”

And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished (Romans 3:24-25).

The “*righteousness*” of God that Christians receive comes through the cross of Christ and through His blood. There are two very important words in this passage: “*redemption*” and “*atonement.*” For the first time, Paul focused on the fact that this “*righteousness*” comes through the cross of Christ, through the blood of Christ, and through the “*grace*” of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a “*righteousness*” through Jesus.

Paul used the phrase “*through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*” The word “*redemption*” is a synonym or a

metaphor that is sometimes used in Scripture for salvation. “Redemption” has the idea of God buying man back. It has the idea of the Lord paying a ransom for us. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said, “*In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace*” (Ephesians 1:7). In 1 Peter 1:18–19, Peter said:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Other passages talk about “redemption” or ransom with the idea that God, through the cross, through the blood of Christ, paid the ransom price and redeemed man out of his slavery to sin.

The second metaphor uses the phrase “*a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.*” Some translations use the word “propitiation.” Christ is the “atonement” for man’s sin: “*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world* (1 John 2:2). Once again, this is a synonym for salvation. The Hebrew writer said:

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

This word “atonement,” or “propitiation,” has the idea of covering up the sins of man. “Redemption” and “atonement” are pictures, just like “salvation” is, of what God does with man’s sins. He redeems man out of slavery and He covers our

sins. He pays the price that is due for punishing sin. Man receives “*righteousness*” through Jesus’ sacrifice.

A “*Righteousness*” That Declares That God Is “*Just*”

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25–26).

The cross was God’s demonstration that this “*righteousness*” is a “*just*” thing for God to do. It is a “*just*” thing for God to give “*righteousness*” to people. Why? Because the cross demonstrates His “*justice*.” In the Old Testament there were statements of forgiveness to people. The Book of Leviticus has numerous passages that say, “*In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven*” (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:13). David did what he did and Nathan told him he would be forgiven (cf. 2 Samuel 12:13). Then in Psalm 32:1 David reflected upon his sin and said, “*Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*” His sins were forgiven, he received “*atonement*,” and he was justified. Who would have known at that point in time? Peter said, “. . . *Even angels long to look into these things* (1 Peter 1:12). They did not know how God was forgiving those sins. Hebrews 10:4 says, “. . . *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*”

In what way and why was God forgiving sins? Paul told the Thessalonian Christians:

All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom

of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you (2 Thessalonians 1:5–6).

How was God forgiving sins? Along came Calvary! Paul told the church in Corinth that Satan did not even know the means in which God was going to save mankind (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8–9). God could point to Calvary and say, “That is why I can forgive sins in the past. And, by the way, the cross is My demonstration of justice in forgiving sins in the future.”

**A “*Righteousness*” That Is Universal
“*Boasting . . . Is Excluded*”**

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (Romans 3:27–31).

Paul wanted the Roman Christians to understand that the justification that comes through faith, apart from any law-works system, including the Law of Moses that they once trusted for their salvation, is for Jews and Gentiles. Just like there is universal condemnation, there is also universal “*righteousness*” made available to everyone if they will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and come to Him. His grace is for all people.

In building his argument for the Roman Christians, Paul said they needed to understand that the Jews and the Gentiles were all lost. What would that understanding do to them? It

would squash their pride and humble them. Paul was doing that very thing by reminding them of who they used to be. Remember there was a disunity issue in the church in Rome. In this section, he said that a Christian now has “*This righteousness from God [that] comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*” A Christian gains “*righteousness from God*” not through anything he has done, not through his personal goodness, and not because of anything his parents have done. Love and grace and the “*righteousness from God*” are gifts from God to His children.

Paul asked, “*Where, then, is boasting?*” He had destroyed their pride. He has set the Jews and the Gentiles so that they would choose to be united with each other, with their brothers and sisters in Christ. The Jews and Gentiles could come together in one Body if they accepted what Paul said. They must swallow their pride and reunite. They were once lost, but now they were “*righteous*” only by the grace of God.

*The Doctrine of “Justification” —
“Justification” by “Faith”
Illustrated*

Review

The church in Rome was having a lot of unity problems. Paul began the doctrinal part of the Book of Romans by building an argument to destroy their pride. Pride stood in the way of the Jews and Gentile's coming together in unity. Unity was necessary so that the Gospel of Christ could go forth from the city of Rome. Disunity in this church would have a ripple effect of discouragement since their *“faith [was] being reported all over the world.”* Paul urged these Christians to remember who they used to be before they became Christians. The Gentiles were condemned for their idolatry, immorality, and many other sins that are mentioned in Romans 1:18–32. In Romans 2:1–3:8 Paul built the argument that the Jews, too, were without excuse because they had done the same things. We reached the conclusion that all men are under sin's penalty:

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9, 23).

In Romans 3:21 Paul began a new section with **“But now”** — *“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe . . .”* (Romans 3:21–22). **“But now” as Christians**, they and we have *“. . . a righteousness from God apart from law . . . this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”* Paul destroyed the pride of the Christians in Rome by telling them that they used to be lost—there was no pride in the way they used to live. *“But now”* they were in Christ, and he described their life of *“righteousness.”* They could not *“boast”* about that life, though, since that came because of the *“grace”* of God. They did not earn or deserve that *“righteousness.”*

“FAITH”

Romans 4:1–21

“Justification” Is by “Faith” Not by “Works”

The theme of the Book of Romans is: *“Justified” by “Faith”* Apart from Works of Law. In Romans 4 Paul focused on *“faith.”* Even to the Jews of old, *“faith”* could be a nebulous term. The Jews might have said, “Faith? What does that really mean?” The Gentiles might have said, “Faith? What kind of faith?” Paul made the specific argument in this chapter that God’s plan has always been “saved by grace through *‘faith.’*” Even in the time before Abraham, there was justification by *“faith.”* Abraham was justified by *“faith.”* David and the people under the Law of Moses were justified by *“faith.”* Paul said, “We who are in Christ are justified by *‘faith.’*”

Paul began this section on *“Faith”*:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:1–3).

Paul posed these questions to the Jews, knowing that Abraham was highly respected and very important to the Jews. He was their “forefather.” He was the father of the Jewish nation and was considered to be their father in the “faith.” This was the typical mind-set of the Jews, but when the Jews of Jesus’ day claimed Abraham as their father, Jesus said, “*You belong to your father, the devil*” (cf. John 8:31–47). Paul used the Jewish mind-set to gain their attention and to ask, “What did Abraham discover in this matter of justification? How was he ‘justified’? How was he saved?”

It is very important to understand how Paul is using the word “works” in this section. He used the word “works” in a couple of different ways in the Book of Romans. James also used it in a different way than how Paul is using it. It is important to know that different writers used the same term with a little bit of a different twist trying to make a different point about the word or highlight a different concept. In Romans 4:2 Paul said the “works” that Abraham could have trusted for his “righteousness” would have been “works” of merit. They would have been good deeds that he would have been tempted to trust as the means by which God would justify him.

Paul asked and answered the question, “*What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’*” (Romans 4:3). Paul was quoting a very important text from Genesis 15:6, “*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*” In the first book of the Bible there was a man named Abraham, and from the very beginning of the story of mankind, man was told that if there

was going to be salvation, justification, and a right relationship with God, it was going to be by “*faith*.” Even in the Old Testament, Abraham was saved by grace through “*faith*.”

Paul continued writing about “*faith*” in Romans 4: “*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness*” (Romans 4:4–5). This word “*credited*” is a very important concept. The Greek word **logidzomai** is also translated as “*accounted*” or “*reckoned*.” Notice how many times Paul used this word in Romans 4. You cannot miss the importance of this word when you see that it is used eleven times in this chapter. “*Credited*” means that God gives you something that you did not earn. It is like having someone deposit money into your bank account you did not earn. You did not earn this “*righteousness*” and you did not and cannot do anything to deserve it.

Consider this verse again: “*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.*” The “*works*” concept that a man might trust for his salvation is not going to be “*credited*” to him as a “*gift*.” If a man agrees to work for someone for a number of hours for a certain amount of pay, that employer is not going to give him the paycheck and say, “Here is a gift for you.” There was an agreement made for his “*work*,” and the man worked to earn his pay. Paul made a very important concept in Romans 4:5, “*However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness*” (Romans 4:4–5).

There are three very important concepts that define who it is that is “*justified*” in God’s sight:

- “*the man who does not [trust his] work*” — Paul used a phrase that sounds strange here, “*to the man who does not work*,” but remember the “*works*” Paul was talking about here were the “*works*” that man would trust for his own

salvation. God “*justifies*” the person who does not trust his “*works*.”

- “*the man who . . . trusts God*” — This concept is in opposition to the man who trusts his “*works*” for his own salvation. Man will either trust his “*works*” or he will trust God.
- “*the man who . . . trusts God who justifies the wicked*” — “*The wicked*” are the only people who can be “*justified*.” Paul has already established this principle in the first three chapters of the Book of Romans. Those who are outside of Christ are “*the wicked*.” Remember, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). If a man is already “*righteous*,” then he does not need “*righteousness*,” but remember, “*There is no one righteous, not even one*” (Romans 3:9). This is a very important concept — do not trust your “*works . . . trust God*,” understand that you are “*wicked*,” and it is “*God who justifies*” you so that you are now saved.

Remember that the Old Testament Scriptures said, “*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*,” — Abraham was “*justified by faith*.”

Consider now the time of the Law of Moses. Did justification change when the Law of Moses came in? Did it suddenly change when all the laws were given on Mount Sinai? Did a new method come in that was different from the “*faith*” of Abraham since he did not have the Law of Moses? Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, said:

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Romans 4:6–8).

Paul used Abraham as a test case before the Law of Moses. David was his test case under the Law of Moses. Both of these men were important to the Jews, so Paul used them as examples of how they, too, were saved. David claimed to be “*justified by faith*,” under the Law just like Abraham was saved by “*faith*” before the Law of Moses was put into effect. As his proof statement Paul quoted Psalm 32:1–2. When David said, “*Blessed are they . . .*” he was talking about himself. He had been forgiven of his sin with Bathsheba and of killing Uriah. He considered himself to be a “*blessed*” man because his sins had been “*forgiven*,” “*covered*,” and God would “*never count [his sins] against him*.” He considered himself a “*blessed*” man because he had received forgiveness, atonement, and justification. Paul used the history of the Jews to show them how some of the giants in their “*faith*” had been “*justified by faith*.” He used Abraham as an example before the Law of Moses and David as an example under the Law of Moses. How were these men “*justified*”? By “*faith*”! Paul was surely leading these Christians to understand that they, under Christ, were “*justified*” and “*blessed*” in the same way.

“Justification” Is by “Grace” Through “Faith”

In Romans 4:1–8 Paul talked about “*justification*” apart from works. Beginning in Romans 4:9 he talked about “*justification*” apart from circumcision:

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in

order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised (Romans 4:9–12, cf. Genesis 15:6).

Circumcision was something that the Jews believed was connected to “*justification*.” Paul used the word “*blessedness*” as another word for “*justification*” in this chapter of Romans. This is a very important text; Paul was trying to get the Jews to understand that “*justification*,” being right with God, was separate and apart from circumcision. Paul said the same thing in the Book of Galatians: “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*” (Galatians 5:6). Circumcision does not count for anything, “*the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*”

Paul again used Abraham’s “*faith*” recorded in the Old Testament as proof — “*Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness*” (cf. Genesis 15:6). Going to the New Testament Scriptures, Hebrews 11 also talks about the “*faith*” of Abraham:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ***By faith*** he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country . . . ***By faith*** Abraham, even though he was past age — and Sarah herself was barren — was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise . . . All these people were still living ***by faith*** when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them

from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth (Hebrews 11:8–13).

Abraham was a man of “*faith*” when he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, at the approximate age of 70. He was a man of “*faith*” in Haran and continued to be a man of “*faith*” on his journeys. Abraham had always been a man of “*faith*.” That is the means by which God “*credited it to him as righteousness*” in Genesis 15:6. Consider the Genesis timeline for Abraham. When was he circumcised? Abraham was not circumcised until he was 99 years old. That was a number of years after he was declared to be “*righteous*” and “*justified*.”

The Old Testament texts prove that Abraham was “*justified*” before he was circumcised. So what was the point of circumcision? Paul answered that question in Romans: “*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised*” (Romans 4:11). “*Circumcision*” became the “*seal*” of that which was already true. “*Circumcision*” was not that which made Abraham “*righteous*,” it was a “*seal*” of what he already was. He was already “*justified*.” “*Circumcision*” actually came after he had been declared “*righteous*.” Paul declared that “*justification*” was not in trusting your works. He made that very clear in the case of Abraham and David, then he said “*justification*” is not according to circumcision. He made that clear in the case of Abraham in the Old Testament. Yes, he was circumcised, but it was a “*seal*,” a sign, that he had already been declared “*righteous*.”

Paul expanded this argument even more so that the Jews would understand that “*justification*” was not according to law-keeping, either. All of these arguments are tied together. Beginning in the middle of Romans 4:11 Paul continued:

So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of

the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised (Romans 4:11–12).

Paul concluded this section by going back to Abraham again because he knew that the Jews thought highly of him. They needed to know that he was the father of those who are going to be “*justified*” in any time and in any circumstance, because it is always about “*faith*.” Whether Gentile, an uncircumcised person, or Jew, a circumcised person, all are going to be “*justified by faith*” just like Abraham.

“Footsteps of the Faith”

In Romans 4:12–25 Paul began to talk about the kind of “*faith*” a Christian needed to have in a more generic way. Paul was talking about the kind of “*faith*” that Jew and Gentile alike needed to have. Every Christian in every age needs to have this kind of “*faith*.” I want to cover this section of Scripture not strictly in an exegetical manner, but talking as an instructor to my students. I want to challenge you, but not discourage you. I do not want to destroy the assurance that Christians have. I do not want you to think, “Wow! I don’t have that kind of faith.” There is a balance in the kind of “*faith*” Paul wrote about. The Lord does not require Christians to have a perfect “*faith*” in order to be “*justified*.” He is looking for mustard seed “*faith*” that will grow. Abraham had the kind of “*faith*” that we need to have as we grow into the likeness of Christ.

- **A Walking “Faith”** — “*And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised*” (Romans 4:12). Paul said, “Jew, and Gentile by implication, you need to “*walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before*

he was circumcised.” Look at the life of Abraham in the Old Testament. Not only did Abraham have a walking “*faith*,” he had a moving “*faith*.” He moved from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran and then to the country of Palestine (Canaan). It was literally a moving “*faith*.” Think about your life as you have been challenged to live for God. Maybe you have had to take a different job, make a shift in positions, or maybe you have had to move. Maybe you had just settled into where you wanted to be for the rest of your life. Have those been challenges of “*faith*” for you? Abraham was faithful to move even as an older man. It is important to continue to grow throughout our years of “*faith*.” Focus on a moving forward “*faith*” until the day Jesus takes you home.

- **A Humble “Faith”** — *“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all”* (Romans 4:16). The Christian cannot have pride if he has humble “*faith*.” We cannot have pride in the fact that we have “*faith*.” The fact that we have “*faith*” can become something that we trust. That can become a sort of legalism. “*Faith*” is based upon the “*grace*” of God and nothing else. How can the Christian be proud if he believes in the cross of Jesus? I did nothing to wash away my sins! I did nothing to earn my salvation! My “*faith*” is totally dependent on Jesus, who did it all for me. The kind of “*faith*” that must continually be ours is a humble “*faith*,” appreciating, growing into, and embracing “*grace*” and the cross of Jesus.
- **An Incredible “Faith”** — *“As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they*

were” (Romans 4:17). There are two incredible statements in this verse:

- ▶ *“He is . . . the God who gives life to the dead.”*
- ▶ *“He is . . . the God who . . . calls things that are not as though they were.”*

An incredible “*faith*” is actually a misnomer. “Incredible” means something I cannot believe. “*Faith*” means I believe. A Christian’s faith is not necessarily something he can get a grasp on specifically. He cannot nail it down, then put it in his cubby-hole, and say, “There it is. It is defined. And I never have to think about it again.” Our “*faith*” is in an incredible God — *“the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.”*

Apply this verse to Abraham. Abraham had “*faith*” in *“the God who gives life to the dead.”* Think about how long Abram and Sarai had been married. Suppose they had married when he was thirty years old and she was twenty. A Jewish couple were expected to have children. After five years of marriage, there were no children, none at ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years. When Abram was seventy years old it is possible that he had been married for forty years and they still had no children. He was not going to have any children by Sarai for another thirty years. I think God called a dead reproductive system and gave it life. In Abram’s case, He gave *“life to the dead.”* We know that Abram believed for all those years (cf. Genesis 15:6). That is the kind of “*faith*” Christians need. It is not a “*faith*” that we can figure out, it is not a “*faith*” that we can say to ourselves, “Oh, I see how God can do that so that is why I believe.” What if you cannot figure it out? What if you cannot comprehend it?

Apply this verse to your own life: Do you have “*faith*” in *“the God who . . . calls things that are not as though*

they were”? If God comes in the door at the back of a room where you are, points to a chair, and says, “That’s a coke can!” What is it? All your senses will say it is a chair, but what did God say it was? It is a coke can! If God says it is a coke can, it may look like a chair, it may feel like a chair, but it is a coke can. When God looks at us, He sees “*righteousness*” because He has declared us “*righteous*.” What do we see? We see an unrighteous person, a sinner. We may say, “I can’t be ‘*righteous*,’” but God says, “I declare that you are alive! I declare you to be what you really are not. I declare that you are “*justified*” and “*righteous*” in My sight.” As Christians we must choose to believe what God sees.

- **A Hoping “Faith”** — “*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’*” (Romans 4:18). “*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed*” — At what point had hope been given up? At what point did his and her parents quit asking them, “Is anything happening with you? Are you expecting?” When did those questions stop? When did they give up hoping? After ten years, did the parents and others begin to think there was no hope? If there had been doctors who could have helped them in having a child, even they would have given up hope. Abraham hoped against everybody saying, “There is no hope,” — “*Abraham in hope believed*.” He had “*hope*” and “*faith*.” He had the kind of “*faith*” that God wants Christians to have. When all the voices and all the circumstances, and maybe even all the people who are surrounding us are saying, “No! No! No! It cannot happen!” but we read in God’s Word of one of His promises that says that it can happen, it will happen! What will you and I choose to believe? Will we have a hoping “*faith*” or will we have a doubting “*faith*”?

- **A Fact-Finding “Faith”** — *“Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah’s womb was also dead”* (Romans 4:19). Sometimes Christians are accused of living in the clouds — “You guys live like there is pie in the sky. You do not face reality.” That is not the true kind of “*faith*,” one that blocks out the truth and blots out reality and whatever is happening around us. Are bad things happening? Do we get diseases? Do accidents happen? Are we fired from our job? The kind of “*faith*” that a Christian has does not say, “That really didn’t happen.” We really can live in reality! This text is saying Abraham looked in the mirror and recognized, “Hey! I really am reproductively dead.” Then he looked at Sarah and said, “You are reproductively dead as far as the flesh is concerned.” Those were the facts, but in spite of that, they still chose to believe on the basis of the promises of God.
- **An Unwavering “Faith”** — *“Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God”* (Romans 4:20). Did Paul really say, “*Yet he did not waver through unbelief*”? What about the stories in the Old Testament when Abraham tried to give Sarah away and when he was okay with taking another route to having a child (cf. Genesis 12:10–20; 16:1–4)? What did Paul mean when he said, “*he did not waver*”? This is a very important principle of “*faith*.” I do not think Paul was saying that Abraham had a perfect “*faith*.” He was not saying that he never had a bad day, or a bad month, or even a bad year. He was not saying that Abraham never had some ups and downs about his “*faith*.” Look at the first time God made the promise to give them a child until the time when God fulfilled that promise. That was about thirty years; that was a long time to wait. Even through all the ups and downs

during that time frame, Abraham held on to that promise. That is what an unwavering “*faith*” looks like. How long have you and I been waiting for the Lord to fulfill His promise to take us home to live with Him? Ups and downs do not mean that we have a weak “*faith*.” It does mean we have to hang in there for the long run. That is what Paul meant when he said Abraham “. . . *did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God.*”

- **A Power-oriented “Faith”** — *“Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness — for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”* (Romans 4:21–25). A Christian’s faith is not in having a child, as Abraham’s was. Our “*faith*” is in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. We were not there to see His resurrection, but we believe because He said it happened. Paul said the kind of “*faith*” we need to hang on to is a “*faith*” that is “. . . *fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*” Has God promised to raise His children from the dead? Yes! Has He promised to forgive all our sins? Yes! Have you seen any of that? Do you think He has the power to do that? Who has the power to do those things? Nobody else has the power to forgive sin. And yet, God said He would. Nobody else has the power to raise us from the dead, and yet, God said, “Because of the resurrected Jesus, I have the power to raise you from the dead on the final day.” The kind of “*faith*” that a Christian needs is a “*faith*” that believes that when God makes a promise, He can keep that promise.

The Doctrine of Sanctification — The Results of Being Justified

Romans 5:1–21

Romans 5 begins a new section in the Book of Romans. Paul began with the Doctrine of Condemnation, which covered the concept that everyone is lost outside of Christ. Then he presented the Doctrine of Justification, the concept of being in Christ and “*justified through faith — apart from works of law.*” These are wonderful concepts, but now that a person is a Christian and has been justified, what is next? There is a lot more. Consider Ephesians 1:3. Paul said, “*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with **every spiritual blessing in Christ.***” Later in the Book of Romans, and also in the Book of Galatians, Paul said:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3–4).

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ,

then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26–29).

The Doctrine of Sanctification

One of the “*spiritual blessings in Christ*” is the whole concept of transformation or sanctification. That means that Christians can be like Jesus. Not only are we free from the penalty of sin, but in Romans 5–8 Paul talked about the ways in which we can win against temptations. What can we do about the power of sin? Are we just forgiven of the sins that we continually commit, sins that we do not have any power to resist? There are two things that come against Christians: one is the hard things that we have trouble resisting and the other is the hard ways in which God tells us to live our lives. We want to win both of those battles. Romans 5–8 will help.

Peace With God

Romans 5:1–11 talks about the blessings of being a Christian:

*Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While*

*we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been **justified by his blood**, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

*"Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**" and "Since we have now been **justified by his blood**" — the question arises are we "**justified by his blood**" or are we "**justified through faith**"? The answer is Yes! Christians are saved by grace, that is, "**justified by his blood**," and we are "**justified through faith**." We are saved by grace through faith.*

Because Christians are "**justified through faith**" and "**justified by his blood**," what blessings do we have in our Lord Jesus Christ? Paul said:

- *"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" — Literally, it means, "We are having peace." It is an ongoing thing. God grants Christians this ongoing "peace," but it is also the "peace" that we feel in our hearts because we have been "justified." This is a subjective and objective "peace." The objective "peace" comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ." In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14). That is the objective sense in which God has made "peace" between us and Him. We are no longer enemies (cf. Romans 5:10). There is also subjective "peace" which Paul talked about in Philippians: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). "The peace of God which passeth all understanding" (ASV) is the sense of*

“*peace*” that sets in because of our relationship to God as a result of the objective “*peace*” of Calvary.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes the following in his book on Romans:

Peace with God indicates a belief that God loves me in spite of the fact that I still sin. Peace with God indicates a state of mind that is at rest about one’s relationship with God. Peace with God indicates an ability to answer the accusations of the devil and maybe even my own conscience. Peace with God indicates a lack of fear of judgment.⁴

- *We have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand* — Christians have access into the throne room of God. The word “*access*” in the Greek was used in that day in a couple of different ways. One way it was used to talk about ushering one into the presence of an incredible person or maybe into the presence of royalty, perhaps even into the presence of a king. Common people do not have the right to walk into the office of any great ruler of the world. We have to be invited; we need special permission to have “*access*” to royalty. Christians have permission to go right into the throne room of God any time we want in prayer. The writer of the Book of Hebrews says:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let

⁴. Lloyd-Jones, David Martyn, *Romans - An Exposition of Chapter 5: Assurance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), pp. 17–21.

us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Christians have access into the throne room of royalty. The word “*access*” was also used to talk about a place of refuge; like a harbor for ships to get away from storms. It was a place of solace and refuge. That is what we have as Christians — we are able to come out of the world and go into the throne room of God anytime we want. We can find a place of solace and peace.

- *We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God* — Christians are not just saved now, there is more to come. “*Hope*” is for that which is beyond. “*Hope*,” in this case, is in “*the glory of God*.” Remember Romans 3:23, “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” “*Falling short of the glory of God*” means that we have fallen short of the dream that God has for His children. God has a dream of the life He wants us to live. In Christ, we have all kinds of blessings, and God helps us to reach the kind of life that He wants us to live. We are allowed to become like Christ with His help in the Spirit. Keep in mind that usually “*the glory of God*” is the end of time. As God looks at us on the earth, He could say, “I will save you wretches now and clean you up down there, but don’t think you are getting into heaven. That is too precious and you will not make it there.” Not only does God “*justify*” Christians here on this earth, but we have the “*hope*” of being with God in the final days. Think about all the songs about heaven and all the thoughts presented in Scripture about what is beyond: the body that will be transformed, being with the Lord forever, and the description of the coming of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4. We rejoice in the “*hope*” of getting to go home to be in the “*glory of God*.”

- *We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us.*

Most Christians would not consider “suffering” as a blessing. We look at “suffering” as something that we have to endure as part of being a Christian. Paul said “suffering” is a blessing, “because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Christians in the 21st century, especially those in the Western world, need to get a hold on this. This may be a generalization, but we do not do very well when it comes to “suffering.” Consider these texts in the New Testament:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12–13).

So that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know (1 Thessalonians 3:3–4).

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:12–13).

Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said (Acts 14:22).

Christians should not act like “*trials*” do not belong in their lives. We should not act like “*suffering*” is not welcome. We should not be surprised when it comes along. We are living in a cursed world. Christians will have foes that will come against them, so “*do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering.*” When Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians about “*trials*,” they were only a few months old in the faith, but he had warned them ahead of time and apparently told them they “*were destined for*” “*trials*,” they were going to be “*persecuted.*”

Paul told Timothy that Christians “*will be persecuted!*” He did not say “maybe” or “if,” he said “*will be.*” When Paul and Barnabas were strengthening the disciples in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they told them Christians “*must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*” Paul was saying that “*suffering*” can be used by God in this transformation process: “*suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*” If we want to become like Christ, we must share in His “*suffering.*” We sing the song that comes from Philippians 3:10, “*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*”⁵ Christians cannot be like Jesus unless they share in “*his sufferings*,” in His trials and tribulations, and win those battles like He did.

“*Suffering produces perseverance*” that gives Christians the ability to hold on for extended times of trials. “*Perseverance . . . produces character.*” The word “*character*” means genuineness. Ask yourself, “Are you for real? Is your Christian faith true?” If someone bursts

5. Paperless Hymnal, “*I Want to Know Christ*” (Praise for the Lord, Copyright © 1992 by Song Supplements, Inc.), American Folk Melody.

into my house with a machine gun and says, “If you are a Christian, I am going to blow your head off,” that is a moment of faith that forces me to make a decision in a public and very forthright way. Am I a Christian? Do I really believe or not? Trials will do that to us. When trials come up against us, they are saying, “Are you for real or not? Do you really believe that Christian stuff or not? Are you a fair-weather Christian? Do you believe in God when everything is going well and the money is coming in, when there is peace and no trials? Is that the only time you believe in Jesus?” Paul was saying, “Trials produce perseverance, which produces genuineness, which produces hope.” It is good for Christians to hope! The Lord does not want us to live here for all time and into eternity. God wants us to want to go home. “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through,”⁶ so “*we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*”

- *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to know how much God loves His children. In these verses he described God’s love in various ways. God does not just love us when we are at our best. The prophet Isaiah said, “*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own*

⁶. Howard, A.H., Songs of Faith and Praise: *This World Is Not My Home* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, Inc, 1993), pp. 957.

way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). When did Jehovah lay “*the iniquity of us all*” on Jesus? It was when we were at our worst, when we were walking away from Him. God was not waiting to send Jesus when we were at our best. God sent His son “*at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*” God sent His son “*when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*” (Galatians 4:4–5). God sent His son “*when we were still powerless*” to take away our sins. God sent Jesus when we were “*ungodly,*” when we were not “*righteous,*” when we were not “*good,*” and when we were “*still sinners.*” It was “*at just the right time*” that Jesus came to take away our sins. Christians need to realize that not only are we “*justified through faith,*” God does not just tolerate us, He loves us in spite of who we used to be and even though we still struggle.

- *Since we have now been justified by his blood, **how much more** shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, **how much more**, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Once again, this is back to “*the hope of the glory of God.*” And that is not all, it is not all done yet, so — “**how much more**”? We have something wonderful coming afterward, “*we shall be saved from God’s wrath.*” There will be judgment, and “*He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Christians are safe from the “*wrath*” that is to come. Once again, Paul says that “*through the death of his Son . . . shall we be saved through his life*” from the “*wrath*” to come! God does not save us now and then say, “You are going to have to spend eternity in hell

because you are just not good enough, you are just not forgiven enough.”

- *Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* — Paul wrote about all these blessings, and then he finished this section saying “*Not only is this so, but*” — there is more! This is Paul’s summation of the Christian’s blessing:

*“Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith . . . justified by his blood** . . . we have peace with God . . . we have gained access by faith . . . we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God . . . we also rejoice in our sufferings . . . hope . . . God demonstrates his own love . . . saved from God’s wrath . . . reconciled to him . . . saved through his life . . . we have now received reconciliation.”*

Summing this up, we get to “*rejoice*” in our relationship to God — “*we have now received reconciliation.*” How special is that? Think about who God is. He is the God of the universe! He is perfect, He has never sinned, never done anything wrong! Christians have done all these things against Him. We have turned our backs on Him, yet He still says, “I want a relationship with you!” He wants a relationship with us not only here on this earth, but also into eternity. What incredible blessings we have!

The Adam-Christ Contrast

In the next section of Romans 5, Paul wrote a contrast and comparison between Christ and Adam. He used several different contrasting comparisons that are very similar in the way they are worded. Look at Romans 5:12–14:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [that was Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned — for before the law [the Law of Moses] was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

Adam ushered in sin. Genesis tells that story, but it is interesting to see what Paul said. Not only did Adam usher in sin, he ushered “death” in. It is very important in the context to figure out what “death” is. Paul was not talking about physical death. He was talking about spiritual “death.” When Adam sinned, he ushered sin and spiritual “death” into the world. In this way sin came to all men, because “all sinned.” That is important, because Christians do not get Adam’s spiritual “death” that he ushered into the world by Adam’s sin. In other words, Adam’s sin is not passed down to man. We get spiritual “death” because we sin! This goes back to Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It is not because Adam sinned that we “fall short of the glory of God.” It is not because Adam sinned that we are condemned. It is not because Adam sinned that we are spiritually dead. Paul said it is because we have sinned. Adam ushered the whole concept of sin and spiritual “death” into the world, and it becomes man’s by his participation, not because it was passed down to him from Adam in some way.

Paul said, “before the law was given, sin was in the world.” What is the definition of sin? In 1 John 3:4 it says, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” Sin is breaking the Law of God. Before the Law of Moses came into existence, was there a law in place? There had to be! If there was sin, that means that someone broke the Law of God. In Genesis before the Law of Moses came into existence, God

was holding man accountable. Why was there a flood? Man's sin caused God's judgment. Why was there a tower of Babel? Man sinned, causing God's judgment — God was holding men accountable. Sin was there because the Law of God was in place. It was not the Law of Moses — we might call it the Moral Law. That law was still in existence for the Gentiles even when the Law of Moses was given to the Jews as their own "*law*."

Paul said, "*before the law [the Law of Moses] was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.*" This is a little bit of a tough statement. What did Paul mean when he said, "*sin is not taken into account when there is no law*"? Perhaps he was repeating what he had already said. If sin is present, there has to be law. If there is no law present, then there is no sin. Maybe Paul was saying there has never been a time when sin was not in existence. That would prove that the Law of God has always been in existence.

There may be another interpretation of this part of the verse that Christians need to keep in mind all the way through the Book of Romans: "*But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.*" When we do not live under a law system, then we are under a grace system (cf. Romans 6:14–15). When there is a grace system, sin is not taken into account. I am not sure which interpretation is correct in this context, but I lean toward the first one, thinking Paul was simply pointing out that during the time from creation until the Law of Moses was given at Mt Sinai, sin was in place and death was in place, and certainly, therefore, the Law of God was in place.

Paul continued, "*Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.*" From the time of creation all the way to the Law of Moses (the Law given at Mt. Sinai), sin was in place and spiritual "*death*" was in place. Why? Because the Law of God was in place, and mankind was breaking that Law. This was true "*even over those who did not sin by breaking a command,*

as did Adam who was a pattern of the one to come.” The New International Version actually adds a little bit of information there, trying to help the reader to understand. That verse literally reads, “*even over those who did not sin as Adam did.*”

There are a lot of ways in which mankind did not sin as Adam did. Adam ushered in sin in a very specific way. He was the one who sinned first. He was the one who introduced spiritual “*death.*” A Christian’s sin does not do that. He was the one who ushered in physical death. He is the one who lost Eden for all time. He is the one who lost the Tree of Life for all time. Adam’s sin brought a curse upon the ground and all creation. Adam’s sin was unique in its consequences and in the fact that he ushered some things in for the very first time. Our sin is not like that. It is different in that respect. That is what Paul was saying here. “*Even over those who did not sin as Adam did*” death still reigns. Why during the time of Adam to Moses did death still reign? Because people were breaking the Law of God.

Beginning in Romans 5:15 Paul gave six descriptions of what Adam brought into the world and what Christ brought into the world to trump that:

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of

one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:15–21).

In your mind try to contrast what Adam ushered in and what Christ ushered in:

- *But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*

“*The gift*” is what Christ brought into the world. “*The trespass*” is what Adam brought into the world. Adam sinned and many died as a result of it. Christ came into the world as “*grace*,” and “*grace . . . overflow[s] to many*.” Adam sinned, and ushered in sin, many partook of it and participated in it, and they all died. God sent Jesus to bring “*grace*” into the world, and all men can have “*God's grace*,” not automatically and not by imputation, but they must participate by faith. That is what Paul has said all through the Book of Romans. Some may read this part of the chapter and think that just as Adam's sin is passed down to all men automatically, then Christ's “*grace*” is passed down to all men automatically. That is called universalism. That is not true. Man has to accept “*grace by faith*.” If he does not have “*faith*,” then he does not get Christ's “*grace*,” he does not get that “*righteousness*.” In all of these contrasts, we receive what Adam ushered in

and what Christ ushered in by participation, not by imputation.

- *Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.*

Adam brought “condemnation” to everybody. God through Jesus brought “justification” and “righteousness” to everybody.

- *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*

The contrast in this verse is “death” and “life.” Through Adam man faced “sin” and “death.” Through Christ man has “righteousness” and “life.”

- *Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.*

Paul was using different words to make these contrasts. It all comes out the same. Adam ushered in “sin” and “death” and leaves all men condemned because they choose to sin. Jesus ushered in the “grace of God” and gives “righteousness” and “justification” to mankind if they will accept it by “faith.”

- *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

Again Paul made the same contrasts using “*disobedience*” and “*sinner*” and “*obedience*” and “*righteous*.”

- *The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

These last two verses are very important. “*The law*,” this is talking about the Law of Moses, “*was added so that the trespass might increase*.” Was Paul saying that God let “*sin reign in death*” from Adam to Moses, and then the Lord put the “*law*,” the Law of Moses in place to increase “*trespass*”? Would God put in place a “*law*” that made people sin more? Think about it this way — were people already sinning? Yes! How many sins does it take to condemn somebody? Just one. The Lord came along and put the Law of Moses in place, but for what reason? Remember in Romans 3:20 Paul said: “*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin*.” The Law of Moses was put in place to make the Jews in particular conscious of sin. Paul said here in Romans 5:20, “*The law was added so that the trespass might increase*.”

- Now consider what Paul said in Romans 7:7, 13:

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law . . . Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so

that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

The Jews were sinning, they were dying, they were being separated from God spiritually. When God chose the Jewish nation, He wanted a “*people*” to believe in Him, to trust Him totally for their salvation. So He put the “*law*” in place to show them what sinners they were. All the “*laws*” that had been put in place were not supposed to handcuff them or frustrate them, they were supposed to remind them that they were sinners. They knew the things that were wrong and offended God. Like the publican in Luke 18, the typical Jew should have responded by saying, “I am a sinner. I am lost. I need the grace and mercy of God” (cf. Luke 18:9–14). That was what the “*law*” was meant to do. Unfortunately, most Jews did not use the “*law*” the right way. They tried to keep the “*law*” as a cleaning tool. They tried to clean up their sins by trusting their law-works. That was not what the “*law*” was put there for. It was to help them to know that they were sinners and they were lost. It was to help them understand how many times they had sinned; when they understood that, they could throw themselves upon the “*grace*” of God and accept His “*grace*” by “*faith*.” Like David, they could know that they were “*justified*” by “*grace*” through “*faith*.”

Contrasts and Comparisons

Adam

He sinned - Many died
One sin - Condemnation
One man - Death reigned
Condemnation for all men
Disobedience - Sinners
Sin increased - Death

Sin Reigns in Death

Christ

His gift - Grace for many
Gift of God - Justification
Righteous - Life reigned
Life - all men with faith
Obedience - Righteousness
Grace - Eternal Life

Jesus Christ Is LORD

The Doctrine of Sanctification — Righteousness Demanded

Romans 6:1–10

This section of the Book of Romans is called the Doctrine of Sanctification or the Doctrine of Transformation. In other words, Christians are trying to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what transformation really means. Paul revealed some wonderful secrets that were not intended to be secrets. He revealed some things for us to put in place so that we can indeed begin to make further progress in becoming like the Lord Jesus. This chapter is connected to a statement that was made in Romans 5:20, “*The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.*” Some might have concluded that if grace increased when you sinned, then should you purposely sin more so that grace could increase more? Romans 6 offers the answer to that kind of faulty thinking.

The Thesis — Dead to Sin

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! **We died to sin**; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through*

the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:1–7).

In Romans 6 Paul talked about one particular theme. Some who know Romans 6:3–4 might think that the theme was baptism, but those verses fit into a context talking about being dead to sin. Some of the older translations say “*God forbid!*” in place of “*By no means!*” The word “*God*” is not in this text. The Greek words Paul used were *Mé génoito*, which means by no means, no way, or it cannot be that way. The thesis of this chapter emphasizes that a Christian cannot purposely go on sinning so that more grace will come in to forgive more sin because that somehow glorifies God. No, that cannot be! What did Paul mean when he said, “*We died to sin*”? The “*we*” in this chapter refers to Christians. When we think about it, we who are Christians still sin, so how can Paul say, “*We died to sin*”? Paul was talking about himself and other Christians that he knew, including the Roman Christians. Christians in the twenty-first century are included in that “*we*.” What did Paul mean when he said, “*We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*”

To see the theme of this chapter look, at Romans 6:2, 7–9, 11, 14–15:

***We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?** . . . Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if [Since] we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him . . . In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus . . . For sin shall not be your master,*

because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Notice the death penalty emphasis in these verses. In other words, consider yourself to be dead because that is what you are. In the first part of Romans 6, Paul was talking about the fact that Christians have died to sin's penalty. We know that even as Christians we are still sinning. In what sense can we say, "*We died to sin.*"? We cannot say we have stopped sinning. First John 1:7 says, "*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us [Christians] from all sin.*" This indicates that while we are walking in the light, we still sin. We know that while we are still sinning, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Equate that to the fact that Paul said, "*We died to sin.*"

Christians have died to sin's penalty, which really means that we have died to the condemning power of sin. Before we became Christians, when we sinned, we died. That is the law of sin and death. But we are "*free from the law of sin and death*": "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death*" (Romans 8:1–2). This is the same concept in Romans 6. Christians are dead to sin's penalty. This is the theme that is repeated over and over in Romans 6. When we sin, we do not die because when we are walking in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

"*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*" (Romans 6:1–2). The motivation for Christians to live righteous and pure lives is understanding that we have died to sin's penalty. Knowing that we have died to sin's penalty and that the grace of God washes away our sins is not some kind of motivation for us to sin more. It is the

motivation for us to fight hard not to sin — understanding that we will sin, but fighting hard not to!

The secrets to resisting sin are found in Romans 6–8. They are not meant to be secrets, but a lot of people do not know how to win the battle against sin. Consider the thread of this concept before looking at the specifics. Paul said, “*We died to sin!*” This is talking about the penalty of sin. Understand, though, that for the Christian there is an ongoing sense of dying to sin. In other words, that means fighting the power of sin. There is a sense in which we try to die to sin’s power. Consider these passages:

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1–3).

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14).

These passages present the same concept that Paul was talking about in Romans. Christ’s death and a Christian’s death to sin’s penalty motivate us to live for the resurrected Christ. In Colossians, Paul continued to tell those Christians that they needed to fight against sin and the temptations of sin. All of this is based upon the fact that we have “*died to sin.*” Paul said he had been crucified to the world. He had been crucified to sin’s temptations and to the condemning aspect of sin in his

life. Paul said, “*the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*” The word “*crucified*” that Paul used here is past tense. It is important to understand that this was something Paul was emphasizing in these passages — it happened in the past. When and where had “*the world . . . been crucified*” to Paul and he “*crucified . . . to the world*”? Look at Romans 6:3–4:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For a moment in this study, I want to make an important point to those of us who are avid Bible students. Every one of the texts in the New Testament that talk about baptism is found in a book that was written to Christians. In the Book of Acts, baptism is sometimes described as the response that an unbeliever, a non-Christian, makes to God and, in doing so, becomes a Christian. However, the Book of Acts was written to Theophilus, who in my opinion was a believer. The other times that baptism is mentioned in the New Testament are written in books that were written to Christians (Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, and 1 Peter). It would be interesting to go back and study the baptism passages in that context. The question to consider is why would the writer be reminding Christians of our baptism? Why would he be talking about baptism to people who already believed that it is what ushers us into the grace of God? Baptism is what forgives and clothes us with Christ and all the other things that the New Testament says about baptism. Paul said in this verse, and it corresponds to all the other places that baptism is mentioned, “*Or don't you know . . . ?*” They did know about baptism. They were not being taught a brand new thing. They knew “*. . . that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized*

into his death?” He was reminding them of something that had already happened in their lives. He was simply reminding them of the effect of baptism: *“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”* Study those other passages in Scripture that mention baptism. Look at them not from the angle that this is a passage that unbelievers need to hear so they can become Christians, but view them wondering what Christians are supposed to discern from being reminded about the wonderful thing called immersion into Christ.

In Romans 6:3–4 Paul was saying this is the time at which you died to sin’s penalty. By implication, this text teaches that baptism is by immersion: *“We were therefore buried with . . . Christ.* The word *“baptism”* in the Greek means immersion. There are other Greek words for “sprinkling” or “pouring.” However, that is really not what Paul was emphasizing in this passage. This Scripture is also a passage that specifically says this is the time at which Christians are united with Christ. This is the time at which we are united with His death. His death is the point at which Christ died to save us. His death is where He shed His blood. So by implication it is understood that baptism is the time at which we connect with Jesus. It is the time at which we are connected with His blood. His blood is the only thing that can wash away our sins. So baptism is indeed the time at which our sins are washed away and the time at which we imitate His death, burial, and resurrection so that we can be raised to walk in a new life: *“. . . baptized into his death . . . buried with him through baptism . . . raised from the dead . . . live a new life.”*

The emphasis in this context says, “When you were baptized, you died to sin’s penalty.” That is the same thing as saying, “You are saved!” It is the same thing as saying, “Your sins are washed away.” Paul was reminding the Roman Christians using different language that they had died to sin’s penalty; and, like Christ was raised from the dead, they had been raised from the dead to walk a brand new life. Continuing

to follow Paul's argument, he said, "We died to sin's penalty. When did we die to sin's penalty? When we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death."

There is a difference of opinion among commentators concerning Romans 6:4. Remember the context is "We have died to sin's penalty." Paul said, "*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death . . .*" The question might arise, which "death" was Paul talking about? It is quite plausible that he was still talking about the Christian's death. An immediate thought might be that Paul was talking about Christ's death. In this context it is possible that Paul was saying that we at baptism were buried into the "death" of Jesus Himself. It is probable that in the course of this argument, Paul was saying "baptism" is the time in which Christians are buried and connected with our "death." That "death" was our time to die. That is what Paul was emphasizing in the context. When we are buried with Christ, we are buried into our "death," and out of that "death" comes "new life." A "new life" is possible because of the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Effects of Our Death to Sin

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:5–7).

These verses repeat the concept in Romans 6:3–4 using different words. The emphasis of what happened, when it happened, and the results of dying to sin continue in these verses. Paul did not just talk about baptism and the results of baptism and then move on. He continued to talk about the

results of when we died to sin and were baptized into Christ. Remember the emphasis of Romans 6 is that since we have died with Christ, since we have died to sin's penalty, should we continue to sin so that grace will increase? Absolutely not! Dying to sin's penalty should be the motivation for us to fight hard not to continue to sin. We must conquer the power of sin.

When Paul said, *"If we have been united with him like this in his death,"* he was repeating what he said earlier, *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"* Christians are united with Christ in His *"death,"* which means we are united with Him in the likeness of His *"death"* when we are baptized. When we are united with Him in His *"death,"* we are also then united with Him in His *"resurrection."* Once again, the commentators may disagree here in regard to the resurrection. The context of what Paul was saying here concerning the *"resurrection"* is not the future resurrection of our bodies, although it could possibly refer to that *"resurrection."* It seems that in the flow of this argument, the *"resurrection"* of Romans 6:5 is the same *"resurrection"* of Romans 6:4 — *"just as Christ was raised from the dead."* That *"resurrection"* happens when a person comes forth from the waters of baptism:

- *baptized into Christ Jesus . . .*
- *baptized into his death*
- *buried with him through baptism into death . . .*
- *Christ was raised from the dead . . . live a new life . . .*
- *we have been united with him like this in his death . . .*
- *united with him in his resurrection . . .*
- *crucified with him . . .*
- *no longer . . . slaves to sin —*
- *anyone who has died has been freed from sin*
(Romans 6:3–7).

Paul was repeating the same concept using different words in these verses. If he was saying that because we died with

Christ in baptism we are going to have a resurrected body (he did use the future tense here), that will be wonderful; but I do not see that as the emphasis in this particular chapter. Paul said, “*don’t you know*” in Romans 6:3 and “*we know*” in Romans 6:6, meaning the Roman Christians and Paul already knew “*that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*” He was saying the same thing, but coming at it in a different way. When was the “*old self*” crucified? When did we die? We died when we were baptized. Remember Paul told the Galatians, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20). “*I have been crucified with Christ*” — Paul was “*crucified with Christ*” when he was baptized. This crucifixion was a metaphorical way to talk about the kind of “*death*” to sin’s penalty that all Christians die when we are baptized.

Consider what Paul said in Romans 6:6: “*For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*” It is important to keep this in the right context. He did not say that once you become a Christian the “*old self*” never sins again. He said the “*old self was crucified . . . the body of sin . . . done away with.*” The “*old self*” is gone, because the “*old self*” has died, and “*the body of sin*” has been “*done away.*” We, who are Christians on the other side of baptism, still say: “But I still sin. I am not sure my ‘*old self was crucified*’ when I was baptized.” Paul was still talking about being dead to the **penalty of sin**. The “*old self*” that had been crucified is the old person who died when he sinned before he became a Christian. That “*old self*” is gone! The Christian is a new self who sins, even though he does not want to, but the blood of Jesus washes his sins away. The “*old self*,” which was subject to the law of sin and death, is what was crucified. The “*body of sin*” that was giving in to sin and dying every time we sinned has been

“done away with.” On this side of the baptism, that *“body of sin”* is gone. That does not mean that we do not sin, but that *“old self”* is gone. We are *“no longer slaves to sin.”*

Paul was saying three things that are very similar in Romans 6:6, but he used different metaphorical languages in each one:

- *“our old self was crucified with him”*
- *“the body of sin . . . [is] done away with”*
- *“we should no longer be slaves to sin”*

As Christians we might say, “I still struggle with certain sins. I seem to repeat them from time to time. I can’t seem to escape them.” That does not prove that we are *“slaves to sin”* in regard to how Paul was talking in this verse. Remember that being *“slaves to sin”* is connected to the law of sin and death — when you sin, you die. Christians are free from being a *“slave to sin”* — when we sin, we do not die anymore. When we sin, those sins are not accounted to us (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:16–21). When we sinned before we became Christians, we were *“slaves to sin,”* slaves to the penalty of sin. We must keep this verse in context, or we will create a lot of angst for ourselves that Paul did not intend.

Paul continued in Romans 6:7, *“because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”* When did that *“death”* that resulted in the freedom from sin happen? Remember Romans 6:3–4 again:

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Everyone who has been baptized into Christ continues to sin from time to time. Paul did not say that once you became a Christian you would be free from sin. He said that when you died you were freed from sin's penalty. Focus on being freed from sin's penalty to better understand what Paul was talking about.

One more interesting thought about Romans 6:7, "*because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*" Guess what the word "*freed*" is? It is the word "*justified*," the word for "made righteous." It is *dedikaíootai* in the Greek. When a person dies with Christ, what happens to him? That person is "*justified*." "*Justified*" has been Paul's word in the Book of Romans. That is what he has talked about the most in this book. It is not so much about salvation or even the words "*freed from sin.*" He said when a person dies in baptism, he is "*justified*." Yes, Christians are "*justified by faith*." We are "*justified by faith*," and baptism is a part of the faith response to the cross of Christ so that we can be "*justified*" and "*freed from [the penalty of] sin.*"

Romans 6:8–10 says:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Paul continued talking about what happens to Christians: "*Now if we died with Christ*" — he has already said, "*We died to sin*" in Romans 6:2. Christians have "*died to sin*" and we have "*died with Christ*." Again, when did that happen? When we were baptized. "*If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him*" — Romans 6:8 is almost identical to Romans 6:5:

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Once again, was Paul talking about the future, Christians living with Christ when we are raised from the dead? Perhaps. In this context, I think he was still talking about when we died, when we were baptized and then were raised to be alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:8 is simply a restatement of Romans 6:5.

Romans 6:9–10 says:

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

This is a very important passage. Paul was going back to the life and death of Jesus. He was saying, “How many times did Jesus live?” Once! “How many times did He die?” Once! And He died once to take care of the sin problem. All of the sins of the world were laid on Him at Calvary: “*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6). How many sins did Jesus take away on Calvary the first time? He only died once, so there is only one time. He “*died . . . once for all.*” He took away all the sins of the world. He made propitiation for all the sins of the world: “*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). Jesus only had to go to the cross one time. He only had to pay the penalty one time.

Once again, Paul was setting up a parallel between Christ and Christians. Christ died, was buried, and was raised from the

dead. Christians die, we are buried, and are raised from the dead to live a new life (cf. Romans 6:3–4). Just like Christ died once to take care of the sin problem, we, too, only have to die once to take care of our sin problem. Christians will sometimes ask if they need to be re-baptized if they sin. Paul was not saying that every time you sin you have to die again. That is not how it works. A Christian is already dead. We do not become alive to sin's penalty again. If you are walking in the light, walking by faith, then just as Christ died once, you only have to die once.

I wish I could reach the hearts of so many Christians who struggle with the concept of being freed from the penalty of sin. Many have a hard time believing this. They want to know if they have done enough good works to make up for the sins they have committed. Have they gone over the limit of sins that God allows them to commit in order to be saved? All of that is not Bible. I want to reach out and ask Christians to wrestle with the truth of Scripture, which is not “once saved, always saved.” The truth of Scripture is “once saved, the Lord cleanses us of sin.” We are to walk with Him in a life of faith, a life in the Spirit, and a life of truthfulness. It is not a life of perfection. It is a life of walking in the light, a life of falling, but then getting up and going on your way again. Let me persuade you that this is so important because it will give you motivation to fight on and to try to win the battles against the temptations of Satan.

The Doctrine of Sanctification — Righteousness Practiced

Review

Romans 5–8 are the chapters in the Book of Romans that deal with the Doctrine of Sanctification. These chapters address the question of how Christians win over the power of sin now that we have been freed from the penalty of sin. We have been justified, so how can we be like Christ? The first half of Romans 6 reverts back to the discussion of how Christians are freed from the penalty of sin. Paul started Romans 6 by saying, “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*” (Romans 6:1). Remember Christians are indeed freed from the penalty of sin when we are “*baptized into Christ Jesus,*” “*united with him in his resurrection.*” We have died to the penalty of sin and have been raised to “*live a new life*” (Romans 6:3–5). Romans 5–8 repeats the same kind of concept over and over again in different ways and using different metaphors. In Romans 6:8–10 Paul said we need to think about Christ in relation to the sin problem. Christ died once! He only had to die once to take care of the sin problem. The implication is that we only need to die once to sin’s penalty. However, in the first ten verses of Romans 6, there is a discussion concerning how Christians can win against sin’s temptations. How can we do the hard things that God commands in His Word? How can we be victorious in the fight against sin’s lure in our life?

Practical Applications of the Principle of One's Death and Resurrection with Jesus

Romans 6:11–23

Paul started this section of Scripture with, “*In the same way*” — “*in the same way*” as what? He was saying that “*in the same way*” that Christ only died once to take care of the condemning power of the sin problem for Christians, we, too, only have to die once. Consider Paul’s exhortation to the Christians in Rome:

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:11–14).

These verses describe the partnership that Christians have with the Holy Spirit to help us win over the power of sin in our lives. This is not so much about the power of God to help us win (Paul will cover that in Romans 8), but more about how Christians can cooperate with the Spirit that lives within us to win the battle. Consider the following steps that Christians need to take to partner with the Holy Spirit.

“Count Yourself Dead to Sin”

Paul began this exhortation saying, “*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11). In essence, Paul said Christians, having died to

sin, now must agree with God's declaration that we have been justified. We must agree with God's determination that sin's penalty no longer has a place in our lives, agree with God that when we sin we are not condemned, and agree with God that when we sin we are not subject to the law of sin and death anymore.

Christians, "*count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" This verse is an imperative; it is a command just like any other command in Scripture. Paul issued this imperative — which meant start doing this now and keep on doing it until Jesus comes or until you die — to the Christians in Rome, many of whom may have been Christians for a long time. We have to make a decision on a consistent basis to agree with God in regard to what He has said. God has said that we are "*dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" This is not something that just happens at baptism and then we are through with that determination until Jesus comes. This is something that we have to continually do — "*count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*"

Let me suggest a practical way to "*count yourselves.*" I liken it to the husband and wife relationship. Before they got married they often told each other they loved one another, but then they got out of the habit of doing that. So perhaps the wife asked her husband why he did not tell her he loved her any more. In ignorance and/or stupidity, he might respond, "I told you when we got married 30 years ago and if I change my mind I will let you know." The woman wanted to hear that affirmation on a regular basis. That is akin to what Paul was saying — Christians need to affirm themselves. This is a confession that we make to ourselves. In what way do you "*count yourselves*"? How do we continue to say, "I agree with you, God, concerning what you have declared me to be: a justified, saved person."

"*Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" is a confession that Christians should make every morning before we even get out of bed. It needs to be included

in our first prayers, telling God that we agree with Him and are ready to serve Him. It needs to be included in our prayers of thankfulness as we glorify God before we take a step out the door. We need to tell God, and ourselves, that we believe that we are dead to sin's penalty but alive to a relationship with Him. We need to acknowledge that nothing can take that relationship away as long as we walk in the light.

No Longer Under Sin's Power

Paul continued his exhortation to Christians telling us that we are transitioning into conquering the power of sin in our lives: *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."* We must make that decision that we are going to stand up and fight in the right way. We must fight a spiritual battle. Paul told the Ephesians that they needed to *"... be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes"* (Ephesians 6:10–11).

In Romans Paul was attacking in a different way. Romans 6:13, 16, 19 give step two to sanctification and our partnership with the Holy Spirit to help Christians win against the power of sin:

*Do not **offer** the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather **offer** yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and **offer** the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness . . . Don't you know that when you **offer** yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? . . . I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to **offer** the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to*

*ever-increasing wickedness, so now **offer** them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*

These three passages use the same word over and over. The New International Version uses the word “offer.” The same word is used in Romans 12:1 — “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer** your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*” Some translations use the word “present” in these verses. In Romans 12, it is the concept of a sacrificial offering, giving yourself to God. Christians are to “offer” themselves as a burnt offering each day. It is the same concept in Romans 6, but Paul expresses it here a little bit differently.

Romans 6:13 says:

*Do not **offer** the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather **offer** yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and **offer** the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

This is another present imperative command from Paul. He said, “Stop now!” in a negative way, and “Do not ever do it again” — “*Do not **offer** the parts of your body to sin!*” The Christian may say, “I would never offer parts of my body willingly and purposely to sin.” Paul was saying we need to make a decision on a continual basis not to do that. Paul said, “*Do not offer . . .*” and then using the same word, he said, “*offer yourselves . . . as instruments of righteousness . . .*” As those who have been brought from death to life, as those who have been justified, freed from the penalty of sin, “. . . *offer the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness.*” Some translations use the word “weapons” instead of “instruments.” In essence, God was saying, “I want to use you for My purposes. I want to use you as My ‘instruments of righteousness’ against the things that try to tear people down

and try to destroy life. I want you to become a weapon in My hands to do My purpose.” Christians have to make this decision not to “offer” themselves to “wickedness” and make the decision to “offer” themselves as “instruments of righteousness.”

Romans 6:16 continues that same thought:

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Paul was saying that when Christians make a decision to “offer [themselves] to someone to obey him,” they are making the decision to become a “slave . . . to the one whom you obey” — the one whom they “offer” themselves to.

Romans 6:19 continues this thought again: “. . . Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.” Some good, moral person who has become a Christian might say that he has never purposely and intentionally given himself over to wickedness. Actually Scripture would say a person is either a child of God or a child of Satan. If a person is not a Christian, then he is in the camp of Satan, and by default, he has offered himself as an “instrument” in Satan’s hand for “impurity and ever-increasing wickedness.” That would be the default setting for anyone who is not a Christian. If you do not make the decision to “offer” yourself to God, then by default you have offered yourself to Satan for his purposes and his wickedness. Paul was telling the Christians in Rome that they used to “offer the parts of your body” to Satan and the slavery of sin. He urged them to make the decision now that they were Christians not to let that be the default setting. They needed to purposely make a decision to “offer” themselves to God.

Consider the following “C” words concerning the “offer[ing]” that Paul was talking about:

- Christians must make a **Conscious** effort to “offer” themselves to God and not to Satan. This is not something that is automatic. The human body has two kinds of muscles: the involuntary muscles and the voluntary muscles. Involuntary muscles are the ones that we do not have to think about controlling. These are muscles that move the lungs, heart, and other internal muscles. We do not have to tell those muscles to work because they are involuntary. There are other muscles that we have to think about using, like our arms, hands, and legs. We consciously command those parts of our body to move. It is a conscious effort. Christians have spiritual voluntary muscles that we have to initiate to move. Paul was telling Christians that we have to make a conscious decision to give ourselves to God. Once again, this is like the first step which said “*count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” The question might arise, “How do I do that? What is the practical application of that?” I suggest that it happen in the same prayer in which the Christian says, “Lord, I accept my standing before you. I consider myself to be dead to sin’s penalty.” The second step would be when we say, “Lord, I consciously want to give myself to You today.” By saying that, the default setting of giving myself to Satan for his purposes is gone.
- It is important to not only make a Conscious decision, but Christians also need to make a **Continual** effort to “offer” their bodies to God. The words “*do not offer*” are present imperative. Some of the others in this text are the same words but they are aorist active imperative. Each one gives the sense of making a decision, but it is not just a one-time thing. The emphasis of these words is not just a conscious decision, but also a continual effort. It is important to

realize that this is a daily effort and maybe more often than that. As a Christian thinks about the day ahead, as he gets out of bed and thinks about the challenges that are coming and temptations that he knows he will have to face because he is going to be in a particular setting, he should make a decision for that morning before he ends up in that situation. He might say: “Lord, I need to give myself to you again because I know my humanity is going to be tempted to blow up in anger or to think about somebody in a way that I shouldn’t think about them. I know that I will be particularly vulnerable in the setting that is coming up in my life today. I want to give it all to You.” We should “offer” ourselves to God in prayer once again. This may be something that goes on throughout the day. It may not happen just one time during the day, and certainly it is not a one-time thing in our lives. This is a very important step and one of those secrets about sanctification. These are things that a lot of Christians have not thought about and do not practice. A lot of Christians are not winning the battle against sin because they are not practicing the steps of sanctification or our partnership with the Spirit.

- It is important for Christians to make a conscious, continual, **Comprehensive** effort to “offer [our bodies] *in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*” What did Paul really mean here when he said, “. . . offer the parts of your body . . .”? I think he meant that Christians need to go through the list of who we are. That is more than just thinking about your fingers or your toes or whatever. He was talking about our whole being. What would be on your list that would comprehensively cover everything in your life of which you would say, “I need to surrender this to God today”? These are some of the things on my list:
 - ▶ I “offer” God my emotions. I do not have the right to blow up at people. I do not have the right to withhold

affection just because I am feeling that I do not like you very much today. I do not have the right to let my emotions do whatever they want to do just because they are natural for every human being. I have to offer my emotions to God so that God can use them in a godly way and so that they will not get out of control and destroy relationships. I submit my emotions to Him.

- ▶ I “*offer*” God my will, submitting my will to His will as it is revealed in God’s Word. I do not have the right to wake up and say, “Well, I am a free spirit and I get to do whatever I want to do today.” You do not have that right if you are a Christian. Remember that you were buried with Christ and the old life is gone. Remember that you were raised with Christ and a new life has come forth. There is a new person that is submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Lordship of Jesus says He wants to control everything about our lives. That is what we have said we would be willing to do when we became a Christian. I submit my will to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my mind. I submit my mind to Him. I do not have the right to waste my mind. I have an obligation to use my mind in good pursuits, which includes studying God’s Word. I do not have the right to let my mind feast upon things that are not particularly healthy for it. I submit my mind to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my skills. I am submitting my talents to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my future. I do not have the right to say I am going to do this, I am going to this city, or I am going to work here and I am going to make this much money without inviting God into that discussion (cf. James 4). I give my future to God according to His will and

providence. I am not saying that we cannot make plans. I am saying that our future is in His hands and we need to submit to His will. I am submitting my future to Him.

- ▶ I “*offer*” God my ambitions. I do not have the right to say, “I am going to do this. I am going to do that. I am going to be this or that.” How many people know at this point in their lives that they have taken many detours to get to where they are? A lot of the time that is because the Lord has allowed things to come into our lives to move us in this direction and we have submitted to that. I do not have the right to plan my life and say this is exactly how it is going to happen. I do not have the right to say that God has to bring that about. I am submitting my ambitions to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my dreams, whatever thoughts I have about what I would like to do. I am submitting my dreams to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my fears. I have fears in different contexts. I have fears about talking to this person. I have fears of faith to launch out in a certain direction. I am submitting those fears to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my job. He has every right to control everything about my job. I am submitting my job to Him.
- ▶ I “*offer*” God my children. They are gifts from God. Does He not have the right to use them as he sees fit? We think of our children as our own because we produced them and we want them to do this and that and to be this kind of person. We try to guide them in spiritual ways, but we do not have the right to say this is who they are going to be. This is a hard one, but I am submitting my children to Him.

- ▶ I “offer” God my health. I have plans to do things for the Lord for the rest of my life, but as I drive out of the parking lot and I am T-boned by some other vehicle and put in a wheelchair for the rest of my life, am I going to be okay with that? Or am I going to be bitter for the rest of my life and blame God for taking me out of what I planned to do with my life? I am submitting my health to Him.
- ▶ I “offer” God my family. I am submitting my family to Him.
- ▶ I “offer” God my habits.
- ▶ I “offer” God my sins.
- ▶ I “offer” God my time.

What is on your list? Some may think, “I thought we were talking about ‘. . . offer[ing] *the parts of the body*.’” All of this is involved in “‘. . . offer[ing] *the parts of the body*.’” Think about Job, who said, “*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl*” (Job 31:1). He submitted his eyes to the Lord. Christians need to do the same thing. We need to submit our ears to the Lord lest we hear things such as gossip or things that are said that are not healthy and not good for us.

Whether it is the “*parts of the body*,” the concepts of a whole life, where we are living, or what we are doing, all of that is what Paul was talking about. The bottom line is that all of this is for the purpose of giving yourself to God so that you can be “*instruments of [His] righteousness . . . leading to holiness*.” He wants us to be weapons of His will. He wants to use us until we go home to be with Him. He wants to use us to

accomplish His will. We said we would submit to that when we became a Christian.

Conscious, Continual, and Comprehensive are huge words. I do not know if there is anything else in the Book of Romans that I feel as strongly about as I do about those three words. I think they will make a tremendous difference in a Christian's life going forward if we will cooperate with God in bringing about godliness in us. Remember what Paul said:

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness (Romans 6:19).

We need to “offer” ourselves “in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.” What is “holiness”? It is sanctification! It is transformation! It is Christ-likeness! That is what God is trying to do for us and in us for the rest of our lives.

Remembering When We Became Christians

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! . . . But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin [the penalty of sin] and have become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6: 15, 17–18).

Notice that Romans 6:15 is a repeat of Romans 6:1. “By no means!” should we sin “because we are not under law but under grace?” Christians have conquered the penalty of sin, and now we are trying to conquer the power of sin. When were we “slaves to sin”? When we were not Christians. Romans

6:17–18 are very similar to Romans 6:3–4. “*You used to be slaves to sin*” when you were not a Christian. Paul was using the same concept talking about when we became Christians. When were we “*set free from sin*”? When we became Christians. When did we “*become slaves to righteousness*”? When we became Christians.

The Roman Christians had “*wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.*” That obedience led them to be free from the penalty of sin and “*slaves to righteousness.*” What was Paul talking about when he said, “*you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching*”? What “*teaching*” saves us? What truth saves us? It is Christ! It is Calvary! It is the blood of Jesus! It is the resurrection! It is the Gospel as Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 15:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1–2).

It is the Gospel that saves us. Paul has just said something different here: “You have obeyed ‘*the form of teaching*’ which saves you.” This “*teaching*” is the Gospel. It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul was saying that they became Christians by obeying a “*form*” of that teaching. We cannot go back to Calvary and sit at the foot of the cross letting the blood of Jesus drip on us because that is gone. The blood of Jesus has gone into the earth somewhere. How can we get in touch with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus? Remember that Paul said:

. . . all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order

that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3–4).

We have died to sin, we have been buried in baptism, and we have been raised to walk a new life. That is what Paul was talking about here in Romans 6:17. They had obeyed a “*form*” of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Just because baptism is symbolic does not mean that it is not essential to our salvation. Paul was saying that was the time at which we became identified with, united with, Jesus, with His blood, and with His resurrection. That is the time at which we became free from the penalty of sin. That is the time at which we were saved and became “*slaves to righteousness.*”

Paul continued his letter to the Romans:

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life (Romans 6:20–22).

Paul continued to talk about “*when you were slaves to sin,*” which was when we were not Christians. At that time we were “*free from the control of righteousness.*” When we were sinners, we did not want “*righteousness*” to control our lives. When we were not Christians, we wanted worldliness. We wanted ourselves to be in control of our lives. There is a difference between being controlled by the fact that you are free from the penalty of sin and being controlled by Satan and the power of sin’s penalty. As Christians, we do look back and are ashamed of that lifestyle. We are sorry for things that we did and that were hurtful to God. It is embarrassing to think about

those things we did before we became Christians. Paul said there was no benefit in those things that only resulted in “death.”

“*But now,*” Paul was talking about when as Christians we are free from sin’s penalty and we “*become slaves to God.*” The benefit we “*reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.*” Paul was moving from talking about the penalty of sin to to conquering the power of sin and eventually having “*eternal life*” with God in heaven. I do think that Paul was talking here in terms of “*eternal life*” in the future at that point.

Romans 6:23 is somewhat of a summary verse and a famous verse: “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Once again Paul was talking about life before a person became a Christian. In other words, when a person is not a Christian and he chooses to sin, what is he owed? What is the debt that is owed? The wages are nothing but “*death,*” “*but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Once we have moved out of the penalty of sin and are struggling against the power of sin making decisions and considering ourselves to be dead to sin and giving ourselves to God, what is the result of that life? What is the result of that pursuit? It is nothing but “*eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Christians are now dead to sin’s penalty and on our way to winning against the power of sin.

*The Doctrine of Sanctification —
The Old Man of Sin Before
Justification (1)*

Romans 7:1–10

The Doctrine of Sanctification covers how to win over the power of sin and how to become like Jesus. Romans 7 actually seems like a parenthesis, but it does fit in the whole movement that Paul was making through Romans 6–8. Romans 6, the first step of sanctification, reminds Christians that they have died to the penalty of sin. When a person was alive to the power of sin before he became a Christian, he was also alive to a “law” system. In Romans 7 Paul used this same concept. He reminded them that Christians are dead to the penalty of sin so that they can conquer the power of sin. They needed to understand that they were dead to a “law” system, which demands perfection. They were dead to living that way so that they could live a true life by the power of God.

Dead to the Law and Alive unto Christ

Paul began Romans 7 using an illustration from marriage:

Do you not know, brothers — for I am speaking to men who know the law — that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as

long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man (Romans 7:1–3).

Once again, Paul used “*Do you not know*” to remind them of something they already knew. This was not intended to be some kind of extensive study on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Paul used this concept in a comparison to the “*law*” type system. He began by talking about the marriage relationship. A man and a woman are married, and the only way that relationship ends is if there is a death. If there is not a death and the wife marries another man while her first husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. Why? If there has not been a death, the wife is still married to her first husband. If the husband does die and she marries another man, then she is not called an adulteress. Paul was simply using this situation as an illustration of a marriage ending only when a death takes place. It is not meant to be a commentary on what Jesus said concerning marriage (cf. Matthew 5, Matthew 19, Mark 10).

Paul has already said in Romans 6 that the Roman Christians are dead to sin and that they have died to sin’s penalty. He said the same thing in a different way beginning in Romans 7:4:

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve

in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Romans 7:4–6).

Again, it is very important that Christians understand dying to sin's penalty. I added the word "penalty" to help us understand what Paul was talking about in Romans 6. In Romans 7, when Paul said, "*you also died to the law,*" I want to add the word "system" — "*you also died to . . . [living under a] law*" system. As a reminder, consider what a "*law*" system demands. If we are going to be saved under some kind of a "*law*" system, then we have to live perfectly. Of course, we cannot do that. Paul said, "Brothers, you remember you died to a law system." By implication, from Romans 6:3–4 we died to a "*law*" system when we became Christians, when we were buried with Christ, when we were baptized into Christ:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Not only did we die to sin's penalty, but we also died to living under a "*law*" system. Paul said, "*You . . . died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God*" (Romans 7:4). Paul, in equating a Christian's death to a death in the marriage relationship, says the woman whose husband died is allowed to marry another man, and it is acceptable because a death has taken place. Understand that this is not a perfect parallel, because in the illustration the woman's husband died and she was allowed to remarry. In our relationship to Christ, we "*died to the law,*" but we are alive again; and having "*died to the law*" system, we can marry Christ. In the same way that a death had to take place

in the marriage relationship so that someone could marry another person, our death to the “law” had to take place since we lived under a “law” system and under sin’s penalty. When a Christian is baptized into Christ, then he is allowed to marry the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was saying that this death and remarriage takes place “. . . *in order that we might bear fruit to God.*”

Paul was not talking about justification in this section; he was talking about sanctification — bearing fruit for God is sanctification. Bearing fruit for God is holiness! Bearing fruit for God is transformation! There has to be a death to sin’s penalty. There has to be a death to a “law” system in order “. . . *that you might belong to another.*” There has to be a death to a “law” system in order that we might belong to Christ. There has to be a death to a “law” system “. . . *in order that we might bear fruit to God.*”

Paul used Romans 7:6 to set up the contrast between Romans 7 and Romans 8. First, he said:

***But now** [Now that we are Christians], by dying to what once bound us [a law system], we have been released from the law [system] so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Romans 7:6).*

Referring back to Romans 7:6, in Romans 8:1–2 Paul said, “*Therefore, there is **now** no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*” “**Now** . . . *for those who are in Christ Jesus . . . [we serve in a new way, which is] . . . the law of the Spirit of life . . .*” In the Greek language there are no capitals in the words so you have to determine in the context whether this is talking about the human spirit or the Holy Spirit. I think Paul was talking about the Holy Spirit.

Characteristics of the Old Man Under the “Law”

First in Romans 7, Paul said this is what the old man who lived under a “law” system looked like. He is under the “law of sin and death, and he does not have the power to “bear fruit” for God. Of course, the Christian cannot “bear fruit” under a “law” system. So in Romans 7 he was saying that before a person became a Christian he did not have the Spirit. All he had was a “law” system telling him to obey, to do it this way, and here is another “law.” In the “new way of the Spirit,” the system in Christ, the Christian has the “Spirit” to help him obey and win against the power of sin.

Romans 7 describes the old man of sin as he is controlled by the “law” system, as he is controlled by sin’s penalty. Some people interpret the man in Romans 7 as a struggling Christian rather than as a non-Christian. I take the view that Paul was going back to the time when we, and he because he used the first person in Romans 7:7–25, were living under a “law” system.

Paul used a number of characteristics that do not describe a Christian, or even a struggling Christian. Many people go to this passage to talk about the struggling Christians because they feel like they are struggling against the power of sin. They think that if they feel like the man Paul was describing in Romans 7, then he must be describing a struggling Christian. This is not necessarily so. The fact that Christians feel like the man Paul was describing in Romans 7:14–20 — “I want to do good, but I can’t” — does not prove that we are the man that Paul was describing in this passage.

Romans 7:14–20 does prove that men are struggling against the power of sin. If we are not winning this battle very often, my conclusion is that we do not know the secrets of winning. We do not know how to fight, and we are still fighting on our own power. We are like the little engine going up the hill saying, “I think I can! I think I can!” We are fighting against Satan, fighting against his temptations on our own

power, and not winning that battle very often. Paul urged the Christians in Rome to partner with the Spirit that is within us. That Spirit within can help us win against the power of sin and the temptations that Satan puts before us. We can win! (Paul covers the Spirit within beginning in Romans 8). Consider the following descriptions of man under the power of the “law” system.

“Controlled by the Sinful Nature” — the Flesh

The first description of the man under the power of the “law” system is found in Romans 7:5: *“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.”* This is before we became Christians — *“when we were controlled by the sinful nature.”* The New International Version (NIV) uses the words “sinful nature” when really the word here is just “flesh.” It is flesh as in how God made us with our desires and our wants. The words “sinful nature” might imply to some that we were somehow born with the bad nature to start off with. Are we born in a depraved state? That is not what Paul was saying. Maybe it would help to use the word “flesh” every time the words “sinful nature” are used in the NIV. Before we became Christians, we were controlled by the flesh. In other words, the flesh sees things that it wants. Our flesh has desires — God made us that way — but the flesh sometimes looks to satisfy those desires in ways that are not according to God’s Word and God’s Law. When those temptations come up, what are we supposed to do? We are supposed to fight those temptations using the power of the Spirit and look for the way of escape that God provides:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In Romans Paul was talking about a person before he became a Christian, who did not have the Spirit. All he had was the “law” saying, stop doing that, do this. There is a lot of pressure, and there are a lot of threats of judgment to obey perfectly. Often times in that situation the flesh gets its way. The flesh controls us and overwhelms the mind.

“Bore Fruit for Death”

Paul also said “. . . *the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.*” Once again, this is before we became Christians, and when “. . . *the sinful passions [were] aroused by the law.*” Before we were Christians, “*we bore fruit for death.*” That is not true in Christ. In Christ, we bear “*the fruit of the Spirit*” (cf. Galatians 5:22–23). In Christ, we bear fruit for life. In our past, before we became Christians, “*we bore fruit for death.*” In Christ, we bear fruit for holiness. We “*bear fruit to God.*”

The Christian cannot be described as one who bears “*fruit for death.*” Think about it this way — when you are not a Christian, you have not given yourself to God, so no matter how hard you try to do good things, you do not “*bear fruit*” for God. You bear “*fruit for death*” because what you do is not in the name of Jesus. It is not done for His purposes. It is not done as a Christian so all you can do is bear “*fruit for death.*”

Served “In the Old Way of the Written Code”

“***But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code***” (Romans 7:6). Paul was contrasting the ways in which men are motivated. Are we motivated by “*the new ways of the Spirit*” living within us or are we motivated by “*the old way of the written code*”? I think Paul was referring here to all the laws within the “law” system that men were under. If you were a Jew, you were under hundreds of the “laws” of Moses. These “laws” told them what they were supposed to do and what

they were not supposed to do. There was a right and a wrong way to do things. Every time they turned around, the “law” was reminding them that they had broken another “law,” that they had sinned. The only way the “written code” motivated the Jews was by reminding them that they were wrong. That is not a bad thing, that is a good thing; but it also threatened that if they broke another “law,” they were condemned because they were living under a “law” system. Under a “law” system there is fear, threat, and reminders. By itself, that kind of system does not give man the power to live for God the way he wants to and the way he should. It does not give us the strength to do those hard things that God has asked us to do for Him. The old man serves “*in the old way of the written code.*” If he is not a Christian, then he does not have the “*Spirit.*”

Incited by “Sin” to Rebel

Paul repeated this description of the old man in a couple of different ways throughout Romans:

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead (Romans 7:7–8).

As Paul was making his arguments against somebody living under the “law” system, he discussed the purpose of the “law” (cf. Romans 3:20, 5:20). The Jew might have concluded that he was saying the “law” was a bad thing. The “law” is not a bad thing — it makes man conscious of sin. It makes sin seem utterly sinful so that we can throw ourselves on the mercy of God and beg for His forgiveness. The “law” is good to remind us of our sin and to tell us we are condemned if we break laws.

The “*law*” defines sin. Paul said he would not have known what coveting was if the “*law*” had not said, “*Do not covet.*” In all the examples and clarifications of what sin is, the “*law*” served its purpose.

What did Paul mean when he said, “*But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment*”? “*The commandment*” was referring to the “*Law of Moses.*” Once again, it sounds like Paul was bashing the “*Law of Moses.*” It was not the “*law*” that was bad. Consider the following illustration going back to the Garden of Eden to look at the dynamic that really took place there. Satan, as the serpent, told Eve that God put this law in place that said man should not eat of this particular tree. They could eat of all the other trees, but they could not eat of this one tree. Satan tempted Eve to think that God had kept her out of the blessings that should be hers by telling her that she could not eat of that tree. I think that was what Paul was talking about here. Satan, as “*sin*” in Romans 7:8, uses and twists the meaning of the “*law*” to tempt us into thinking that the “*law*” is against us. He wants us to think that the “*law*” is keeping us from what we should be able to do and what we should be able to have. The “*law*” incites us to rebel and fight against the “*law*” that is in place. Satan tempts us to break the “*law.*” The “*law*” was not the problem in the Garden of Eden. Satan used the “*law,*” twisted its meaning around, to incite Eve to break the “*law*” that was so important to her. It was put there to protect and help her. She saw it in a different light once she was tempted. That is what Paul was talking about here. When we are not Christians there is a “*law*” system in place, and Satan tempts us by using the “*law*” to incite us to rebel against that which is good. When we do rebel, we sin; and when we sin under a “*law*” system, we are dead to God.

Dead to a Relationship with God

Paul continued to say that when we were not Christians, we were under a “*law*” system and were dead to a relationship with God. He even repeated some passages. In Romans 7:9 and

following Paul used first person and even sometimes used the present tense as a literary device. He was still talking about when Paul and we were not Christians. He used this literary device to take himself back into the time when he was not a Christian. First person added emphasis and richness when he said, “I was this” and “I am this.” He used this literary device to emphatically say:

Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:9–12).

Paul was dead to a relationship with God, so what did he mean when he said, “*Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died*”? Some believe that Paul was describing his life when he was a child. As children we are not born into sin and not in a lost position, so some say we are safe. We are not held accountable for the wrong things that we do because we are children. As children we were not under a “law” system. The “law” did not condemn us every time we broke a “law,” even though we were aware of and broke the “law.” As children we were alive in a relationship to God. Then he said, “*but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.*” This sounds like what some call the age of accountability. As children we are not held accountable for our sins, but when we reach the age of accountability the Law of God holds us accountable and indeed condemns us for our sins. It is possible that is what Paul was talking about.

Another interpretation says that Paul was suggesting a sense of perception of walking along in his adult life thinking: “I am doing pretty well. I know what sin is. I know what some of the laws are. I know what I should or should not be doing. I sin some and I do a little bit of wrong, but overall I do pretty well.” So maybe he perceives that he is alive apart from a “law” system. But then the “law” comes streaming in and says, “This is sin and this is wrong and you should be doing this.” Over and over the “law” is saying, “You are lost and cut off from a relationship with God.” It is possible that Paul was talking about the perception of the person — that once he thought he was alive, then when the “law” system came in it showed him how utterly sinful he was — “*when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.*” At that point he realized he was dead.

I lean toward this second interpretation because I think it fits the context better than the first. This passage may help a little bit in talking about the difficult concept called the age of accountability. Either way, Paul was saying that once the “law” had made it clear that you had died to a relationship to God, then you realized and understood what the “law’s” purpose was. It showed how utterly sinful you were, showing you that you had coveted or committed adultery or that you were not kind to others. All of that came together to say that you were lost.

Paul repeated what he had said in Romans 7:8 in Romans 7:11, “*For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.*” I suppose when a person first realizes that he is under a “law” system, he gets excited because he knows this is from God, that God wants him to do this and not to do this; but this makes it sound like the “law” deceived him into thinking that he was acceptable if he could keep the “law.” However as time goes on, he realizes that he broke this “law” and that “law,” and then he realizes that the “law” demands perfection. James 2:10 says, “*For whoever keeps the whole law*

and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” Satan deceived him by using the “law” to make him think that he could keep it; but then he realized he could not keep it and it discouraged him because he realized he was dead.

Does that make the “law” a bad thing? In Romans 7:12 Paul said, *“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”* Paul was not bashing the “Law of Moses” or any “law” of God. He was just claiming one more time what Christians surely know — God did not put a “law” in place for the purpose of condemning us or giving us trouble. He put the “law” in place for our protection. He also put it there to lead us to Christ: *“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith”* (Galatians 3:24). Along with Paul, Christians need to claim that the “law” is a good thing. When we realize that we cannot keep it, when we realize it is telling us what a sinner we are and it kills us in that sense, that is a good thing even though it discourages us.

The Doctrine of Sanctification — The Old Man of Sin Before Justification (2)

Romans 7:11–25

Paul had already told the Roman Christians that they were “dead to” sin’s penalty in Romans 6. In Romans 7 he said Christians are dead to a “law” system. Both of those happened at the same time when —

. . . all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3–4).

Christians die to sin’s penalty when they are united with Christ. We die to living under a “law” system, which demands perfection and condemns us after just one sin.

The Condition of the Man Living Under a “Law” System

In Romans 7 Paul began to describe the man who was living under a “law” system in contrast to the man who was living under God’s grace and led by the Spirit, which Paul

would describe in Romans 8. Paul was not describing where the Roman Christians were, but where they used to be.

“Deceived” into Sin

In Romans 7:11–12 Paul continued to describe those who were living under a “law” system:

For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

When a man lives under a “law” system, he is deceived into sinning. Remember the illustration of what it must have been like in the garden. God put laws in place, telling Adam and Eve that they could not eat of one particular tree. Satan came to Eve and said, “I think that God is unfair. God is keeping you from enjoying the benefits of becoming like Him.” Satan used the “law,” which was intended to protect Adam and Eve and not to keep them from some privilege, and reinterpreted the “law” in such a way that Adam and Eve believed him. In that sense, the “law” was used by Satan to seize the opportunity to tempt them to think that God was using a “law” against them when He really was not. When anyone lives under a “law” system, he can be deceived into thinking that the “law” is a bad thing or that he can keep most of the laws and be just fine. The problem with that is under a “law” system you have to be perfect. Before the Romans became Christians, they lived under a “law” system and were deceived into “sin.”

“The Law . . . Is Holy, Righteous and Good”

This is very important because Romans 7:11 makes it sound like the “law” was at fault. It sounds like the “law” was a bad thing. Paul emphasized at this point, in Romans

7:12, that “. . . *the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*” The “law” was “holy” because it came from God. Peter said, “*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’*” (1 Peter 1:15–16). The “law” is “righteous” because it is just in every respect. Every precept, every “law” comes out of the very just nature of God. The “law” is “good” because of the benefits to mankind and because of the purposes of “law” —

- *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin* (Romans 3:20).
- *The law was added so that the trespass might increase* (Romans 5:20).

“Utterly Sinful”

*Did that which is good, then, become death to me?
By no means! But in order that sin might be
recognized as sin, it produced death in me through
what was good, so that through the commandment
sin might become utterly sinful* (Romans 7:13).

Paul continued the thought that “*The law was added so that the trespass might increase*” when he said that the “law” makes sin “utterly sinful.” In the Greek the word “utterly” means beyond measure, exceedingly, excessively. Once again, one might initially conclude that God put this “law” in place to cause man to sin more. That makes God seem like the villain, but that is not so. He put the “law” in place so that He could show men “*that which is good.*” He put the “law” in place so that He could make men conscious of sin. He put the “law” in place so that we would realize that we are “utterly sinful,” and, once again, so that we would throw ourselves on the mercy of God. While anyone

lives under a “law” system, every time he turns around he is breaking a “law” of God. Because of that, he is considered “utterly sinful.” It is important to understand that this does not just apply to the ugly Gentiles who were described in Romans 1:18–32. Paul was not talking just about idolatry, immorality, rebellion, and rolling in the mire of sin. This also described the Jews who were good moralists and trying to live under the “Law of Moses” just as Saul of Tarsus was. Because they were breaking “laws,” they were “utterly sinful.” That was also true of Cornelius, one who was described as “devout and God-fearing . . . [who] gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly . . . righteous . . . respected by all the Jewish people” (Acts 10:2, 22). The text indicates that he was also lost. If a man is lost, then he is “utterly sinful” because he is living under a “law” system and is answerable to the “law of sin and death.”

“Unspiritual”

Paul continued to describe the man who lives under the “law” system, saying: “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual . . .” (Romans 7:14). The word “unspiritual” has to do with the flesh. In other words, once again this has to do with one who is living under a “law” system. If you are living under a “law” system, your flesh has wants and desires. That is the nature that God has given men. When Satan tempts us, we fill those wants and desires in an improper way. The “law” says, “You are ‘unspiritual.’” You are following what the flesh wants even though it might not be fulfilled in the righteous way God intends. This is in contrast to the spirituality of the “law.” There is nothing unspiritual about the “law”— “the law is spiritual.” Our human nature wants to fulfill our desires in a way that is not according to the “law.” The “law” was directed to the spirit of man, but the flesh cries out to be fulfilled in a different way.

“Sold as a Slave to Sin”

Romans 7:14 has another description of the man who is living under a “law” system — he has been “. . . *sold as a slave to sin.*” That is a strong statement. Earlier passages indicate that this can only be talking about the man who is lost:

- *What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin* (Romans 3:9). Remember that meant they were under sin’s penalty.
- *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness* (Romans 6:13). Paul was talking about the past life of a non-Christian who would “*offer parts of [his] body to sin.*”
- *For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace* (Romans 6:14). Paul was talking to the Christian in this passage. “*Sold as a slave to sin*” cannot describe a Christian, because he cannot allow sin to be his “*master.*” A Christian cannot be a “*slave to sin.*”
- *Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted* (Romans 6:16–17). In this passage, Paul was describing a man

before he became a Christian, since he was a “*slave to sin*.”

- *What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet” (Romans 7:7). Some might conclude that this is describing a struggling Christian, but with descriptions like this of the old man living under a “law” system, I do not think this passage refers to a Christian. Christians are not described anywhere in Scripture as those who have been “sold as a slave to sin.” That is just not our position with God.*

“Cannot . . . do what is good”

The main part of Romans 7 concerning the old man of sin before he was justified is Romans 7:13–20. Romans 7:18 may be the key verse in this chapter. Beginning in Romans 7:13:

Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now

if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it (Romans 7:13–20).

Did you catch the frustration in this passage? Once again, Paul was talking in first person using the present tense. Can you imagine that this is Paul the Apostle, the Christian, talking? I do not think so. Even though it is written in first person and in the present tense, it is important to understand that he was using this as a literary technique to talk about the grip that sin has over men when we live under the “law” system and when we are amenable to the “law of sin and death.” Paul has said this over and over again. These verses are hard to read, particularly in the older translations: “for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it” (King James Version).

Romans 7:18 says: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” This does not mean that the Old Testament “law” said, “You can’t keep me.” Deuteronomy actually talks about keeping the “law,” but who has ever kept the “law” perfectly? The answer to that question is found in Romans 1–3: No one — “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (cf. Romans 3:23). So if no one has ever kept the “law,” does that mean that anyone really can? We can argue about semantics here, but the emphasis is that Saul of Tarsus, the man under the “law” and others like him, who wanted to keep the “Law of Moses” said, “I want to do good, but I cannot carry it out.” The principle is “the spirit is willing but the body [the flesh] is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Read Galatians 1 where Saul talked about his previous way of life in Judaism. Saul was one who wanted to be the supreme keeper of the “Law of Moses,” and not only the “law,” but all the traditions that went with it.

Under a “law” system, Paul was not describing the Gentile in Romans 7, but this could be the Jew or the moralist who was living under a “law” system (not the “*Law of Moses*”). He might want to keep the “law” of God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, but he just cannot do it. He has the desire to do it, but he cannot. This is probably the section more than any other where Christians think that this is talking about the struggling Christian. I am sympathetic to this because I understand that as Christians we feel like we are struggling. But when we struggle like this, my conclusion is that we are not taking advantage of the tools God has given us to fight and win the battle against temptations, against the things that Satan uses. Indeed he is too strong for us by ourselves, but we are not by ourselves in this fight. When we became Christians, the Lord not only freed us from the penalty of sin, but He also sent the Spirit into our hearts. His Spirit within empowers us to win the battle with our desires when we do not seem to be able to follow through on resisting temptations. This section of Scripture, especially Romans 7:18, is a very important passage. There are other texts in this section that also describe the man who lives under the “law” system.

“Sin Living in Me”

A Christian has God’s Spirit living within. Biblically speaking, Romans 7:17 and 20 cannot describe a Christian:

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me . . . Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it (Romans 7:17, 20).

We cannot describe a Christian as one who has “*sin living in me.*” Biblically speaking, we might use that language to talk about our frustrations of fighting against sin’s temptations, but there is either the Holy Spirit of God or sin dwelling in

us. God will not dwell in the same temple — our body — with sin. “*Living*” or dwelling in the Greek has the idea of a house where something takes up abode. It gives the impression of a place where something will stay, remain, or live. The person Paul was describing here is a person in whom sin has come to live. This is not describing something that comes in temporarily so that you fight against it, you win, it leaves, but then it tries to get back in. This particular sin lives within. It is interesting that the same word, “*living*,” is used in reference to God living in us: “*And if [Since] the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you*” (Romans 8:11). We know that when we became Christians we received “. . . *the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). Romans 5:5 tells us that “. . . *God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*” The Spirit lives in every Christian. How can you have the spirit of God living in you and sin living in you at the same time? It is impossible. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul said:

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Paul told the Christians in Colosse, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . .*” (Colossians 3:16). Either God lives in the Christian, His Spirit lives in us, and “*the word of Christ*” lives in us, OR sin is the dominant living in us. As Christians, we know what the right interpretation is. The reference “*it is sin living in me*” is talking about the person who is not a Christian.

“Nothing Good”

“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18). Once again, Paul used the idea of “live.” Does anything good live in the Christian? Indeed, we have the “*Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead living in*” us, we have received “*the gift of the Holy Spirit,*” “*God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit,*” and the “*word of Christ dwells in [us] richly.*” The Scriptures are very plain about the fact that Christians have the “*Holy Spirit,*” so someone cannot say that “*nothing good*” lives in us. That is not just a hyperbole talking about someone who is struggling against the power of sin. Paul was saying emphatically there is “*nothing good*” in this man or person who lives under a “*law*” system.

Practices Doing “*Evil*”

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do . . . For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing (Romans 7:15, 19).

Paul was describing this man as one who practiced doing evil. The Greek word for “*I do*” is **prássoo**, similar to what we see in the English word practiced. This would be the non-Christian who practices evil. He might even be one who is trying to live under the “*law,*” but that is his lifestyle biblically. That is not the way a Christian is described. Consider several verses out of 1 John as John talked about the life of a Christian:

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we

are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5:18–20).

It is not the Christian's practice to do evil. We might say, "I struggle with sinning." This is true and yes, we all do, but it is not our lifestyle, it is not our nature to "*continue to sin.*" The person John was describing in these verses is not the same person that Paul was describing in Romans 7. John continued, saying that ". . . *the whole world is under the control of evil one.*" That is not so for the Christian, for we are under the control of God and the Spirit that lives within.

"A Prisoner of the Law of Sin"

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members (Romans 7:21–23).

Paul used some strong language here, which is very similar to the text right above it. He said, "I am struggling in a warfare that I do not win very often." We want to do good, but we just cannot seem to carry it out. He presented the metaphor of a "*war*" going on with our flesh. We have to understand that he was saying our flesh has desires that it cries out for. It is as if our body wants to take this, wants to have that, but the mind, which is on "*God's law*" and wants to please God, says, "No, you cannot have this because it is

not the way to fulfill my desire.” Within this metaphor, there is this war going on between the mind and the flesh. Paul said the flesh wins most of the time. That is not the way God intended for the Christian to be. If that describes him, the Christian is not taking advantage of the power that God had in mind for him to win the battle. We know that we do not have enough strength in our being to win the battle. In essence, the mind controls the flesh, so a Christian has to have some help. The flesh overpowers the mind most of the time. The mind eventually gives in to the barrage of the flesh, which says, “I want! I want. Give me! Give me . . .” And the mind finally gives in.

“Wretched Man I Am!”

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24).

This verse is a descriptive sort of summary of what Paul was talking about. The “*body*” that man has is flesh and indeed, it is dying. The word “*wretched*” means completely exhausted. There is no energy and no strength to fight anymore. This idea is presented in the previous verses. Paul was saying, “I am worn out!” Think about the last time you put yourself into some venture, whether it was mental or physical, that just made you feel exhausted and unable to move. That is what Paul was describing here. This is the person who is out of spiritual and emotional energy, one who is unable to do any more fighting.

It is possible that Paul was referring to an illustration of an Etruscan king named Mezentius (c. 1176 B.C.) as written of by Virgil, the Roman writer. He was known to be a savage ruler. In his writings, Virgil wrote about Mezentius’s practice of what he did to those who would kill people. He would take the body of the person who had been killed and strap it on the back of the killer. The putrefaction and decay of the

dead body would eventually find its way into the body and life of the killer, and that person would eventually die. Maybe that is the picture that Paul was resurrecting to say that if you are not a Christian, if you are a man under a “law” system, then you are carrying on your back this “*body of death*” — You are “*wretched!*” You are worn out and, eventually, you will die. What a way to end this chapter on the old man before justification.

Conclusion

Paul did not end Romans 7 in that way. He concluded: “*Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” The Christian might cry out, “Who shall deliver me?” There is only one answer — the Lord Jesus Christ! Through His cross the righteousness of God has been manifested:

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25–26).

Because of the cross, we are no longer amenable to the “*law of sin and death.*” That is the transition that Paul used before moving to Romans 8 to talk about the new man in Christ.

“In the Sinful Nature”

Before that move, one more time Paul wanted to remind the Christians of what they used to be: “*So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature [flesh] a slave to the law of sin*” (Romans 7:25). We were in a bad place, where perhaps the mind wanted to do God’s “law” but the flesh was overwhelmed time and time again. Lost, we are separated from God and bound only for destruction.

The Doctrine of Sanctification — The New Man in Christ (1)

Romans 8:1–8

Romans 8 is probably one of the most popular chapters among Christians. It is a turning point, as far as I am concerned, in the study of the Book of Romans. This chapter is full of blessings from God with great descriptions of what the Christian has when he is “*in Christ Jesus*.” Someone has said that the Bible does not teach the eternal security of the believer. In other words, they are saying the Bible does not teach “once saved, always saved,” but this chapter and its assurance of salvation is strong. That is the viewpoint of this chapter in many respects. Christians are hearing about themselves, but we are hearing it from God’s perspective. This is particularly true near the end of the chapter.

The Spirit-Given Life

This chapter is not so much about what we are doing to secure our salvation as it is knowing that we need to make our salvation secure. This chapter is not so much about our faith as it is about the blessings that God gives us, particularly the Holy Spirit, in order to secure us in Him.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from

the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1–4).

Paul began Romans 8 in contrast to Romans 7, which talked about sin living in man and said nothing good was in man because he was “*sold as a slave to sin.*” From the very beginning Paul said, “Christian, hear me!” — “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” In the Greek, there are no verbs, so this is like an interjection. “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!*” is like a billboard that has certain words on it to attract attention with an exclamation point at the end. It is powerful! It is emphatic!

Romans 8:1–4 talks about the Spirit’s involvement in mankind’s being saved in the first place. Then Paul talked about the Spirit’s involvement in helping us to live the Christian life. Remember this is the section in the Book of Romans that talks about the doctrine of sanctification — how to become Christlike. Romans 6–7 talks about being dead to sin’s penalty. Because we are “*dead to sin,*” “*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).*” That is part of the Christian’s partnership with the Spirit. In Romans 6:13–19 Paul urged the Roman Christians to make sure they “. . . *offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*” Then in Romans 8 Paul said, “Let’s talk about the power that is available to you as a committed believer to live the Christian life.”

Paul wanted these Christians to know that the Spirit has been involved in their salvation from the very beginning. This reminds me of John 3:3 when Jesus declared, *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”* Paul told Titus we are saved:

*... not because of righteous things we had done ...
He saved us through the washing of rebirth and
renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on
us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior
(Titus 3:5–6).*

These are the same kinds of concepts.

What did Paul mean when he said, *“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*? He meant there is *“NO condemnation”* when the Christian sins. Under a *“law”* system, when we sin, we are condemned, we are subjected to the *“law of sin and death.”* Paul repeated that phrase in Romans 8:2, *“because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”* What is *“the law of sin and death”*? Paul was not talking about the *“Law of Moses.”* He was not even talking about a *“law”* system as we have used the word *“law”* in previous chapters. The word *“law”* here means there is a principle in place, and here it is *“the law of sin and death,”* which means when you sin, you die. When we sin, we are separated from God.

Paul said Christians are no longer held accountable for our sin in two different ways in the first two verses of Romans 8. One, we are not condemned when we sin, and two, we do not die when we sin. So what happens to the Christian who is walking in the light when he sins? First John 1:7 says, *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* Paul says it in a different way here: when you are walking in the light, when

you are walking by faith, when you are walking according to the Spirit, you are not condemned when you sin because you are not under a “law” system anymore. The Christian is dead to the penalty of sin, so he is no longer condemned when he sins. He is free from the principle of the “law of sin and death” that says when you sin, you die.

The “. . . law of the Spirit of life sets [us] free from the law of sin and death.” What a powerful statement for Paul to make at the beginning of this chapter. When he said “the law of the Spirit of life sets [us] free from the law of sin and death,” he was talking about Christians — “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Many times, Paul and others in the New Testament writings use the phrases “in him,” “in Christ,” “in Christ Jesus,” “through Christ.” Listen to some of the things that are talked about in these Scriptures:

- . . . are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:24–26).
- Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (Romans 5:1).
- And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:11).

- *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory* (2 Timothy 2:10).
- *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ . . . In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace* (Ephesians 1:3, 7).
- *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?* (Romans 6:3).
- *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ* (Galatians 3:27).

Once a man has been “*clothed . . . with Christ*,” once he becomes a Christian, he has “*every spiritual blessing in Christ*.” One of those “*spiritual blessings*” is the fact that “*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death*.” There was no longer any “*law of sin and death*” in our lives.

Then Paul said: “*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man*” (Romans 8:3). The “*law . . . was weakened by the sinful nature*.” The “*law*” was made weak through the flesh. That is a description of what Paul had been talking about in the previous chapters. The “*law*,” “*the law*” system, “*the law*”

from God “*was powerless*” to do something because it was connected to the weakness of the flesh. The flesh wanted to do things that it should not. The “*law*” said you should not do that. There was a struggle between the mind and the flesh, Satan tempting man, and the mind by itself would give in to sin.

There is a sense in which the “*law was powerless*” to give the believer enough strength to resist. The “*law*” certainly could not wash away those sins. Only the blood of Jesus, only the grace of Christ according to Calvary, is able to take away those sins. Paul was repeating that the “*law was powerless*” to take away sin once the flesh had given in. Since the “*law*” was weak through the flesh and could not take away sins, God did something different: He sent “. . . *his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.*” That is the way the New International Version says it. Actually, the words “*sin offering*” are not there in the Greek. Literally, in the Greek it says, “God sent Jesus to take care of sin.” He came in the likeness of flesh for the purpose of taking care of the sin problem. The Old Testament does talk about the sin offering, or trespass offering, as one of the offerings that the Jews had to offer for their sins. There is no doubt that Jesus was metaphorically the fulfillment of that Old Testament sin offering. I am not sure that was what Paul had in mind here when he said God did something for sin. I think that maybe Paul was saying, “God sent His Son to take care of the sin problem, which your flesh and the ‘*law*’ could not take care of.”

Paul continued, “*And so he condemned sin in sinful man.*” What a powerful statement that is! Most of the time when the Bible uses the word “*condemnation*,” it is God condemning man for his sins. In this verse Paul turned that word around and used it in a unique sense. Since Christ came to take care of the sin problem, “*he condemned sin in sinful man.*” Paul was not saying He was condemning man for his sins. Think about it in this way. When the government looks

at different houses or buildings that are dilapidated, sometimes they condemn those buildings as if to say they are no longer useful and are out of service. That is the sense in which Paul was using the word “*condemned*.” Christ and His cross have ruled out sin’s penalty in the Christian’s life. Once again, Paul repeats this concept — Christ has “*condemned sin in sinful man*.” Sin no longer has the condemning power! Sin no longer has the power to render man lost.

Romans 8:4 is a transition verse to the next part and where most of this chapter’s emphasis is found. Remember this section is about sanctification, but so far Paul was talking about justification. He was talking about the initial salvation that men enjoy in Christ. Repeating once again, Paul said, “*Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death*.” “*The Spirit of life*” was involved in that the Spirit brought man into Christ when he was “*born of water and the Spirit*” (John 3:5). “*Because*” of Christ’s sacrifice and “*because*” He rendered sin no longer a viable thing in a Christian’s life, “*in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*” (Romans 8:4). What are “*the righteous requirements of the law*”? “*The righteous requirements of the law*” are perfection! That is what the “*law*” demanded. If man was living under a “*law*” system, he was required to live perfectly. Man cannot do that, so Paul said because of the cross of Christ, Christ’s sacrifice meets “*the righteous requirements of the law*.” “*Because*” of Christ’s sacrifice, “*the righteous requirements of the law*” have been “*fully met in us*” as Christians!

I would have expected Paul to say that “*the righteous requirements of the law*” were fully met in Christ because they were. He was perfect. The “*law*” could come along to Christ and say, “Are you perfect?” and Jesus could say, “Yes!” He did not sin:

- *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).*
- *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin (1 John 3:5).*
- *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

The sinless Jesus did fulfill “*the righteous requirements of the law.*” But that is not what Paul said in this passage. He was saying that “*Because*” of what Christ did, Christian, you have met “*the righteous requirements of the law.*” What did Paul mean by this? Notice what he said following, “*in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us*” — IF we “. . . *do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*” Remember Romans 7:6, in setting up the contrast between Romans 7 and 8, Paul said, “*But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*” He described how the Christian serves “*in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*” He was saying, “Christian, you can be perfect.” We might say, “Wait a minute! I still sin!” Yes, we do! If we are walking in the light, what happens to the sin? It is washed away by the blood of Jesus. We appear perfect in the eyes of God because of the blood of Jesus, not because of our own righteousness.

Paul applied another principle in this passage. Christians fight and struggle trying to win against Satan and his temptations, but we cannot do it very well: “*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I*

have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18). Paul was telling them that with the help of the Spirit, indeed, you can do it. In other words, every time you are tempted by Satan, you can win! We might say, "But I do not win." That is not the same thing as saying you can't win. With God's power through the Spirit, we can win if we access the power.

Years ago I heard an illustration in regard to the power of God. Think about everybody getting on the fanciest, most modern airplane. Everybody sits down and the captain comes on to say we are getting ready to take off. He says, "I need everybody's help. I need everyone to say, 'Varoom! Varoom!' and make the sound of the engines." So everyone in the cabin thought if this is the only way we are going to get off the ground, we need to do this. Everyone went "Varoom! Varoom!" but the plane did not move. The captain said, "Do it again, it will take more power." So they did it again, and the plane still did not move. Of course, the plane did not move, because they had not accessed the power of the engines on the plane that were there to make the plane fly and soar. A lot of Christians are sitting on the plane, as it were; they are in the Lord's Church, they are saved, they are enjoying the "*no condemnation*" part, but they have other things to do and they have other plans. God has things in mind for them to do, but it is like they are sitting on a big jet and trying to get off the ground so they can live the soaring life in Christ that they want to live. But they are all thinking they have to go "Varoom! Varoom!" to get the plane off the ground. That is all self power like the little engine going up the hill saying, "I think I can! I think I can! I think I can!" It does not work that way.

Paul's Prayer for the Church Ephesians 3:14–19

Christians do not meet “*the righteous requirements of the law*” except through the power of the Spirit in the inner man. That is what we really want to discover. That is what makes the most sense. I want to look at Ephesians 3:14–19 to set the tone for the rest of Romans 8. This is something that we really need to understand. In recent years this has become a significant passage to share with other Christians to help them have confidence that we can win if we “. . . *count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11). Consider what happens to the person who yields himself to the presence of God:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:14–17).

Paul was praying for the Christians in Ephesus, who had all become Christians in the same way when the Spirit came into their hearts when they were baptized. Paul was praying that the Spirit that dwelled within them would empower them in their inner being. Paul was praying that the Spirit would turn loose His power — for what reason? To give them miraculous gifts? No. Those were not the most important things. That was not even the eternal purpose of God for Christians. Paul was praying “. . . *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*” Romans 8:29 says, “*For those God foreknew [Christians] he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son . . .*” What has been the

eternal purpose of God for all Christians who would accept the Gospel when it was preached? The eternal purpose of God for all Christians was that they become like Jesus. Remember that is sanctification. Paul visited or wrote to all of his churches, telling them to imitate him as he imitated Christ:

- *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).*
- *Therefore I urge you to imitate me (1 Corinthians 4:16).*
- *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children (Ephesians 5:1).*

How do we get there, Paul? Paul said, *“I pray that . . . he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”* “Power through his Spirit” is “power” that we did not have in Romans 7. We are not on our own anymore because we have God living in us *“through his Spirit.”*

Paul continued his prayer:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17–19).

Paul prayed that Christians, “all” Christians, might “. . . have power, together with all the saints.” All Christians have access to this “. . . power through his Spirit in your inner being . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses

knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Listen again! Paul has said this more than once now:

- If we are strengthened “ . . . *with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*” we can be like Christ.
- If we are strengthened “ . . . *with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*” and that is for all Christians, we can be “ . . . *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*” We can be like God!

When Jesus said, “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48) in His sermon on the mount, we might have blown that off thinking that was some kind of highfalutin goal that we could never reach. Jesus meant that! That is what Paul was saying in Romans 8:4: “ . . . *in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature [flesh] but according to the Spirit.*” Paul was saying that God has placed His Spirit in our hearts so that we can indeed become like God.

Christians do not just become like God in the washing away of our sins, and not just in escaping the “*condemnation of the law of sin and death.*” We have the power to become like Christ!

The Spirit-Controlled Man

In Romans 8:5–17 Paul continued talking about the Spirit and His control over the mind and the flesh. The Spirit that controls the mind can also control the “*sinful nature,*” the flesh. Remember Paul has already mentioned this control in Romans 7:

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature [flesh], the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death . . . I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out . . . but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members . . . Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:5, 18, 23, 25).

Paul was basically saying that the Spirit can control the mind. The Spirit who is able to control the mind can also control the flesh. Once again Paul said this several different times in very similar concepts:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:5–8).

What kind of “*mind controlled by the Spirit*” was Paul talking about? In this passage Paul did not tell Christians how the Spirit does all that. Honestly, I am not sure the New Testament really tells us a great deal about how the Spirit brings this about. Our part is to participate with, to partner with, the Spirit so that He can do what He was put there to do.

Paul was saying that the Christian has to have a spiritual mind. The Spirit actually helps us to have a spiritual mind. When we think about this partnership with the Spirit and the spiritual mind, we have to think about the Word of God. One of the main ways in which we get the mind of God, the mind of the Spirit, is to put the Word into our hearts. The Spirit wrote the Word of God:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

. . . the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:3–5).

Paul was inspired to write these things, but what was he trying to say in regard to the Spirit giving us a spiritual mind? In the great text when Paul was talking about the armor of God, he said, *“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Ephesians 6:17). *“The sword of the Spirit”* is to prepare Christians to fight against the temptations of the devil. *“The word of God”* actually permeates that whole section on the armor of God. For Christians to be able to fight and win against the temptations of the devil, they must be saturated in the Word of God. Christians must let the Spirit take the Word of God and transform their minds into the likeness of Christ. The Spirit cannot do that without the Word of God. If I allow all

the distractions of the world to come in, if I am not participating in the Word of God consistently and regularly with a heart that is open to the precious truths of God's Word, then the Spirit has nothing to use against the worldliness that I am putting in my mind from all kinds of things that are around me. Whether it is media, friends, or people at work, I am receiving messages all the time from the world. I have to counteract those messages with the Word of God that the Spirit has written. I put it into His hands so that He can cut away the dross and replace it with the truth of God's Word and the mind of Christ.

Paul continued:

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6–8).

The Spirit, who has the Word of God inside, brings about the spiritual mind, but he also brings about "*life and peace.*" "*The sinful mind is hostile to God,*" but the mind controlled by the Spirit is not hostile to God. It is submissive to the law of God; it is not trying to fight against the law of God. It wants to obey Him and become His.

The Doctrine of Sanctification — The New Man in Christ (2)

Romans 8:5–39

Romans 8 is the favorite of many people, especially Christians. It has a lot to say about our assurance of salvation and our assurance that we can win against the power of Satan in our lives. Paul talked about dying to the penalty of sin and a “law” system in Romans 6 and 7. Romans 8:1–4 is the beginning of the contrast between a life under the “*law of sin and death*” and the Spirit-filled life in Christ. The “*righteous requirements of the law*” have been fully met for those who live according to the “*Spirit of life.*” Christians are “*alive to God in Christ Jesus,*” with the emphasis on the Holy Spirit as God’s power that has been given to us. That Spirit, in connection with our cooperation and participation, becomes a strong force giving us the power to become like Christ. Christians have power in the inner man from the Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (cf. Ephesians 3:14–19).

The Spirit-Controlled Man

In Romans 8:5–11 Paul outlined the results of the Spirit’s being the power source in a Christian’s life to bring about the life, mind, body, and actions of Jesus. There really are two parts to mankind. There is the inner man, which we know are the mind, heart, and emotions all together with our

spirit. That is what works against the power of sin in our flesh. The flesh wants to have its fulfillment of its desires in ways that are not holy. The inner man, who has power over the flesh, can win the battle against the power of sin in our lives.

The Spirit controls and affects the mind in different ways. This chapter does not give so much of the how-to, but more of the effect of the Spirit's being in our minds. A Spirit-controlled man has a **spiritual mind** that is not a carnal mind controlled by fleshly desires. The mind that is controlled by the Spirit is at peace within, giving us a **peaceful mind**. The mind that is controlled by the flesh cannot please God — “*It does not submit to God's law.*” The Spirit helps man to be connected to God. We are not trying to please men; we are trying to please God (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9). A Spirit-controlled man has a **submissive mind**.

Consider the results of the Spirit's being in a Christian's heart and mind. Beginning in Romans 8:9, Paul said:

*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature [flesh] but by the Spirit, **if** the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But **if** Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you (Romans 8:9–11).*

Paul's “**if** the Spirit of God lives in you . . . **if** Christ is in you” is actually rhetorical — As a Christian, “*the Spirit of God lives in you . . . Christ is in you!*” In other words, since the “*Spirit [of] Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin.*” There are different spirits to consider in these verses: “*by the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ,*” and

“through his Spirit” all refer to the Holy *“Spirit”* (big “S”), while *“your spirit is alive”* refers to our human *“spirit”* (small “s”). Paul was talking about the fact that the Holy Spirit living inside the Christian works with our human spirit. Our body is dead, but our *“spirit is alive because of righteousness.”* A Spirit-controlled man has a mind that is **alive**.

As a result of the Holy Spirit’s living in the Christian, we have an **indwelt mind**. Several different times, Paul has said the *“Spirit of God lives in you.”* The word *“lives”* here is in contrast to what lived in man earlier — *“nothing good lives in me . . . sinful nature,”* the flesh, *“ . . . it is sin living in me”* (Romans 7:18, 20). Paul was not talking about the Christian when he wrote those words. Sin no longer lives in us. Sin no longer takes over within us. The Spirit comes to live within the Christian. Paul wanted to make it clear that the Spirit is not separate and apart from the Father and the Son. Notice again how many different ways Paul described the Spirit in these verses:

*. . . by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you . . .
the Spirit of Christ . . . Christ is in you . . . the Spirit
of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in
you . . . through his Spirit, who lives in you*
(Romans 8:9–11)

Who was Paul talking about? The Holy Spirit! He is the *“Spirit of Christ!”* He is the *“Spirit of God!”* He is the *“Spirit”* that Christ promised would be with Christians forever. He is *“the Spirit of truth”* (cf. John 14:15–17). A Spirit-controlled man who has this *“Spirit”* within has a mind **possessed** by the *“Spirit.”*

The Holy Spirit is in complete harmony with what Christ has done on the earth and what God, the Father, has been doing in His eternal plan. Think about the eternal purposes of God — God not only wants to save man, but once He saves

us, He wants us to become like Jesus. God's second eternal purpose, wanting us to become like Jesus, is why the Spirit was put in our hearts, so that it might powerfully come to pass. What happens when we live this life? Paul said:

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you (Romans 8:11).

God is going to bring "*life to your mortal bodies*" — God is going to bring life to our fleshly bodies "*through his Spirit, who lives in you.*" The Spirit is not only that which was put there by God as a seal of our salvation (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:21–22), He is not only the earnest of our inheritance (cf. Ephesians 1:13–14), He is also the guarantee of the redemption of our bodies. Remember Paul has said, "*your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness*" (Romans 8:10). Christians have been justified "*because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set [us] free from the law of sin and death*" (Romans 8:2). We have been given a spiritual life in our inner man. Our inner person has been redeemed, saved, and justified, but what has not been redeemed, what has not been transformed, is this physical body. The same Spirit that brings about this kind of mind in the inner person and this kind of power to fight sin is also our guarantee that one day our "*mortal bodies*" will be redeemed as well. Then those bodies will also be alive, as we are in our spirit. A Spirit-controlled man has a **hopeful mind**, looking forward to the day when God will raise us as He did His Son. A Spirit-controlled man has an indwelt mind, a possessed mind, an alive mind, and a hopeful mind.

The question arises, if our inner man is being controlled or is in partnership with our spirit and our will against sin in our flesh, can the Christian win the battle? Is there something

in the flesh that can still win here on earth as we fight the power of sin? Can we control the flesh? We have the inner man and the Spirit within, but what about the outward, what about the flesh? In Romans 8:12–17 Paul talks about the Spirit-controlled walk:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature [flesh], to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature [flesh], you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:12–17).

If someone is looking for one verse in this whole chapter of Romans 8 that sums up the emphasis in the process of this chapter, it is Romans 8:13: *“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”* Paul was urging the Christians in Rome to *“put to death the misdeeds of the body.”* He was talking about imperfections in Christians. We have not won the battle over the power of sin yet. He admits that we still sin even though we are walking in the light and even though we have been justified. Paul said, *“but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”* How can Christians *“put to death the misdeeds of the body”*? *“By the Spirit!”* Not only is our

mind to be controlled “*by the Spirit*,” but also our deeds must be controlled “*by the Spirit*.”

When Paul talked about a Spirit-controlled walk, what kind of fleshly control was he talking about? A Spirit-controlled walk must be an **obligated walk**: “*we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature [flesh], to live according to it*” (Romans 8:12). If a person is walking according to the flesh, then he is obligated to the flesh. Christians are not obligated to the flesh, even though the flesh cries out and it wants and wants. Just because the flesh cries out, just because the body cries out for what it wants, that does not mean we have to give into our flesh. We are not obligated to allow the flesh to control us. The Spirit in God’s Word and the Spirit within is going to help us say NO to the flesh when it asks for things that we know are against what the Spirit has revealed in His Word.

Romans 8:13 says: “*For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*” A walk with the help of the Spirit might be called a **mortified walk**. It is a life that we have “*put to death*.” It is interesting that Paul has already said that we are “*dead*” to sin’s penalty (cf. Romans 6:11). In this verse he was saying there is a continual putting to death the “*misdeeds of the body*.”

It is important to know that there is more than one “*death*” concept in Scripture. Did the Christian die to sin’s penalty once? Yes! Is there a continual fight against the “*misdeeds of the body*” as we try to live for God? Yes! Is there a continuation of trying to put to death the “*misdeeds of the body*”? Indeed, there is! The Spirit helps us in that fight. Scripture does not really tell us how all that happens. We do not have details about how the Spirit empowers us to live the Christian life. We do know from Romans 6 that we can partner with the Spirit. We know what our part is:

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus . . . Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:11, 13).

Christians must put the “*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” in our hearts so that the Spirit has a sword in His hands with which He can mortify the flesh (cf. Ephesians 6:17). This is done with our cooperation. Once again, I do not know exactly how that works. I was trained educationally as an electrical engineer, but I have been preaching for a long time and never really practiced electrical engineering. But I was trained, so I have studied all of the electrical wave theory. I remember looking at the different oscilloscopes and sine waves and so forth so that I knew what electricity looks like. I understood to some degree. But when I flip the light switch and a light comes on over my head, I don’t sit there and think that since I do not know exactly how that happens then I am not going to use the light switch until I understand completely how it works. Sometimes people think that until they understand exactly how the Spirit works to bring about Christ’s likeness in their lives, they are not going to participate with Him. I am going to reject and deny Him. I do not know that Scripture tells Christians all the how-to of the Spirit, but I do know there is a promise that He can bring about life in us if we will cooperate. Flip the switch and cooperate with the Spirit as He tries to bring about life in our flesh.

Look at what Paul said in Romans 8:14–16:

because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received

the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Paul was talking about a **son’s walk**. The “*Spirit of God*” brings Christians closer to the Father. Those who walk by the Spirit are led by the Spirit. Paul was not talking about something mystical here. Those who are led by the Spirit have a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. Paul was talking about the Spirit doing what the New Testament tells us He will do. When we are led by the Spirit, we have a close walk with God. It brings us into fellowship with the power of the Father. We know that the Father works powerfully in the lives of people. For example, Romans 8:28 says: “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*” Ephesians 3: 16–19, 20–21 is another power passage:

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power through his Spirit** in your inner being . . . And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have **power, together** with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God . . . Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to **his power** that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

We know that it is a son’s walk because the Spirit is not opposed to what the Father is trying to do to bring about

Christ-likeness in our lives because “*we are God’s children.*”

It is also a **courageous walk**: “*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear . . .*” Fears of all kinds come into our lives because we are human, because there is the intimidation of society, and because there is the intimidation of Satan at times. What gives us the sense of not being afraid for our lives, not being afraid for our spirit, not being afraid for our salvation? Paul said the Spirit is involved in that. As we walk with the Spirit we do not have to be afraid. We do not have to hide behind every door. Our faith and the power of the Spirit in our inner man give us a very confident, powerful, and fearless walk with God.

The Christian’s walk is also a **hopeful walk**. This goes back to what Paul said in Romans 8:9–11. Romans 8:17 says: “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*” “*If we are children*” is another rhetorical statement. We have already established that “*we are children*” of God. Now “*we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.*” What a powerful concept that is! Paul has already said that “*we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’*” That expression is so powerful in an Israelite context. The only one who could speak to his father and call him “*Abba*” was the son who was going to receive the inheritance. Based upon the fact that we can call the Father “*Abba*” and that we have that close relationship with Him, “*we are heirs — heirs of God.*” It is not just that you have a relationship with Him and that you can talk with Him and He can counsel and give you help, we are not just “*heirs of God*” — we are “*co-heirs with Christ.*” We may not know exactly what that means, but we do know that we are going to be with Him eternally. Jesus told His disciples:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God;
trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many*

rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going” (John 14:1–4).

Jesus was talking about Christians being with Him in the heavenly realm. Paul told the Christians in Philippi that our citizenship is in heaven:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20–21).

There is a sense in which our eternal state will be so much like Jesus, even in reference to what kind of “*body*” we are going to receive. What are we hoping for? We are hoping for a “*room*” in a mansion. We are hoping for a new “*body*.” We are hoping for a presence with God and for eternal life. And there is so much more that goes with our inheritance as we walk in this life.

Romans 8:17 does put a condition on this hopeful walk: “. . . *if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*” There must be a **suffering walk**. Christians can be “*heirs*” and “*co-heirs with Christ*,” if we share in His “*sufferings*.” Remember in Romans 5:3–5 Paul talked about “. . . *we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces . . .*” special blessings in Christ. Suffering is a condition that comes with being a “*co-heir with Christ*.” It is required in our walk of faith. It is a condition of our cooperation with the Spirit to bring about these blessings in our lives.

Beginning in Romans 8:18–25, Paul launched into the continuation of the Spirit-controlled man and the Christian’s hope for an afterlife. This is an unusual passage, and we do not have the time to do a lot of in-depth work with it here. Things are said in these Scriptures that are unique and not said anywhere else.

Paul put together a parallel in these verses:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

The Christian is going to have to “suffer” if he is going to have an eternal reward with Christ. When we weigh the sufferings with what will come in the afterlife, they do not compare to the “glory” that is to come. Paul said, “Stay faithful. It will be worth it.” There is an old song that says, “Heaven will surely be worth it all.” That is what Paul was saying. There will be “suffering” in this present life, but our “hope” is that there is a reward in the future. Step one for a Spirit-inspired “hope” is in **meaningful “suffering.”**

What is the “*glory that will be revealed in us*”? Paul said, “*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.*” Paul was making a parallel between what happened to all of creation and what was happening to us as Christians. There was a time when “*creation,*” talking about the world and the universe, “*was subjected to futility*” (NKJV). The King James Version says, “*subjected to vanity, not willingly.*” Other versions say it was “*useless*” or it was “*subjected to God’s curse.*” In Genesis 3 after the fall of man, the LORD put curses on “*creation.*” Even though “*creation*” is inanimate, it is crying out for redemption. It is crying out to be delivered from “*God’s curse.*” The main point of this passage is the parallel between creation “*groaning*” for its deliverance from its present cursed state and Christians also “*groaning*” for the “*redemption of our bodies.*” Remember our spirit is “*alive,*” but our flesh is dead. Our flesh has not yet been redeemed. As creation is “*groaning*” for redemption so our flesh is also “*groaning,*” waiting for a time when we shall be redeemed. That will happen on the final day. Step two for a Spirit-inspired “*hope*” is our **affinity with “creation.”**

First Thessalonians 4:13–18 talks about a time when Jesus will come back and “*the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will . . . meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*” He is going to bring our bodies so that we will be re-united with our bodies. We will be in the likeness of Christ and will have “*glorious bodies.*” We do not know exactly what our bodies will be except that Paul told the Christians in Corinth that the body that was perishable will be “*raised imperishable . . . it is raised in glory*” (1 Corinthians 15:42–43).

What does all of this mean to the Christian? It means we have “*hope*”:

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he

already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently (Romans 8:24–25).

Paul was telling the Roman Christians they had to wait for the “*redemption*” of their bodies: “Hang on! It will be worth it!” The “*suffering*” here will be worth it. The “*glory*” to come will be incredibly worthwhile. Step three for a Spirit-inspired “*hope*” is knowing that we are waiting for the “*redemption of our bodies.*”

Paul knew that these Christians were still struggling against the power of sin in their flesh. Even though they were Christians, they were weak:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will (Romans 8:26–27).

Christians are saved; they are walking in the light. Paul said, “*In the same way.*” In other words, Paul was saying, “Here is another way that ‘*the Spirit helps us.*’” He has outlined a lot of ways the Spirit has been involved in our lives. What a powerful passage of Scripture. Yes, we pray, and yes, God knows what things we need before we ever ask (cf. Matthew 6:8). He wants us to pray, but “*We do not know what we ought to pray for.*” Who knows exactly what we need? It is the Spirit who lives inside of us. Consider this for a minute. God is up in heaven, and He already knows what we need before we ask. The Spirit inside of us knows what we need because He dwells within us. Then look at Romans 8:34, which says: “. . . *Christ Jesus . . . is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*” “*Christ Jesus . . . at the right hand of God,*” the “*high priest . . . one who has been*

tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15) — He is “*interceding for us.*” The Father knows what we need, the Son intercedes for us because He has been there, and the Spirit, who knows us inside as we pray our fumbling prayers, speaks for us. He is our partner. The Spirit speaks for us, the Son speaks for us, and the Father knows what we need before we ask! Do you think we can lose? There is only one way we can lose — do not pray! Just do not ask God. James said, “*You do not have, because you do not ask God*” (James 4:2). The fourth step is **cooperating, partnering**, with the Spirit, who knows exactly what to ask of the Father for us.

When we partner with the Spirit, Paul said:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:28–30).

This is a great passage about providence, but think about it in the context. Romans 8:28 is God’s response to a Christian’s prayers and to the Spirit’s intercession. Can we lose? Can we receive from God what we need? We lose only when we do not pray. That is the importance of prayer in our lives. How does God respond? Is He flippant? Is He capricious? Does He wake up on the wrong side of the bed some mornings and give us what we do not need? Jesus would say in Luke 11:1–13 that the Father always gives good gifts when we ask Him. It is impossible for Him not to give us good gifts. What is the definition of “*good*” gifts? For those “*who have been called according to his purpose*” — What is God’s “*purpose*” for us? He wants to save us. He wants to help us

to become like Jesus. And the third purpose is to bring glory to Himself: *“we were also chosen . . . in order that we . . . might be for the praise of his glory”* (Ephesians 1:11–12). Even though we may ask in a fumbling way, every answer that God gives us in response to our prayers will be with *“good”* gifts *“according to his purpose.”*

Paul continued with: *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”* *“For those God foreknew”* refers to you and me as Christians. We do not need to be afraid of the word *“predestined.”* All that means is that before time, God had a plan for those who, with their own free will, would choose to be Christians. God *“also predestined those He foreknew to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”* Christ was the *“firstborn,”* but then, here come all these Christians who have become *“firstborn . . . brothers.”* Why are we *“firstborn”*? Because He has saved us. Why? Because we have an inheritance. Why? Because the Spirit lives within us.

Then Romans 8:30 says: *“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”* Four times Paul used the past tense in this verse:

- *“he predestined”* — that would have happened before time began.
- *“he also called”* — that would have happened when we responded to the Gospel and became Christians.
- *“he also justified”* — that also happened when we became Christians.
- *“he also glorified”* — We have not gone home yet so I thought that had not happened yet. I think Paul used the past tense here to say that as far as God is concerned, this is a done deal. It is not *“once saved, always saved.”* It is not *“once saved, never sure.”* We are on track to fulfill God’s eternal purposes from *“predestined”* to

“*glorified*,” from eternity to eternity. Christians are right in the middle, working in cooperation with the Spirit to bring about the final “*redemption of our bodies*.”

Paul closed this well-known passage with incredible questions as a summary. He started out asking what kind of conclusion should the Christian come away with: “*What, then, shall we say in response to this?*”

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31–39).

Paul’s first question is a rhetorical one: who can successfully oppose the Christian? He answered with two ways to say, “Nobody! No one!” If God is for you, then who can win against you? Nobody! He gave us Christ Jesus, and if He gave us His Son, what would He not give us? What

would He withhold from us that would make sure that we win the battle? First, *“God is for us;”* He is on our side. Second, *“He . . . did not spare his own Son;”* He gave us Christ Jesus, so He will not hold anything back.

Paul’s second question is also rhetorical: *“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?”* Who can successfully accuse or condemn God’s chosen people? Again Paul has a twofold answer. *“It is God who justifies.”* God is sitting on the bench in a courtroom scene, and He declares us acquitted. Who is going to argue with the Judge? Would Satan win that battle? We can argue, but we cannot win that battle, either. God says we are justified! Second answer: *“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”* This is the courtroom scene again. Jesus is our lawyer. His defense is His blood! It is a stacked deck! We win! No one can successfully accuse us in the courtroom of justice before God. Nobody!

Paul’s last question is: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”* Paul asked, *“Who can make God stop loving you? What can make God stop loving you?”* Paul mentioned trials and hardships, Satanic powers, the bad things we go through in life, and the ups and the downs in life. None of what happens to the Christian can persuade God to stop loving us. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* Nobody! No one!

The end of Romans 8 says we have won in the past at Calvary. We will continue to win through the power of the Spirit in the inner man: *“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* God is looking forward to giving us the victory at the end of time. Stay faithful, Christian! It is worthwhile.

*The Doctrine of Justification —
An Illustration and Vindication of
the Doctrine of Justification*

Romans 9:1–29

Remember that the Roman church was not a united body of believers. The Jew and Gentile Christians were not treating each other as Brothers in Christ. Paul really addressed that problem in Romans 14–15. Paul had built theological arguments to persuade these Christians to come together as a united body, one church and one mind, for the sake of the Gospel. He did that by reminding them who they used to be in the past. Paul presented the doctrine of condemnation in Romans 1–3. Everybody outside of Christ was lost. He told them they were justified in Christ by the cross and by the grace of God through faith. In Romans 5–8 he talked about the doctrine of sanctification, telling these Christians that not only had they conquered the penalty of sin, but they could also conquer the power of sin in their lives. Some scholars outlining the Book of Romans say that Romans 9–11 is a parenthesis. Others say these chapters are an illustration of justification by grace through faith. Either way, it is important to see that Paul was zeroing in on the Jewish people in these chapters. He had said a lot of things in the Book of Romans that might lead somebody to think that God had written the Jews off and did not want them to be

saved anymore. That is far from the truth, and Paul strongly proclaimed that in Romans 9–11.

God's Sovereignty Determined Who Would Be in the Messianic Line

I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit — I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Romans 9:1–5).

This chapter begins with one of the strongest statements in Scripture. It is emotionally charged. Some might try to write it off as a hyperbole. Paul did that kind of thing. Paul himself was a Jew who was hurting over his brothers, who for the most part as a nation had not received the Gospel. They had not wanted to hear it. They were the ones who had crucified Jesus, and they had not responded in significant numbers since that time.

Paul started out by saying that he would have been willing to be accursed and damned if it would mean the salvation of his fellow Jews. This is an especially strong statement, considering the fact that Paul was one who had been kicked out of synagogues, stoned by the Jews in various cities, run out of towns, and made to move on to the next place, often times by Jews who had rejected the Gospel.

They rejected Paul as one of their fellow Jews. What Paul had to say beginning in Romans 9 was to rebuild the Jews' belief that God still loved them and wanted them saved. He wanted the Jews to know they were the ones God had chosen to bring the Messiah into the world. Understand that Romans 9 is about election, but it is not about election to salvation. It is about election to play their part in the lineage to bring Christ to the earth. God had to select what man and family line He would use. He had to select what nation He would use to be the line through whom the Messiah came. He chose the Messianic line. Paul said God chose the Jewish nation and talked about some of those sovereign choices that God made.

Notice first Paul talked about the blessings that the Jews had possessed through the years. He said these are “. . . *my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.*” As Jews they received the blessings:

. . . Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! (Romans 9:4–5).

These were the blessings for the Jews from the very beginning:

- “*Theirs is the adoption as sons*” — Old Testament Scriptures in Exodus and Deuteronomy mention that family relationship:

Then say to Pharaoh, “This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let my son go, so he may worship me.’” But you

refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son'” (Exodus 4:22–23).

You are the children of the Lord your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession (Deuteronomy 14:1–2).

- *“Theirs the divine glory”* — Referred to the representative *“glory of the LORD,”* the presence of God, that came to live among the Jews in the tabernacle and the temple. That is the way it was described in the Old Testament. *“The glory of the LORD”* was in the *“Most Holy Place.”*
- *The covenants* — Of course, they had the Mosaic covenant, but they also had the covenant of circumcision, the Abrahamic covenant, the Levitical covenant, and the Davidic covenant. These were covenants that God made with Israel that He did not make with any other nation. They had blessings of all kinds.
- *The receiving of the law* — This was *“the embodiment of knowledge and of truth”* (Romans 2:20). No one else on the face of the earth got the *“Law of Moses”* like Israel did.
- *The temple worship* — No other nation or people got to have the temple in which God dwelt.
- *The promises* — Perhaps Paul meant the Abrahamic promises or perhaps the Messianic promises. They also

had a land promise and a national promise. They had a seed promise. These were blessings that only Israel had. No other nations had these promises.

- *Theirs are the patriarchs* — The Jews had Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had their forefathers and men from the past which no other nation had.
- *From them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!* — All of these lead to the conclusion that these blessings were about the ancestry of Christ. The Jews were indeed the nation through whom the Messiah would come. God made these choices toward that end.

How did God make those choices? In Romans 9:6–7 Paul said:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children . . .

In some respects, these two verses outline what Paul was going to talk about in Romans 9–11. He said just because you, the Jews, are one of Israel's descendants does not mean you are truly Israel. He used "*Israel*" in two different ways in these verses. Being an Israelite person and nation did not mean they were true descendants of Abraham and true spiritual children of God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all had different children. Were they all part of this special nation? Were they all chosen to be part of the lineage of Christ? The answer is no. Romans 9 talks about the choices God made to bring Christ to the earth. In Romans 10 over and over, Paul quoted from the Old Testament to prove his point that God

planned for the Messiah to come through the Israelites and for the Gentiles to be allowed into the Kingdom.

Romans 9:7–9 says:

. . . On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

The child of “*promise*” was according to the chosen lineage of God. Just because the person was a child of a particular person did not mean he was the chosen one.

Paul started all the way back with Abraham. Abraham was considered the Israelites’ father. First of all, God made the choice of Abraham, then Abraham had a child before Isaac was born. He had Ishmael first with Hagar, but God said no. Just because he was Abraham’s son did not mean that he was the son of the “*promise*” to bring the Messiah to the earth. Ishmael was not the child of the lineage, in other words. Later, after Isaac was born and after Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah and they had many children. Those children became the lineage from which the Arab nations came. Who was the child of “*promise*”? Was it Ishmael or one of the sons of Keturah? Was it to be Isaac? Genesis 17 makes it clear that the child of “*promise*” was to be Sarah’s son, and she only had one son, Isaac:

“. . . your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him . . . my covenant I will

establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year” (Genesis 17:19–21).

What about the next generation?

Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad — in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls — she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Romans 9:10–13).

For a second time Paul made the same argument. One generation down from Abraham, what happened? Isaac, the chosen son, is the story that Genesis follows, looking at the lineage from which the Israelites will come and from which the Messiah will come.

Following Isaac, the chosen son and the son of “promise,” he and Rebekah had twins: Jacob and Esau. The Old Testament says that the Israelites, the Jews, came from Jacob, and the Edomites came from Esau. Esau was the older son, so he should have been the one chosen by God to carry on the lineage of Abraham and Isaac. When Rebekah inquired of the LORD, He said: “*Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger*” (Genesis 25:23). God made the declaration that Jacob would be the chosen son. Isaac and Rebekah would not have known which son to choose. God did not choose Jacob because he was a great man. It was not that Jacob was so much better. The Old Testament records that Esau was not a great guy, and Jacob was even worse. He lied, he took things from his brother, and yet the LORD made

a sovereign choice. The word “sovereign” is a very important word in this chapter. God made a sovereign choice choosing the younger son over the older one to carry on the Messianic line. The lineage was not according to who was better; it was according to the choices God made.

What about the next generation? Jacob had 12 sons. What did the LORD do then? Romans 9:13 says, *“Just as it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”* What a strong statement. That comes from Malachi 1:2–3:

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the LORD says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”

Remember at that point “*Jacob*” was the nation of Israel, the Jews, and “*Esau*” was the nation of Edom. Neither one of them was a good nation. Neither nation was righteous before God, but in about 430 B.C. through the prophet Malachi, God told the Jews that He loved “*Jacob*” and hated “*Esau*.” This did not mean that God hated Esau as a person. God was telling the Jews that He gave Jacob more privileges and more blessings than He gave Esau. It was a sovereign choice that He made before they were born. And when they were just boys, He gave Jacob the birthright and the blessing. It happened through Jacob’s deception, but God gave him those blessing over Esau. God made a sovereign choice. Again, God made a choice to bless the Israelites as He had done since they became a nation at Mount Sinai. He gave them all the blessings listed in Romans 9:4–5. God did not give any of those blessings to Edom or any other nation. It was only because of His sovereign choice that He did what He did.

Consider what Paul said beginning in Romans 9:14:

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden (Romans 9:14–18).

Paul was quoting from Exodus 33. Moses really wanted to be close to God. This was before there was a tabernacle. So Moses asked for the privilege of being in the presence of God on a continual basis. God allowed Moses to go into a tent outside the camp, and there he could encounter God in a more personal way than any of the Israelites were allowed to experience. God wanted Moses to know that this privilege was not because he was a sinless person or because he was better than anyone else. God made the sovereign choice, and He said:

. . . "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:19–20).

God had the right to tell Moses he could not do it, and God would be just in doing that. God made the sovereign choice to allow Moses to come into His presence, and they had a very special relationship. Once again the word

“sovereign” comes up. God made a sovereign choice. God did not look at Jacob and Esau and decide that Jacob was a better man and choose him. He did not look at Moses and say that he was better than anyone else and for that reason allowed Moses to come into the tent of meeting to be in His presence. These were all sovereign choices that God made in relation to His mercy.

Paul said:

It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" (Romans 9:16–17).

Paul continued with the illustration about Pharaoh. Go back and look at the story of Pharaoh and Moses in the early chapters of Exodus. Beginning in Exodus 7–14, the text says that “*Pharaoh hardened his heart*” or “*the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart.*” Pharaoh resisted Moses and resisted God in letting the Israelites leave the land. The meaning is somewhat nebulous when the text says “*Pharaoh hardened his heart*” or “*his heart was hard.*” Further along in the story, the text says, “*the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart.*” God allowed Pharaoh to make choices. He allowed Pharaoh his own free will for a while, but then God made the decision to “*harden Pharaoh's heart.*” Why would God choose to do that? What reason did He have? Exodus 9 says:

Or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your

people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth (Exodus 9:14–16).

God “*hardened Pharaoh’s heart*” so that He might display His power and in order that His name might be proclaimed in all the earth. God made a sovereign choice, and it was not in relation to His people Israel as it was with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, all of whom eventually were believers in God. In Exodus He was dealing with the stubborn monarch named Pharaoh, who was totally resisting the desires of God Almighty as expressed by Moses, the Law giver and the savior of the Israelite people. God made the sovereign choice in this case not to show mercy. God had the sovereign right to “*harden Pharaoh’s heart*” because Pharaoh had already made up his mind. What does that mean — to “*harden Pharaoh’s heart*”? I am not sure exactly, but I am going to save that discussion until Romans 11. This verse is actually setting up what Paul wanted to say in Romans 11 when he said that the Israelite nation of his day for the most part “*were hardened*” (Romans 11:7). He gave that credit and power to God. This goes all the way back to the time of Pharaoh. This was not the only time that God “*hardened*” hearts, but in this case God made a sovereign decision, just as He had in previous instances “. . . *that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.*” God had a plan in place that would eventually bring Christ to the earth.

God's Sovereignty and Purpose

God's sovereignty was not arbitrary. Paul continued:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:19–21).

This illustration about the Potter and the clay points out the sovereign power and the right that God has as the Potter to make people and nations whatever He desires according to His sovereign will. Isaiah talked about the sovereignty of God in relation to Israel:

You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"? . . . "Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'He has no hands'?" (Isaiah 29:16, 45:9).

Paul used this Old Testament pottery image not only in relation to Pharaoh, but also in relation to what God had done in the Jewish nation itself. Someone looking at this might say that God was hard Himself to harden the heart of Pharaoh, cut him off, and take away his right to make those choices. The sovereign God has every right to make those

choices. We, who live in America and like our free will choices and think that God would never do anything detrimental or judgmental to somebody, need to read these verses. There are sovereign choices that are not indiscriminate and not whimsical that God has always made through the years, not just in the lineage of Christ, but in other circumstances for particular reasons. He needed to fulfill His plan to bring Christ to the earth. He wanted to display His power and to glorify Himself. He has every right to do just that. If somebody is going to make a choice like Pharaoh did to reject God, God has every right as the Potter to shape the clay into whatever He desires: *“Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”*

Christians might look at these passages and think about themselves. We might think that we did not get the same advantages as somebody else did. Maybe you grew up in a different environment or someone else had advantages that you did not have. Maybe you had these parents and they had parents with more wealth or they lived in a better situation. Whatever the case might be, none of us have the same privileges from God. God is not fair! He is just, but He is not fair. There is a difference. Look around. We did not all get the same things from God as human beings on this earth. Does that make God wrong? God would say, “I am sovereign. I have the right to control. I have the right to do whatever for My plan and My purpose. And, by the way, that does not take away your free will choice.”

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he

prepared in advance for glory — even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22–24).

Paul might be talking about Israel in this passage. He might be telling the Roman Christians to look back in the stories in the Old Testament to see how God had borne with the Jews as a nation. God had been patient and merciful when they deserved destruction. He had the right to do that. He had the right to judge another nation, to judge and bring wrath upon them at any time He chose if they were an ungodly nation. God might make the choice to bring wrath upon another nation before He brought it on Israel. God had the right to bring destruction on both nations because they were sinful. He can choose because He is sovereign. He can choose to be merciful to one and to bring wrath on the others. Eventually He will be just even to those He has been merciful to.

Once again, Paul was talking about why God was doing what He did. He was not making His sovereign choices without a plan in mind. His choices were made because of the purposes He wanted to fulfill. Why was God making these choices? He wanted to bring Christ to the earth, “*not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles,*” so that they could be a part of the Gospel of Christ when Jesus came.

Paul quoted from the Old Testament in Hosea 2:23–26 and 1:10 to show how sure God’s plans for man were:

As he says in Hosea: “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” and, “It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Romans 9:25–26).

The texts in Romans 9:25–26 are prophecies of the coming Messiah and prophecies of the Gentiles being brought into the Kingdom. God wanted the Jews to know that He had been planning for a long time. He made sovereign choices to bring about the fulfillment of this plan through Christ so that the Jews and Gentiles could be saved. Indeed God prophesied through the Old Testament prophets, but the people did not always understand.

Paul continued his quotations from the Old Testament using texts from the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 10:22–23 and 1:19:

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality.” It is just as Isaiah said previously: “Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah” (Romans 9:27–29).

Isaiah was prophesying about how many of the Jews would be saved in the future when the Messiah came. It would only be a “*remnant*.” These quotations project what Paul was going to talk about in Romans 11. Israel had the idea that all of the nation was going to be saved. The people believed that if you were a Jew, then you were saved. Isaiah was prophesying about a time during the Christian age when there would be a Jewish nation, but then “*only the remnant will be saved*,” and that is the way it had always been. For those who understood that principle, they were ahead in understanding God’s plan. The Jews in Paul’s time heard these things and thought it sounded like God had written them off. They thought they were no longer God’s special nation. They thought they were no longer the saved nation on

the earth any more. Some of that was true, and some of it was false. Isaiah was prophesying that only a “*remnant*” would be saved.

Romans 9:30–33 really carries on into the theme that is in Romans 10. Romans 9:30–10:4 is an interim section that talks about the Israelite nation and their chances for the future salvation if they choose to believe in Christ.

*The Doctrine of Justification —
Illustration and Vindication of the
Doctrine of Justification (2)*

Romans 9:30–10:21

Remember that Romans 9–11 is a unit that in some ways is a parenthesis between the theological argument, which is over at the end of Romans 8, and the practical application for the Book of Romans in chapters 12–15. Paul used this parenthetical unit to talk to the Jews about their rejection of God and His “law” and their attempt to find righteousness in the wrong way. He told the Jews that God still loved them and still wanted them to be saved. In Romans 9, Paul told the Jews that if it were possible he would give up his salvation “for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Romans 9:3–4). What a stunning, unselfish statement from Paul. Romans 9 was about God’s sovereign choices that He had made through the centuries for men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. He chose the person, family, and nation that would carry the Messianic line. It was also about the sovereign choices He made in relation to people like Pharaoh when he was moving the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. Remember that all of God’s choices were part of the plan to get Israel in the right place to bring Christ to the earth.

The Reason Israel Is Lost

It seems to me that a better chapter division would be if Romans 10 began with Romans 9:30. Romans 10 really focuses on why Israel had not zeroed in on faith in God. They may have used the approach that they did not know about faith and the plans that God had to send Jesus to the earth. Paul quoted numerous prophecies from the Old Testament to make sure the Jews understood that this had always been God's plan.

Righteousness Is Not / Cannot Be Attained by the Jew Romans 9:30–10:4

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

These verses are a section to itself where, in essence, Paul said these are the reasons why Israel had been rejected as a nation. He was not talking about every Jew, but the nation as a whole had not been saved and did not have a right relationship with God. Paul began with a rhetorical question concerning the Gentiles. The answer is yes; they did not pursue it as Jews, but they received *“righteousness that is by faith.”*

“But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not?” At this point, Paul started listing the reasons why Israel was lost in contrast to the Gentiles:

- *Because they pursued it not by faith* — The Israelites lacked *“faith.”*
- *But as if it were by works* — The Israelites sought *“righteousness”* by a *“works”* — oriented relationship to God.
- *They stumbled over the “stumbling stone”* — The Israelites were lost because they rejected Christ. He is the *“stumbling stone.”* Using the Old Testament language, He is the cornerstone over which the Jews tripped.
- *As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame”* — This is a quote from Isaiah 28:16 when he was prophesying of a time when *“in Zion,”* in Jerusalem where the Temple was, the Jews would stumble over a *“stone”/“rock”* because they did not put their trust in Him. This was a prophecy of the Christ to come. The Israelites rejected Christ and put Him on the cross at Calvary.

- *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved* — The Israelites rejected messengers from Christ after His death when He went to heaven. They rejected the messengers who came to the Jews and said, "Here is the Gospel." They rejected who Jesus was and God's plan for them. They rejected Peter and Paul and others who came to preach to them.

- *For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge* — The Israelites had a "zeal" for religious things, but that "zeal" was not based on "knowledge." They were zealous for the "law" itself and for the "works" of law, but that zeal was not connected to the right kind of "knowledge." If they had read the Old Testament well, they would have known that they could not find the righteousness of God by trusting in the "law" and "works." They lost their salvation because they were religiously zealous, but that sincerity was not enough. They needed the right kind of "knowledge" of the things that God said and how He said them.

- *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own* — The Israelites trusted in their "works of law," which meant, in essence, they were trusting themselves. That meant they were establishing their own "righteousness." In other words, they were saying they did not need God's "righteousness" because they had their own. They were saying their "righteousness" was good enough. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, the Pharisee was the one who relied on his own "righteousness."

- *They did not submit to God's righteousness* — The Israelites “*did not submit to God's righteousness.*” This is just another way to say they had established their own “*righteousness.*” Remember what 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Does man need “*the righteousness of God*”? Paul also said:

“ . . . that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith (Philippians 3:8–9).

The Jews were seeking their own “*righteousness*” instead of the “*righteousness that comes from God*” through Jesus Christ.

- *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes* — The Israelites failed to see the “*righteousness*” that comes through Christ Jesus. That “*righteousness*” was according to faith — “*for everyone who believes.*”

Look at the beginning of this verse: “*Christ is the end of the law.*” The word “*end*” is ***Télos*** in the Greek. It has different meanings, but in this text the New International Version is talking about the “*end*” of the “*Law of Moses.*” The “*Law of Moses*” had completed its task as the school teacher that led us to Christ as Paul said in Galatians: “*So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith*” (Galatians 3:24). The “*Law of Moses*” had done its job; Christ had come, the purpose of the “*law*” had ceased, so the “*law*” also needed to cease. Paul told the church

at Colosse: *“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 2:14, NKJV). The author of Hebrews said: *“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear”* (Hebrews 8:13). When Christ came, the Gospel came, the cross came, and the Law’s purpose ceased. In that sense, Christ ended the *“Law of Moses.”*

There is another sense in which Christ is the *Télos*, *the end of the law.*” The *“Law of Moses”* was pointing to Christ. Christ was the accomplishment of the *“law.”* The *“law”* never said that, in and of itself, it was the *“end-all”*; it was not where it would all stop. The *“law”* was not the ultimate. The *“law”* would always say there is one who comes later who is the reality. Paul would say: *“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”* (Colossians 2:17). The *“law”* was *“a shadow of the things that were to come.”* Christ is the One whom many prophecies talked about. He is the Messiah who was *“to come.”* In that sense, Christ is not only the One who ended the Law of Moses, He is also the One who fulfilled the Law of Moses in every respect.

Your Approach Is Inexcusable

Paul continued to tell the Jews why they were lost. In Romans 10:5–21 he showed them over and over again from the Old Testament why being lost was inexcusable. They should have known that their approach was wrong. Paul showed them the *“book, chapter, and verse”* in the Old Testament for what they should have known. Paul quoted from the Old Testament passages, telling the Roman Christians in specific words that if they were going to seek

“righteousness . . . by the law,” then this was how they needed to do it:

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them” (Romans 10:5).

Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5, actually quoting Moses, the law giver and author of Leviticus. Moses said if a person wanted to be right by “law” keeping, then he just needed to be perfect in his obedience. Even the “law” said he had to do all the things the “law” required. This might be considered the negative approach.

Turn the negative approach around and in Romans 10:6–8 Paul said, quoting Deuteronomy 30:12–14:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming . . .

Deuteronomy 30:12–14 has several things to say about the “law.” Moses had given the Old Testament “law” and told the Israelites they did not need to ask for more revelation because he had given them enough in the “law” to seek and find God and to do what was appropriate to receive His “righteousness.” In other words, there was enough within the “law” to find out how to live a life of faith so that He could declare them to be righteous just like He did their father Abraham: *“Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6). Notice that Paul added the words that are in the parentheses to the text from

Deuteronomy. Paul applied these verses to Christ and the Jews of his day. They could not ask God “*to bring Christ down*” again as if to say they had missed Him the first time. The Jews might have said, “If you send Him one more time, we will not crucify Him again. We will see Him and accept Him. We will listen to Him.” Paul said they could not ask for a second revelation. Paul applied the words, “*to bring Christ up from the dead*” to tell the Jews that one resurrection was enough.

The Jews had come to see Jesus on more than one occasion and asked Him to show them one more sign, just one more sign, and they would believe. Jesus basically said they had received all the signs they needed. They did not need another sign; their hearts needed to choose to believe in the signs that had been performed. John said:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30–31).

The writer of the Book of Deuteronomy told the Israelites of his day not to ask God to give them more revelations, not to ask for someone to come from heaven or to descend into the deep. Paul applied these verses to his day, telling the Jews they could not ask for Jesus to come again or to be raised from the dead again. It had been done once; the proof was there! It was up to the people to believe.

Quoting from Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul said:

*But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you **confess** with*

*your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and **believe** in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Romans 10:8–10).*

Moses was saying do not ask God to give you more because you already have it “*near you.*” The Jews had enough. The “*word*” was a revelation from God that was in their “*mouth and . . . heart.*” This “*word*” was never supposed to lay on the surface and not affect the inner man. The “*word*” did not tell the Jews to be circumcised in the flesh and to forget about being circumcised in the “*heart.*” The Old Testament law was intended to be an inner-man law. It was meant to be a faith law. Make sure you do not misinterpret this point in Romans 10:8.

There is an important connection between what Paul said in Romans 10:8 and Romans 10:9–10 and the concepts from Deuteronomy 30. The “*law*” was a “*word*” and “*heart*” kind of message that Moses gave to the Israelites. Paul told the Jews of his day that “*The word of faith that we are proclaiming*” — talking about the Gospel of Christ that he was preaching — was also a “*word*” and “*heart*” message. Paul said: “*If you . . .*

- *Confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,”*
- *Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,*
- *You will be saved.*
- *It is with your heart that you believe and are justified,*
- *It is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

This is the passage of Scripture that many of us are familiar with and often relate to our confession of Jesus as the Son of God before we are baptized. Paul did not say that he was talking about the confession a person makes before he is

baptized. He was actually using the “*confess*” and “*believe*” in connection with the quote from Deuteronomy. He was saying that the Gospel, “*the word of faith*,” that he was preaching to the Roman Christians was the same “*word*,” the “*mouth and heart*” kind of message, that Moses said the Old Testament law was to the Israelites during his time.

Notice that in this passage, Paul said “*mouth*” and “*heart*” twice. This gives the Christian some insight into confession, but Paul was not talking about a specific event in a Christian’s conversion. It is good to know that what we “*confess*” with our “*mouth*” is what we “*believe*” with our “*heart*.” Christians must “*believe*” that “*Jesus is Lord*” and “*that God raised him from the dead*.” In the Greek, it just says, “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus Lord*.” The Christian will confess with his “*mouth*” what he believes in his “*heart*.” Paul said, “Do you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord? Do you believe that God raised Him from the dead?” What was Paul trying to say here? “*Jesus is Lord*” referred to the fact that Jesus was deity. Paul also wanted them to know that Jesus wanted to be the “*Lord*” of their lives. If He was deity, then He had the right to be the “*Lord*” of their lives. Paul was asking them to “*confess*” that Jesus is the Son of God. Would they “*confess*” that He would be their “*Lord*” from now on? Would they “*confess*” with their “*mouth*” what they “*believed*” in their “*hearts*” that “*God raised him from the dead*”? Why is that so important? As Paul began the Book of Romans, he said:

Regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:3–4).

The resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate proof that He is the *"Son of God."* There is a connection between believing in your *"heart"* that *"Jesus is Lord"* and believing *"that God raised him from the dead."* There is a connection between confessing with your *"mouth"* that *"Jesus is Lord"* and confessing that He is deity, that He is the *"Son of God,"* as is evidenced *"by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."*

The main point that I am trying to get across here is that Paul was saying his gospel, *"the word of faith we are proclaiming,"* is the Gospel the Jews rejected. It is a *"heart"* and *"mouth"* religion. It is like what the *"Law of Moses"* was, according to Moses in Deuteronomy 30:12–14.

Paul used approximately 28 references from the Old Testament in Romans 9–11. Why so many? To the Jew, the Old Testament was the best textbook with the best proofs for what he believed. Paul quoted from the Old Testament twelve times in Romans 9, nine times in Romans 10, and seven times in Romans 11. He quoted from Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Joel, and Hosea — the length and breadth of the Old Testament. His quotes ranged from the Pentateuch to the Minor Prophets. In essence, he said the Old Testament testified that what he was saying was true. This is the Gospel that was prophesied! This is the Gospel that was given to the Jews. It is the Gospel that was talked about in terms of justification by faith. It is the Gospel that prophesied the coming of Christ.

Continuing his progression through the Old Testament, Paul quoted from Isaiah 28:16 in Romans 10:11: *"As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.'"* The emphasis in Isaiah 28:16 is on *"trusts,"* which is another word for faith, another word for believe. Once again, even the prophet Isaiah, like Moses in Deuteronomy 30 and Leviticus 18, was establishing that righteousness, as far as the Old Testament text was

concerned, is a faith thing. It is a “heart” and “mouth” religion — “*Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.*”

Romans 10:12–13 says:

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul was still talking about what it means to “trust” God, but he used different terminology. How were the Jew and Gentile going to be saved in the first century? By calling on the “*name of the Lord.*” Paul quoted Joel 2:32. Remember that Joel 2:28–32 is the text where the prophet prophesied concerning the day of Pentecost:

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days . . . And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.”

Peter quoted this passage from Joel on the day of Pentecost, telling those people listening to him that the prophecy was being fulfilled that day. The Spirit was being poured out on all flesh. It is interesting that in Acts 2 Peter said he wanted to tell them what it meant to call “*on the name of the Lord.*” The Jews asked, “*What shall we do?*”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38–39).

Later in his epistle, Peter said:

And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him (1 Peter 3:21–22).

It is the plea or an appeal of a “good conscience” toward God. It is another way of saying when a person is baptized, his faith and confession are calling on God to save him. That concept has been misunderstood in a lot of religious circles.

What does it mean to “call on the name of the Lord”? Remember what the writer of Acts recorded concerning what Ananias said in Acts 22:16 when he came to Saul of Tarsus, who was later to be called Paul the Apostle: “*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*” “Calling” “on the name of the Lord” is connected to when one is baptized. It is his belief and his “heart” saying to God Almighty that he believes in God and believes Jesus’ blood will meet him in the water. He is calling on God with a clear “conscience,” believing that Jesus’ blood will cleanse him.

Paul continued in Romans 10 with a passage that some people use when talking about the Gospel going to all the

world. Some say this is a world evangelism passage, but that is not how Paul was using these verses:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14–15).

This is not a passage about world evangelism motivation. Paul was continuing his argument about the manner in which people are saved: A preacher goes, he preaches, people hear, people believe, and when they believe, they “*call on the name of the Lord*,” they respond to that faith in baptism, and the Lord responds and saves them. Although this passage is often connected to world evangelism, and that is okay, in this context Paul was simply giving them another reference that the Gospel was a “*heart*” and “*mouth*” religion. Paul continued to give the Roman Christians the methodology of what happens when a person “*trusts*” God and “*calls on the name of the Lord*.” Anyone who needs to be saved has to hear the Message. Lots of times that comes from a preacher. Once they hear about Christ the Savior and His death, burial, and resurrection, they have the choice to believe, and if they believe, they will “*call on the name of the Lord*” and be saved.

Paul quoted Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*” Paul was quoting from an Old Testament text in which the king was not allowed on the battle field, so he was waiting for a runner to tell him how the battle went. If there was victory on the battle field, the runner would say, “Oh, King! We won! We won!” — “*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring*

good news” from the battlefield. Someone who has never heard the Gospel and hears the Message from a Christian or maybe reads it in Scripture might respond, “*How beautiful are the feet of . . .*” the person who came to share the “*good news*” with me.

Paul closed out Romans 10 with several more quotes from the Old Testament:

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:16–17).

Not all the Israelites caught on to the “*heart*” and “*mouth*” religion in the Old Testament. Isaiah said, “*Lord, who has believed our message?*” in Isaiah 53:1. It had already been prophesied that the Jews would reject the Messiah. Romans 10:17 is another familiar verse that tells how a saving faith is developed — “*the message is heard through the word of Christ.*”

In Romans 10:18–21 Paul quoted several Old Testament passages, still saying that Israel had rejected the Message as it came to them:

But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” [Psalm 19:4] Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” [Deuteronomy 32:21] And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” [Isaiah 65:1] But concerning Israel he

says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." [Isaiah 65:2]

The Jews might have asked, "Did I ever hear the Message? Was it ever available to me?" Quoting Psalm 19, Paul said the Message did go out "*to the ends of the world.*" Did Israel understand? In Deuteronomy Moses projected the time when Israel would hear the Message but would reject it. Isaiah projected that the Gentiles would hear the Gospel and Israel would be "*a disobedient and obstinate people.*"

Paul said the Jews had sufficient knowledge from the Old Testament. He quoted from Leviticus all the way to Isaiah and Joel. There were all these prophecies that talked about justification by faith. Paul said the Jews did not accept those prophecies and instead tried to live by a law system when they were living under the Law of Moses. The prophecies even projected the time when the Messiah would come, but they still did not accept Him. Did they hear? Yes! Did they understand? Yes! Could they have known? Yes! But what did they do? "*Not all the Israelites accepted the good news!*" Romans 10 closes on a somber note. One might conclude that it sounds like God had given the Jews their last chance. Could they possibly be saved? Romans 11 is the chapter that says, "Yes! There is still hope for the Jews as well as the Gentiles."

*The Doctrine of Justification —
Illustration and Vindication of the
Doctrine of Justification (3)*

Romans 11:1–12

There Is Still Hope for Israel

Remember that Romans 9–11 is a parenthetical unit between the theological arguments in Romans 1–8 and the practical applications in Romans 12–15. In Romans 11 Paul told the Jews one more time that God was not finished with them yet. Paul had said some things earlier in the Book of Romans that were critical of the Jewish nation, but God had not given up on the Jews. He still wanted them to be saved. Romans 9 was about God's sovereign choices regarding the family and nation through whom the Messiah would come to save all mankind. Romans 10 covered the justification by faith concept in the Old Testament law. The Old Testament law said they could not be saved by trusting their law keeping. If they could move from the concept of law keeping to grace through faith with Christ as the object of that faith, they would be on the right track to salvation. In Romans 11 Paul said there was still hope for Israel.

Paul began Romans 11 by continuing his argument that there was still hope for Israel by asking another question:

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah — how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace (Romans 11:1–6).

Right away, Paul gave the thesis for this chapter: “*Did God reject his people? By no means!*” Had God decided that He was finished with the Jews? For centuries the Jews had been a people who approached justification by trusting in their law keeping. At other times, they had rejected God and His law completely. They surrounded themselves with idolatry and immorality, and God sent them into captivity with Assyria and Babylon. When the Gospel of Christ came, did God announce that the Jews had been given enough chances? Did He turn to the Gentiles so they could become His people? Did He tell the Jews they did not have another chance? Paul answered this question saying, “By no means!” ***Mé génoito!*** This is the same Greek phrase that Paul used in Romans 6:1–2 when he asked: “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!*” That is a very strong statement! When Paul asked if God was rejecting the Jews, he emphatically said, “No! Never! That is not true!”

How could Paul prove to the Jews that there was still hope for them to be saved? Paul presented two immediate

proofs that God had not rejected His people. He began by answering in the first person, using himself as a witness for God's eternal plan:

I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

Paul said, "I am a Jew and I am saved. I have embraced the Gospel of Christ." Of course, the Book of Acts reveals that many Jews embraced the Gospel of Christ. Beginning on the day of Pentecost, 3000 Jews became Christians and were baptized into Christ. Later there were 5000 Jews, and then there were multitudes. It is as if Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, stopped counting after a while because there were so many Jews becoming Christians. However, the nation as a whole did not accept the Christ. There was still persecution of the Apostles in the early days. Many became Christians, but most did not.

Paul wanted the Jews to understand that he was truly a Jew: "*I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.*" Paul made his case about his genuine Jewish heritage in several books that he wrote:

Are they Hebrews? [talking about false teachers who had infiltrated the church in Corinth] So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I" (2 Corinthians 11:22).

Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church;

as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (Philippians 3:4–6).

Paul was a true Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia into a Jewish family (cf. Acts 22:3). He used himself as the first proof that God still loved the Jews and wanted them to be saved. He had really been in their shoes, feeling rejected for so many years until he saw Christ on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9:1–19; 22:1–21). Apparently, Christ Himself preached the Gospel to Paul (cf. Galatians 1:1–2:10). Ananias came to Paul and asked him what he was going to do about this Christ whom he had persecuted. At that point, Saul of Tarsus was ready to become a Christian (cf. Acts 9:10–19). Paul was sent not by men, but by God the Father (cf. Galatians 1:1–2:10). If there were only one Jew who had been saved, that would prove that God had not given up on the Jews.

The second proof Paul used goes back to the Israelites' history:

Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah — how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Paul quoted from 1 Kings 19:10, 14, and 18 when Elijah faced the conflict with the prophets of Baal on Mount Caramel. They had a contest to see who was God. Was it Baal or Jehovah? God brought victory by sending down fire from heaven and burning Elijah's sacrifice, including the water, rocks, and all that surrounded the altar. All the prophets of Baal were slaughtered in the Kishon Valley, and

then God sent the rain. (cf. 1 Kings 18:16–46). Elijah should have been “high as a kite” after this victory, but when he heard that Jezebel wanted his head, he “. . . *was afraid and ran for his life*” (1 Kings 19:3). He hid from Jezebel in a cave, and the LORD came to him in a small voice. Elijah made this statement: “*Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me*” (cf. 1 Kings 19:10, 14). Basically, Elijah was saying, “I am the only Jew who is faithful to You in the northern tribes of Israel.” God responded to tell him there were 7000 who had remained faithful (cf. 1 Kings 19:18). Seven thousand is a pretty small number, considering the nation was probably over several million at that time. Paul told the Roman Christians that even during Elijah’s time the whole nation was not saved. There was a whole nation who were resisting God, being unfaithful to Him, and practicing idolatry. But there was a “*remnant*” of 7000 Jews who were faithful. In the first century Paul was also a Jew, one who was saved and a part of that “*remnant*” of Jews. The nation of Jews resisted God and Christ, but Paul was one of the “*remnant*” who were faithful to God. Not everyone had rejected God. God still cared about the Jews.

The summary verse in Romans 11:5–6 is an important concept: “*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*” The Jews were saying God had rejected them as a nation. Paul said, “No! There is a “*remnant*” of which I am a part. In today’s world, I am a part of a church that has Jews and Gentiles in it.” There was a “*remnant*” of Jews who were saved during the first century. It had always been that way. The Israelites had the idea that the whole nation was going to be saved. They thought that once they were born an Israelite, they were always saved. Born into a covenant relationship with God, they believed they would not lose it. They

believed that as long as a Jew had been circumcised, he was in good shape with God. Paul said it had never been that way. Think back to the time of Elijah when there was a “*remnant*” and most of the nation of Israel was lost. Thousands and thousands of people, perhaps several million, were actually lost. The only group of people who were saved was the 7000, which included Elijah.

There has always been a “*remnant*.” That is a very important concept for Christians. There is a nation (think about a very large circle) and there is a “*remnant*” (think about a small circle). There was the nation of Israel, which as a whole, Paul said, was resisting God. But there was the “*remnant*,” often times a small group of people, who by the “*grace*” of God were the saved. Paul made it clear that this “*remnant*” had been saved “*by grace*” through faith. Even in Elijah’s time, the “*remnant*” was not saved by their perfect law keeping. Paul emphasized “. . . *there is a remnant chosen by grace.*” “*Grace*” and “*works*” are mutually exclusive. They cannot exist together. If it is by “*works*,” then “*grace would no longer be grace.*”

It is very important to understand how Paul used the word “*Israel*” throughout Romans 9–11 in preparation for studying Romans 11:26 where Paul said: “*And so all Israel will be saved . . .*” I believe every time he used “*Israel*” in these three chapters, he was talking about the Jews exclusively.

Paul continued to talk about the nation of Israel and the “*remnant*” in Romans 11:7–10:

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.” And David says: “May their table become a snare and a

*trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.
May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and
their backs be bent forever.”*

The nation of Israel, the Jews as a whole, tried to obtain the righteousness of God through their own personal righteousness. Paul said: *“Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it . . . because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works”* (Romans 9:31–32). Israel did not obtain what they sought, “. . . but the elect did.” Who were the “elect”? The “elect” were those who had chosen to live by grace through faith. There was the nation of “Israel” and there was the “elect.” The “remnant” is the “elect.” *“The others were hardened.”* Remember in Romans 9:18 Paul said: *“Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”* Then in Romans 9:27 Paul quoted from Isaiah 10:22 to say: “. . . concerning Israel: *‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.’*” Not only was a large part of the Israelite nation resistant, but Paul introduced the concept here that the nation as a whole had been “hardened.” The “elect,” the “remnant,” were not hardened; they were the ones who had a heart of faith.

Paul quoted a very important passage from the Old Testament in this regard and said, *“as it is written.”* In other words, this concept of the nation as a whole being “hardened” was prophesied in the Old Testament. Quoting from Deuteronomy 29:4, Paul said: *“God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.”* This is important because Paul built a case on what I am going to call concentric circles: the large circle represents “Israel” and the much smaller circle represents the “elect.” He said that in his day the nation as a whole had been “hardened,” but there

was a “*remnant*.” He said that in Elijah’s day, approximately 800 B.C., the nation as a whole had been “*hardened*,” but there was the “*elect*,” the “*remnant*,” of 7000 people.

In this passage, Paul went back to the days of Moses to a prophecy concerning what God was going to do to the nation of Israel if they did not remain faithful. This was part of the covenant of “*blessings and curses*” (cf. Deuteronomy 28–30). If the nation of Israel did not remain faithful, God was going to give “. . . *them a spirit of stupor*” — in other words, He was going to “*harden*” them. Paul said earlier that “*God . . . hardens whom he wants to harden*” (Romans 9:18) and used Pharaoh as an example. The text in Exodus says: “*Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said*” (Exodus 7:13). Then the Scripture says: “*Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go*” (Exodus 8:32). Finally in Exodus 10:1 the LORD said: “. . . *I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them*” (Exodus 10:1). God “*hardened*” Pharaoh’s heart after he became resistant. God “*hardened*” his heart so that He could fulfill His purposes. This passage says that if the nation was going to be resistant to God, if they were not going to be faithful, then He was going to give them “*a spirit of stupor*,” “*eyes . . . that could not see*,” and “*ears . . . that could not hear*.” And this was to be an on-going thing that would happen to Israel if they were unfaithful to God. As far back as the “*Law of Moses*” in the covenant of “*blessings and curses*” in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses set up the concept of the nation of Israel and the “*remnant*.” I do not know if the people who read the Old Testament really understood, but they should have realized there was always going to be the nation, who for the most part were not saved, and the “*remnant*,” which was usually small, who were going to be the saved ones.

Romans 11:9 says: *“And David says: ‘May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.’”* This is a quotation from Psalm 69:22–23. Think about this for a moment. Deuteronomy was during the time of Moses, and the text says the *“others,”* the resistant Jews, *“were hardened.”* Then during the time of David, which was approximately 1000 B.C., hundreds of years after the time of Moses, he was talking about the same *“hardening,”* saying there was going to be a *“stumbling block and a retribution for them. Their eyes will be darkened . . . and their backs bent forever.”* Paul was talking about the Deuteronomy 29 concept of *“a spirit of stupor.”* Once again, Paul was talking about the concept of the nation as a whole being *“hardened”* during David’s time. Since we know that David was a faithful man, we know that during his time there was also the *“elect,”* a *“remnant.”*

Paul mentioned four different time periods in the Israelites’ history when there was the nation as a whole and a *“remnant”* of the faithful. In the Book of Deuteronomy there was the nation of Israel, who could not see and hear, and *“the elect.”* David said there was a nation, whose *“eyes”* were so darkened they could not see, and there was a *“remnant.”* During the time of Elijah there was the nation of Israel and a *“remnant”* of 7000. And Paul said *“at the present time”* there was a nation that had been *“hardened”* and a *“remnant”* of which he was a part. It had always been that way. The Israelites had to realize that the nation and the *“remnant”* were not the same. The nation and those who were saved were not the same. It had never been that way, and it never would be that way. A person was not saved just because he was a Jew. The Israelites had to understand that fact.

The Jews must have questioned what Paul was trying to say in these verses. First Paul told them that God had not rejected “*his people*,” God had not given up on Israel. God still wanted them to be saved, but then Paul said that for the most part, God had “*hardened*” them. That sounds like God was opposed to the Jewish nation. Maybe God did not really want to save “*his people*.” Paul said God did not “*reject his people*,” but then he said God had “*hardened*” Israel and had given them a “*spirit of stupor*.” How can both of these be correct? How do they fit together? Is it possible that in some sense God was using the “*hardening*” to actually try to save the Jews? That is exactly what Paul was saying:

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! (Romans 11:11–12).

Paul repeated what he said in Romans 11:1: “*Did God reject*” the Jews? “*By no means!*” Surely this question was going to come up again. Did God “*harden*” the Jews? Did the Jews “*stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!*” Did God give them a “*spirit of stupor*”? Did He darken their eyes so that they could never recover? Paul said, “*Not at all!*” That was not what Paul was trying to tell them. God had not rejected the Jews!

God Hardened the Resistant for a Purpose

I wish I could have been there when Paul finished writing Romans 11. When he finished writing this chapter or perhaps dictating it to a scribe, I think he must have thought,

“What did I just say? What did the Spirit just reveal to me?” He came forth with the incredible Doxology in Romans 11:33–36. He surely must have thought that God’s ways are beyond finding out. Beginning in Romans 11:11, Paul revealed an incredible evangelistic methodology that God was using because He is not willing that any should perish. Consider these passages:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle — I am telling the truth, I am not lying — and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2:3–7).

If these principles are true, and they are, then God is working His will and His ways providentially in every way possible to save the most people. That was what Paul was saying about himself in his letter to the church in Corinth:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the

Illustration and Vindication of the Doctrine of Justification (3)

law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)

Not everyone is going to respond to the Gospel, not all will obey, but to “*save some*” Paul became “*all things to all men.*” That is what God revealed to Paul here. He revealed His methodology of how He was going to save the “*remnant,*” who would respond to the grace of God.

I want to put Romans 11:11–12 and 15 together as we begin these passages. Paul said the same thing three different times. I encourage you to write these verses out on a piece of paper. Write out Romans 11:11, leaving two spaces between the first line, the second line, and the third line or however many lines it takes to write it out. Then write out Romans 11:12 right under Romans 11:11, and do the same thing with Romans 11:15, matching up the concepts between each verse. This is a good exercise to do on your own:

Romans 11:11 — *Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.*

Romans 11: 12 — *But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*

Romans 11:15 — *For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*

- “*Their transgression*” refers to the Jews (vs. 11).
- “*Their loss*” refers to the Jews (vs. 12).

- “*Their rejection*” refers to the Jews (vs. 15).
- “*Salvation has come to the Gentiles*” (vs 11).
- “*Means riches for the world . . . means riches for the Gentiles*” (vs. 12).
- “*Reconciliation of the world*” (vs. 15).
- “*To make Israel envious*” (vs. 11).
- “*How much greater riches will their fullness bring*” (vs.12).
- “*Their acceptance be but life from the dead*” (vs 15).

Consider these three concepts and how they worked. Israel rejected God’s Word, so God hardened them. But the hardening of the Jews toward Christ’s Gospel made it somehow more attractive to the Gentiles. As Paul went from city to city preaching the Gospel, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, the Gentiles were receptive. Paul, a Jew, was going into a Gentile city and preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Part of the dynamic of the receptivity of the Gentiles may have been the Gentiles’ wondering why the Jews had rejected the Message that Paul was preaching. God is all-knowing! If the Jews were going to resist, God was going to harden them, they were going to throw the Gospel out, and the result of that was the Gentiles’ thinking they needed to look into this Gospel. Once the Gentiles began to embrace the Gospel, God hoped that would make the Jews whom He had hardened “*envious*”— as if to say, “Jesus was a Jew! The Gentiles are hijacking our Messiah!” They did not really believe He was the Messiah, but perhaps they thought they should look into that Message again. I never would have thought of this methodology, but God did. What was God trying to do? He was trying to save the most people, because that is who He is. The Jews were given the Gospel first, as Paul said in Romans 1:16–17:

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

As a nation, the Jews basically said they did not want this Gospel. Then the Gentiles accepted it, and hopefully, that was going to make the Jews in Paul's day jealous, so that they would reconsider and respond to this Gospel.

Romans 11:12 says the same thing as Romans 11:11. If the Jews' "*transgression*" and "*rejection*" of the Gospel meant "*riches for the world . . . the Gentiles*" and their "*loss*," meaning the Israelites' not accepting the Gospel, meant "*riches for the Gentiles*," then "*how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*" If the Jews' rejection of the Gospel meant "*greater riches for the Gentiles*," then how much more, "*how much greater riches will their fullness bring.*" "*Their fullness*" referred to "*Israel*," the Jews. If the Jews changed their minds, if they no longer rejected the Gospel, and if they believed in the Messiah, "*how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*" In essence, when Paul was talking about "*greater riches*," he was talking about righteousness. He was talking about salvation. And when he used the word "*fullness*," he was talking about righteousness and salvation. He was talking about the Jews' embracing the Gospel and being saved.

Romans 11:15 says the same thing as Romans 11:11 and 12 — If the Jews' rejection of the Gospel was the salvation of the Gentiles, and then if the Jews reconsidered and accepted the Gospel, that would be like "*life from the dead*." That would be like people being raised from the dead. Of course, that is what happens when people are saved. That is what Romans 6:3–4 says:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Christians were dead in sin, we died to sin's penalty, we were immersed into Christ, and we were raised to walk a new life. We have been raised from the dead; we have been given "*life from the dead.*"

Three times in Romans 11:11–15, Paul said the same thing to the Jews. The fact that they had a hard heart did not mean that they would never believe. In fact, Paul hoped that the Gentiles' salvation would stir up the Jews to be jealous and cause them to reconsider the Gospel of Christ. Paul had once been where the Jews were, but God had mercy on him, and He would have mercy on other Jews also. Indeed Paul's ministry as a gospel preacher and his acceptance of Christ was an example to the Jews so that they, too, might choose to believe and be saved. God's methodology to save so many is brilliant!

*The Doctrine of Justification —
Illustration and Vindication of the
Doctrine of Justification (4)*

Review

In the first part of Romans 11 Paul argued that God was not finished with the Jews; He still wanted to save them. Remember that Romans 9–11 is a parenthetical unit between the theological argument and the practical applications in the Book of Romans. In Romans 9 Paul argued that even though the Jews were chosen by the sovereignty of God to be the nation through whom the Christ would come, most of the Jewish nation did not accept the sovereignty of God. They did not follow the laws of God and were not obedient to God. God had to punish them through the ages in different ways, but He still sent Christ to the earth through the Jews. The Israelites as a whole did not accept Christ and justification by faith, so they were ousted from the grace of God. In Romans 10 Paul used the Old Testament Scriptures over and over again to prove that God was trying to save people through faith. The Jews could not argue that they did not know that the Christ was coming. They could not say that they did not know about justification through faith.

Beginning in Romans 11, Paul said there had always been a “*remnant*” of saved people in the Israelite history. Remember there was the nation of Israel as a whole and the saved, the “*elect*,” the “*remnant*.” Paul made the argument

in the first part of Romans 11 saying, “I am a Jew. I am saved. I accepted Christ. Therefore even if it were just I, there would still be a ‘*remnant*.’” He used himself as an example and then reminded them that there were many Jews who had been saved since the day of Pentecost. The “*remnant*” was sizable, but it did not include the nation as a whole. There had always been the nation and the “*remnant*.” Paul made this argument over and over using the Jewish history in Deuteronomy, the time of David in Psalms, the days of Elijah, and the times of prophets like Isaiah and Joel. Paul said it had always been that way even to the present age. What did all of that mean? It meant that God was trying to save as many people as possible.

Remember the parallel between Romans 11: 11, 12, and 15. Paul said:

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! . . . For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

If “their transgression,” the Jews’ rejection of Christ, in other words, “*means riches for the world, and their loss,*” which was the Jews’ rejection of Christ, “*means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*” The Jews rejected the Gospel and the Gentiles embraced it to a certain degree, so “*how much greater riches will their fullness,*” the Jews, “*bring!*” “Their fullness” means the Jews’ salvation. The Jews rejected the Gospel, the Gentiles were receptive, and hopefully, the Gentiles’

receptivity would make the Jews jealous so that they would reconsider the Gospel that Paul was preaching.

Warning to Gentile Christians Romans 11:13–24

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Romans 11:13–15).

Even though Paul was a Jew, he called himself “*the apostle to the Gentiles*” because his main ministry was to the Gentiles. When he went into any city on his missionary journeys, he went to the synagogue first because that was what he had to do, but then he would turn to the Gentiles. What a powerful statement when Paul said, “*I make much of my ministry in hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.*” Paul wanted his “*ministry*” to be a part of the whole, dynamic methodology of what God was trying to do to save His people by making them jealous. Paul wanted to arouse his “*own people . . . and save some of them.*” He had been a captain of an army of Jews, so to speak, who spoke against Christianity. Then he became a Christian, and now his “*ministry*” was mostly to the Gentiles. In doing this, he hoped that his fellow Jews, those who knew him and his story, those who were of the Jewish faith but had not yet embraced Christianity, would become jealous. Surely “*some*” were affected and were saved. “*Some of them*” then would be a part of the “*remnant.*” If the Jewish “*rejection is the reconciliation of the world,*” the salvation of the Gentiles, “*what will their*

acceptance be but life from the dead?" It would be a great thing if the Jews started turning to the Lord, even if it were a small "*remnant*." They would be like ones resurrected from the dead. That is true for all Christians; if we are saved, it is a resurrection from the dead. Perhaps Paul was being emphatic here since the Jews had been so adamant in their "*rejection*." It would be incredible if more Jews became envious, looked into the cross and the Gospel message, and embraced Christianity because they believed it would be "*life from the dead*," a resurrection from the dead for them.

It is important to remember that Paul was not just talking to the Jews. He said, "*I am talking to you Gentiles*" (Romans 11:13). He wanted the Gentiles to know that this message was not just for the Jews. They, too, needed to know the methodology that God was using to save more Jews. What should the Gentiles think about all of this? Beginning in Romans 11:16, Paul took a different slant: "*If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy . . .*" (Romans 11:16a). In the Old Testament the Jews were expected to give the "*firstfruits*" of their labor from the fields. They were to give their "*firstfruits*" to God. That did not mean that the "*firstfruits*" were for God and all the rest was theirs. In essence, offering their "*firstfruits*" was their way of saying, "LORD, I believe that it is all yours." The "*firstfruits*" were connected to the rest of the crop. Paul actually did not do much with that illustration.

However, in the second illustration Paul gave the sense of what he was trying to say in this section. He said:

If the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but

the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either (Romans 11:16b–21).

Using the example of a tree and its roots, Paul said, “*If the root is holy, so are the branches,*” because the whole tree comes from the roots.” He was trying to say there was a connection between the “*firstfruits*” and the rest of the “*batch of dough*.” And there was certainly a connection between the roots and the rest of the tree.

Remember Paul was talking to Gentiles but, of course, hoping that the Jews were listening as well. Notice how Paul followed through with the concept of connection in the illustration of a tree and its roots. Some of the natural branches, which were part of the growth of the tree in the first place, “*have been broken off*.” Then Paul called the Gentiles the “*wild olive shoot*,” which had been “*grafted in among the others*.” In essence, he was saying they did not belong there; it was not natural for them to be a part of this tree. Paul was saying, “You Gentiles got into this tree by faith.”

These two illustrations about the “*firstfruits*” and the dough and then the roots and the tree “*branches*” go back to something Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4:21–22:

“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”

There is a sense in which the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represented the roots of this tree. The tree that grew out of these roots was a Jewish tree. “*Salvation is from the Jews*,” in the sense that the Messiah came through the Jews. Jesus was a Jew, so this was a Jewish tree. It was also a “*salvation*” tree, but first it was a Jewish tree with Jewish “*branches*” that were a part of the natural tree. In Paul’s illustration, “*some of the [Jewish] branches have been broken off . . . because of unbelief.*” Paul was saying, “You cannot remain in the God tree, the ‘*salvation*’ tree, if you choose to proceed without faith.” Those Jews who did not believe were the “*branches*” who had been “*broken off.*” The wild “*branches*,” the “*wild olive shoot*,” who were the Gentiles, had been “*grafted in*” because they had chosen to believe, to be saved by grace through faith. He said, “*You stand by faith.*” Paul was quick to tell the Gentiles, “Do not become uppity about the fact that you were saved because if you choose not to live by faith anymore, then God will break you off the tree and you will remain on the ground as a result of your unbelief.”

What about the Jewish branches that had been broken off? Could they be grafted back in? Indeed they could if they embraced the Gospel of Christ by faith. This is a faith tree! Paul repeated a number of things he had already said because he wanted the Gentiles to understand that this “*salvation*” tree was not just their tree. Just because the Jews as a whole nation had rejected the Gospel, that did not mean this was a Gentile tree from now on. This was a tree where God would love to graft many Jews back in to be saved. Paul continued his illustration of the “*root*,” the “*natural branches*,” and the “*olive tree*”:

*Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of
God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to
you, provided that you continue in his kindness.*

Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (Romans 11:22–24).

In these verses, Paul referred to the “sternness of God . . . to those who fell,” the Jews, and His “kindness to you,” the Gentiles, if they continued in “his kindness.” If they continued to live by grace through faith, they could stay as part of the tree. If the Jews did not “persist in unbelief, they will be grafted [back] in.” God, by His power in the Gospel, can take a “wild olive branch” (the Gentiles) and “graft” them into the “salvation” tree even though they do not belong there by nature. If God can do that, how much easier would it be for God to take the broken Jewish branches on the ground and “graft . . . the natural branches [the Jews]. . . into their own olive tree!” Of course, the Jews and the Gentiles, can only exist in that “salvation” tree if they continue in the “kindness of God,” meaning they have to live “by grace through faith.”

“All Israel Will Be Saved”
Romans 11:25–32

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away

*from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them
when I take away their sins” (Romans 11:25–27).*

This is a difficult, and certainly often controversial, passage in the Book of Romans. Paul was still talking to the Gentiles who could have become conceited thinking that the “salvation” tree was now theirs. He told them that they needed to remember that the Jews could be grafted back in. My point here is that whatever the interpretation of these verses may be, it has to be in continuity with the context. I cannot say, “I think it means this . . .” if what I say has no bearing on the context. It has to flow with the context. I cannot come up with some hare-brained interpretation of this text that does not fit with what Paul was saying in the verses before and after. If I do, that is wrong.

Still talking to the Gentile “brothers,” Paul said, “Gentiles, I want you to understand this ‘mystery.’” Anytime Paul used the word “mystery” in his letters, that word almost always referred to the Jews’ and the Gentiles’ being brought together in one Body, the Church. Paul was probably recalling that sense of the word “mystery.” He wanted the Gentiles to have a good understanding of the fact that the Jews and the Gentiles had been brought together in one Body. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said:

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus
for the sake of you Gentiles — Surely you have
heard about the administration of God’s grace that
was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made
known to me by revelation, as I have already
written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be
able to understand my insight into the mystery of
Christ, which was not made known to men in other
generations as it has now been revealed by the
Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This*

mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:1–6).

In Romans 11 Paul said, “You have been brought together in one tree. I do not want you to be ignorant of this ‘*mystery*.’ I do not want you to be ‘*conceited*’ because this is what God wants to do. He wants all kinds of ‘*branches*’ on His tree.” In that context, Paul said, “*Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved . . .*”

I have intentionally used the New International Version in this reading because I think they have made a mistake in this translation — “*Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved . . .*” When Christians read this, they might think that this is happening in a linear form: Israel experienced the hardening, then the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and so then all Israel will be saved. The thinking is that this is a time line of events. Some have interpreted it that way. I want to explore some nuances of this text that are important to Christians.

Remember when I mentioned that it is very important to understand how Paul used the word “*Israel*” in Romans 9–11 in preparation for studying Romans 11:26. I said I believed that every time Paul used the word “*Israel*” in these three chapters, he was talking about the Jews exclusively. Look back at Romans 9:6: “*It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.*” “*Israel*” is used in this verse to talk about the nation and about those who were saved. Both uses of “*Israel*” in this verse were talking about the Jews only. Paul was not talking about the spiritual “*Israel*” during the Christian age as if it was the new nation of God that included Jews and

Gentiles. That was not how he was using the word “*Israel*” in this text. Look at Romans 9:27: “*Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.’*” The word “*Israel*” in this verse means the nation of “*Israel*.” There are several references to “*Israel*” in Romans 9–11. Every single one of those references before Romans 11:26 referred to “*Israel*” as the nation of “*Israel*,” the Jews only. No Gentiles were included in these verses. I think the same thing applies in Romans 11:26. I do not think that “*all Israel*” in this verse was referring to the Jews and Gentiles who had been saved in the Christian age — the Church — because of the context in which that word was used. In this context in Romans 11, Paul was talking about the Jews who had been saved. This thinking is not accepted by everyone, but in this context, I do not think he was referring to the Jews and Gentiles who were saved. He was referring to only the Jews who were saved when he said, “*all Israel will be saved*.”

This passage has been interpreted differently by many through the years. Some millennialists think that Paul jumped to the end of time to say that right before Christ comes to set up His thousand year reign there will be this wholesale conversion of Jews. That does not fit this context at all. Before and after this verse, Paul was talking about something that was happening in the first century. He did not jump from one time to the next and then back again. There are also amillennialists, who do not accept the thousand year reign, who believe Paul was talking about the time right before Christ comes at the end of time. They say “*all Israel will be saved*” means that most of the Jews will be saved right before Jesus returns. Using that interpretation, the Scripture does say “*all Israel*,” so if the Jews are going to be saved at the end of time right before Christ comes, it would have to be every Jew. Was Paul saying that every Jew, or

even most Jews, were going to be converted right before Jesus comes again? That really does not make sense because in these chapters Paul said that from Deuteronomy until “*the present time*” in the first century it had always been the same — there had always been the nation and the “*remnant*.” Why think that near the end of time every Jew on the face of the earth, not including the Jews previous to that time, would choose to embrace Jesus and be saved? What kind of situation would cause them to do that of their own free will? That is ludicrous! That sounds more like the Calvinist view — God would force them to be saved. I believe we all have free will choice. There has never been a time and there will never be a time when every single Jew will choose to be saved on a particular occasion. That just does not fit anything that has happened in Israelite history. That did not happen in the first century, so why would one think that near the end of time there is going to be this wholesale Israelite conversion? If I am wrong about that, that will be great, but I just do not see it in this context. Most Jews rejected Jesus even when He was there in person. Will there be a time before He comes at the end of time when all the Jews will say, “Hey, we believe in Jesus!” and will all be saved? That does not make sense in this context or in the whole scheme of things.

Consider the following explanations of what Paul said in Romans 11:25–26:

- “*Israel has experienced a hardening in part*” — Paul said that the Jews in the first century had been “*hardened*.” The tense in this verse is perfect tense, which means it started in the past and is continuing. Paul was restating what he had already said in this chapter. The nation as a whole had been “*hardened*” by God, because over and over and over they had rejected the grace of God. What does God do when people resist Him for a long period of time? Often times He

“hardens” them, but He hopes they will turn around and choose to be saved. He hopes that they will become *“envious”* and choose to be saved. At this point, Paul was just repeating what he had already said, “I want to tell you that the nation of Israel is experiencing a *‘hardening in part.’*” He was not saying that a part of each individual was being *“hardened,”* but that part of the nation was being *“hardened.”* He had already said that the *“remnant”* had always been small, so the *“part”* of the nation that was being *“hardened”* was rather significant.

- “. . . until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.” — The New International Version’s translation of *“full number”* is not accurate. Remember the word *“fullness”* was used in Romans 11:12, *“But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”* That is the same word that is used here. The NIV did not say *“full number”* in Romans 11:12 because they knew it was not talking about a number. Paul was talking about the *“fullness”* of the salvation of the Gentiles. Romans 11:12 was actually talking about the *“fullness”* of the Jews. The word *“fullness”* in this chapter has to do with *“salvation.”* It has to do with the Gentiles coming into the grace of God. When did the Gentiles come into the *“fullness”* of *“salvation”*? It was in Acts 10 with the conversion of Cornelius. It happened when all the Gentiles were invited into the Kingdom on Paul’s missionary journeys. The *“fullness”* of *“salvation”* for the Gentiles happened when the Gospel went throughout the world and invited everybody to be a part of the Body of Christ. It happened when the *“mystery”* of the Jews and Gentiles came together in

one Body. The “*fullness*” of the Gentiles had already happened.

Looking at this as a linear event makes it seem like Israel was going to be hardened for a while, then the Gentiles were going to be converted for a while, and then there would be this magic number of millions of Gentiles converted — the number known only in the mind of God — and when that number of Gentiles was converted, then that was when “*all Israel* [would] *be saved*,” every Jew was going to be saved. Paul had already said the Jews were being “*hardened*,” so that was ongoing. Acts 10 and Paul’s missionary journeys say that the “*fullness*” of the Gentiles had already taken place. The word “*until*” in “*Until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*” does not mean that the “*hardening in part*” had stopped and something else had started. In the Greek language “*until*” does not have to mean that something stopped and another thing started. The “*hardening*” of Israel was going on and the “*fullness*” of the Gentiles was going on at the same time. Were the Jews being “*hardened*” in Paul’s day? Yes! Was the “*fullness*” of the Gentiles going on? Yes, because they were already experiencing the grace of God. These two things were going on parallel to each other.

- “*And so all Israel will be saved . . .*” — “*And so*” does not have to mean that something stopped so that something else could start. It simply means accordingly, at the same time, or ongoing. “*And so all Israel will be saved*” needs an interpretation that fits the context Paul had already set up: the “*hardening*” of the Jews was going on during the first century, the “*fullness*” of the Gentiles was also going on during the first century since it began with the conversion of Cornelius, and at the

same time, “*all Israel [would] be saved*” because there was a “*remnant*” that was being saved. This process was continuing, and Paul was repeating the dynamic he had already mentioned. Do not jerk the phrase “*all Israel will be saved*” out of context and make it mean some strange thing at the end of time that has never been mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. The “*remnant*” Paul was talking about in this context was only the Jews.

Does this interpretation fit into the context before and after Romans 11:25–27? Paul said:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

Paul quoted Isaiah 59:20–21, an Old Testament passage, to explain what he meant when he said, “*All Israel will be saved.*” Isaiah was not prophesying about the end of time; he was prophesying about the first advent of Christ’s coming. He was talking about Christ in the first century. He was talking about when Jesus was born. He was talking about when Christ went to Calvary. Jesus went to Calvary to do what? To “*take away their sins.*” That is what Jesus did in His first advent. Isaiah was not talking about His last advent. It was very important that the Christians in Rome understand what Paul meant when he said, “*All Israel will be saved.*” This Old Testament prediction of the coming of Christ in the first century talks about the dynamic of Jews and Gentiles being saved. Israel was being “*hardened*” and a “*remnant*”

was being saved during the time of Paul in the first century. Before and after Romans 11:25–26 there is a congruency with that interpretation. Paul was not talking about something way off in the distance. He was talking about what was going on during the first century.

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all (Romans 11:28–32).

Once again Paul was stating the whole dynamic methodology of what God was trying to do to save His people. He was talking about the dynamic of Jews and Gentiles being saved. The Jews were the “*enemies*” of the Gentiles because they had been “*hardened*.” God loved the “*election*” because He loved the “*patriarchs*.” He loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because they were the “*roots*” of that Jewish “*salvation*” tree. Because those “*roots*” were “*holy*,” the Jewish tree was “*holy*.” God still loved the Jews and wanted them to be saved. The Gentiles needed to understand that “*God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*.” They needed to understand that even though they “*were at one time disobedient*,” it was because of Jewish “*disobedience*” that they had received “*God's mercy*.” Paul was restating the whole dynamic of the Gentiles’ receptivity

to the Gospel hopefully making the Jews jealous. There was consistency in Paul's interpretation on both sides of Romans 11:25–26, in Romans 11:11, 12, and 15 and in Romans 11:28–32.

Romans 11:32 might be called the general rule of God's working with people: *"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."* God did not just *"harden"* the Jews in Paul's day. He has used this technique on other people and in other times for the purpose of wanting to save the most people. He had *"hardened"* the heart of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He had *"hardened"* other nations to make other people receptive. It is the brilliance of God's methodology of trying to save the most people that was revealed to Paul. Surely that revelation caused Paul to write this magnificent doxology:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:33–36).

This was possibly the first time that Paul understood God's dynamic methodology of *"salvation"* by revelation. This could be considered Paul's *"Wow!"* statement. God's ways are *"unsearchable," "his paths [are] beyond"* what man can imagine. Man cannot know *"the mind of the Lord."* God is wise, loving, and merciful. He wants the most people to be saved. He is working every angle that He chooses to work to save the most people. Christians need to trust Him in all His ways.

The Body That Works

Romans 12:1–8

Romans 12 starts the practical application of Paul's letter to the church in Rome. The church in Rome was having difficulties with unity. The Jews and the Gentiles were not getting along with each other. In Romans 1–4 Paul tried to destroy their pride by reminding them of who they used to be before they became Christians, using the doctrine of condemnation. Then he reminded them of who they were as Christians using the doctrine of justification, which brought about righteousness. In Romans 5–8, he reminded them of the wonders of the glory of God as shown through the Spirit who lives within every Christian so that we can be sanctified. Then he used the parenthetical unit of Romans 9–11 to say that God still wanted the Jews to be saved.

Relationship to God Romans 12:1–2

This practical part of the Book of Romans follows the theological section of the book. Paul made very down-to-earth, specific applications. If these Roman Christians did not understand the theological teachings from Paul, they would not use his practical applications. This is the first time he has said, “Do this! Do not do that! Quit thinking about this! Start thinking about this!” He could not tell them all these things until they were convinced by what he had already said in the first eleven chapters. Beginning in Romans 12:1, Paul said:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1–2).

Christians might look at these two verses as an umbrella statement over all the practical applications in the Book of Romans. Before Paul said anything about their own giftedness and the giftedness of others, before he talked to them about love, and before he talked to them about their responsibilities to the government, he started by saying they had to make a decision based upon the grace of God that he had already talked about.

“Therefore . . . in view of God's mercy” refers to what Paul had talked to the Roman Christians about in the previous eleven chapters. They needed to realize that God had been merciful to them and had shown His grace. *“Therefore”* means they were to draw a conclusion on what had been previously said in Romans 1–11 as a whole. Paul wanted to talk about the grace of God. He began with *“Therefore, I urge you,”* some translations use the words, *“I beseech you.”* The word *“urge”* is very strong in the Greek language. Paul was not saying, “If you can get around to it, do this . . .” or “If you are inclined to do this, that would be okay.” As a result of God's mercies and grace, Paul exhorted them to make a decision concerning three things. Paul did not give them an option — *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies . . .”* to do three things.

“Offer [Present] Your Bodies as Living Sacrifices”

Paul's first exhortation was — *“I urge you, brothers . . . to offer [present] your bodies as living sacrifices.”* Offering

“your bodies as living sacrifices” is a powerful statement. Paul used the concept of *“sacrifices”* and offerings going back to the roots of what the Israelites were commanded to give on a daily basis in the Old Testament. Through the priests, every Israelite was commanded to offer two sacrifices every day, one in the morning and one in the evening. One was called the *“burnt offering,”* which basically said, *“LORD, I am yours. Who I am is all yours.”* This is not the first time Paul has used this Old Testament language. Remember that Paul used this same word, *“offer/present,”* in Romans 6:13, 16, and 19. The same concept of giving yourself to God dealt with partnering with the Holy Spirit.

The other *“offering”* was called the *“grain offering”* or the *“fellowship offering,”* which said, *“LORD, all that I have is yours.”* In a metaphorical sense, Paul was telling the Roman Christians to think back to the Israelites on a daily basis. They needed to wake up every morning and say, *“LORD, I am yours, and everything I have is yours.”* What an incredible thing to say. Paul said every Christian needs to wake up and *“offer”* himself every day throughout the day, making the decision to *“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice . . . to God.”* In essence, we are to say, *“LORD, I am all yours and everything that I have is all yours.”*

Paul used the words *“living sacrifice,”* which is interesting because in the Old Testament the animals were killed to *“offer”* the *“sacrifice.”* This is kind of a misnomer because a *“sacrifice”* indicates death and *“living”* indicates life. This is like the metaphorical verse in Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Christians have died, but we are now alive. That is the imagery Paul was using when he said: *“. . . offer your bodies as living sacrifices . . . ”* In other words, he was saying, *“Give your whole being to God.”* This is not the only passage

that talks about a sacrificial life or the offerings that we give to God as Christians. Consider the following Scriptures:

- *To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit* (Romans 15:16). Paul was talking about his preaching as being a “ministry” (cf. Romans 11:13–14). He had the “priestly” duty of proclaiming the Gospel so that the Gentiles might also become “an offering acceptable to God.” Paul’s preaching was not just preaching. It was also a “sacrifice” as he served in the sense of a priest. As a priest, Paul “offered” “sacrifices” to God. His preaching was an “offering” to God, and he “offered” his Gentile converts as a “sacrifice of praise” as well (cf. Hebrews 13:15–16).
- *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased* (Hebrews 13:15–16). The writer of Hebrews talked about another kind of “sacrifice” — “a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name.” “The fruit of [your] lips” might be worship on Sunday, worship in your car, singing, praying, or walking through a field and talking to God. “The fruit of lips that confess his name” indicates confessing who God is as a “sacrifice of praise.” The Hebrew writer said, “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Being hospitable and helping others are described as works of service in other Scriptures, but here they are described as “sacrifices of praise.” As the Christian is living his life for God, he is constantly, “continually,” on a daily basis, “offer[ing] to

God a sacrifice of praise.” These “*sacrifices*” do not just happen on Sunday morning in the worship assembly.

- *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure* (2 Timothy 4:6). Did you know that even the death of a Christian is a “*sacrifice of praise to God*”? A “*drink offering*” was poured out on the ground as if to say, “I am giving this totally up to you, LORD.” Our whole life is a “*sacrifice of praise to God.*”

Paul said: “*Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.*” A Christian’s “*spiritual act of worship*” must be “*holy and pleasing to God.*” It is interesting that the word Paul used is not the typical word used for “*spiritual*” in the New Testament. He used the word from which we get the word “logic.” It is the word for reasonable. Some translations translate it that way. Did you know that giving yourself to God in view of His mercy, in view of His grace, is the logical thing to do? Why would we do it any other way? When someone understands what God has done to save and redeem him, what is the logical thing to do? Bow down and say, “I give it all up. It is all yours. You have bought me. You paid the price with the blood of Jesus for me. What else can I do but surrender myself totally for You?” Our “*living sacrifice*” is our reasonable “*act of worship.*”

***“Do Not Conform Any Longer to the
Pattern of this World”***

Paul said, “Do not make your decision to go back to your old way of life and start offering yourself to evil.” Remember in Romans 6:13, 16, and 19 Paul talked to the Roman Christians about how they lived before they became Christians. Their default setting had been to wake up and

give themselves over to evil and sinfulness, so Paul said: “*I urge you, brothers . . . do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.*”

“Be Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind”

Paul said, “*I urge you, brothers . . . be transformed by the renewing of your minds.*” These two exhortations work in tandem with each other. The best way for a Christian to change the old ways and the best way not to “*conform to the pattern of this world*” is to renew one’s mind with the precious Word of God. Change the old way by listening to the truths of God’s Word. We are replacing the old messages that were part of our lives with new messages of truth. We are countering the messages from Satan on a daily basis with the truths of God’s Word. The word “*transform*” is used several times in the New Testament. Basically, it has to do with changing the mind. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthian Christians: “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). This is the same concept in Romans. Remember the synonyms we talked about when studying the doctrine of sanctification were transformation, holiness, and becoming like Jesus. Paul continued talking about our transformation. Part of transformation is offering yourself to God, giving Him all that you are and all that you have.

Paul “*urged*” the Roman Christians to make a decision to no longer be conformed to the “*pattern of this world*” and to “*be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind.*” They had to make this decision based upon the grace of God. If they accomplished these three specific things, the results would change their lives. Paul said, “. . . *Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will*” (Romans 12:2). When you are a “*transformed,*” growing Christian you become a test case, a

proof case, for “*God’s will.*” What is “*God’s will*”? What is God’s eternal purpose for the Christian? Romans 8:29, “*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*” God’s will is that we all become like Jesus. If we are giving ourselves to Him, if we are not conforming to the “*pattern of this world,*” if we are being “*transformed by the renewing*” of our minds, then we are becoming like Christ. And then we become the proof case to the world that “*God’s will*” is right and true and on target.

Relationship to the Church

Romans 12:3–21

Paul now began to tell the Roman Christians the specific ways in which they needed to live to present themselves “*as living sacrifices . . . to God.*” Romans 12:1–2 talks more to the individual Christian, but in Romans 12:3–8 Paul was talking about specific things in a corporate church context. The idea in these verses has to do with giftedness and how Christians can use those “*gifts*” to bless the “*Body.*” We are a part of the Church in congregations where we can use our “*gifts.*”

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him

teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:3–8).

This is such a poignant passage in regard to the “gifts” that God gives the Christian through the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38 Peter said: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus and the church in Corinth concerning this “Holy Spirit”:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession — to the praise of his glory . . . I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better . . . that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ . . . not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Ephesians 1:13–21).

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether

Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

The “*Holy Spirit*” is the “*seal*” of our salvation. He is the earnest of our “*inheritance*.” He is the “*promise*” that our body is going to be redeemed some day. He is also the “*power*” from God in our inner-being. That “*power*” helps us to become like Christ. The “*Holy Spirit*” is also the One who gives “*gifts*” to members of the “*Body*” of Christ. In the 1 Corinthians 12 context, the “*Spirit*” gave a lot of miraculous “*gifts*,” but not all the “*gifts*” were miraculous even in the first century. I am persuaded that all the of miraculous “*gifts*” have passed away, but I think that we who are Christians in this present age have been gifted by the “*Spirit*” with non-miraculous “*gifts*” to do wonderful things in the Body of Christ. Most of the “*gifts*” listed in Romans 12:6–8 are non-miraculous “*gifts*.” Some might argue that some of these “*gifts*” are miraculous, but I am not sure that is the case. I am going to treat this section from a twenty-first century perspective. What is Paul saying to those of us who are Christians today about our giftedness? There are a number of different principles that have to do with giftedness.

Paul said:

- “*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you . . .*” — All of the “*gifts*” are given by the “*grace*” of God. Many other things in Scripture are referred to as the grace of God, and in this context, the giving of the “*gifts*” is “*by the grace*” of God. God could have saved us without giving us “*gifts*,” but He chose to give us grace in “*gifts*.”
- “*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought*” — If these are “*gifts*,” then we do not have the right to

be arrogant or proud about them. Christians must respect the “*gifts*” of others, and we should respect our own “*gifts*” and realize that they are only “*gifts*” from God.

- A Christian must use his “*gift*” — “*in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*” These “*gifts*” are given through the “*Spirit*” when we are baptized. I am not sure I have enough information to say whether He gives us more than one “*gift*.” I am not sure if our “*gifts*” change through the years or maybe He gives us other “*gifts*” along the way. I know that He gives us “*gifts*” “*in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given*” us. Keep in mind that when we become Christians, our faith is usually the size of a mustard seed. “*Faith*” is all that God requires. We know who the Lord is. We know He was raised from the dead. We know He is the Son of God, and we want to become a Christian on the basis of that. Most new Christians do not know all of the Scriptures, because they have not been studying for years and years. Our “*faith*” is rather minimal at that point in time, but we are gifted by the “*Spirit*.” Suppose a young Christian has the “*gift*” of teaching. He should not be asked to teach in an environment that needs someone who has been a Christian for fifty years. His “*gift*” of teaching needs to be used based upon his study of God’s Word, his growth in his Christian life, and his faith. There are different roles in the Body even though the “*gift*” is the same; that does not mean that you fit into just any role in the Body of Christ. In other words, a brand-new convert should not be teaching an adult Bible class. Even though he may have the “*gift*” of teaching, his faith is not ready for that; his experience and his growth are not ready for that. It is important that we match where our “*gifts*” fit within the Body and where our “*gifts*” benefit the Body according to the amount of “*faith*” we have.

- “Each member belongs to all the others” — Our “gifts” belong to each other. We do not have the right to say, “This is my gift, I am going to use it for me, and I do not have to use it for you.” God gave Christians their “gifts” for the purpose of benefitting the whole Body of Christ. Consider Ephesians 4:11–16, where Paul told the Christians in Ephesus:

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be . . . so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ . . . we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The giftedness of the Body and the giftedness of each member was given to the Body to build up the Body so that as a whole it might mature in Christ Jesus. My “gift” “belongs to all others.”

- *If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

Christians are given “gifts” for a purpose. Remember some of the Roman Christians were not using their “gifts” and were upset with one another so that they were not united as a church. They may have been saying, “I am not going to use my gift to bless you. I am going

to keep it to myself because I am unhappy with you.” Paul said a Christian must use his “*gift*” from God; it is a stewardship. We do not have the right to say we are not going to use a “*gift*.”

Years ago in a congregation where I was the minister, there was a gentleman who had been a Christian for a long time. He was a very bright man who studied the Word diligently. He was the best adult Bible class teacher in the congregation. He became upset about something and decided he was not going to teach anymore. That brother did not have the right to say he was not going to use his “*gift*” to bless the Body. Our “*gifts*” are given to us as a stewardship. It is a “*gift*,” “*the grace given*” from God, to be used to help the Body of Christ. We do not have the right to say we are not going to use our “*gift*” to bless the Body. We must use it. Paul said Christians are given “*gifts*” to bless the Body. That is why God gave us “*gifts*” in the first place.

There are many things about giftedness that we could study. We might gain more insights from other passages on this concept. One thing that I want to mention concerning this chapter is that this is not a complete list of the “*gifts*.” In my experience as a minister, I have seen that when there are people in the Body of Christ with different “*gifts*,” sometimes they think that everyone should have the “*gift*” that they have. They think that they have the best “*gift*,” one that is the most useful. I have seen people with the “*gift*” of evangelism think that is the supreme “*gift*” because of the Scriptures talking about the need to share the Gospel with all the world. They think everybody else should have that “*gift*” and be exactly like them. God did not build a Body with only one “*gift*.” He built a Body with multiple “*gifts*.” Whatever “*gift*” you have, you need to treasure it, and you need to find how you can put that “*gift*” into the Body of Christ so that it blesses the Body.

Christians need to have the right attitude toward everyone else with their giftedness. I have seen situations where different giftedness has caused discord in the Body and arguing with one another because they do not respect and understand where the other person is coming from. I will never forget living in New Zealand in the 1980's when a fellow minister was presenting some of the material from Romans 12. After he talked about some of these "*gifts*," he asked individuals in the congregation of approximately 150 members, "So-and- so, what do you think your gift is?" There might have been a little reticence or embarrassment at that point. Many did not know what their gift was, so he would ask the rest of the church, "What is So-and-so's gift?" and everybody knew. That is such an important concept. When we recognize the giftedness of another person in the Body, we need to communicate that to them. Tell them that they are blessing the Body with their "*gift*" because that encourages them.

When someone is like a square peg in a round hole because they might think they have a certain "*gift*" but they really do not, it does not bless the Body. Sometimes we are oblivious to the "*gift*" we have. You might think you have this "*gift*," but because of the way you relate to the Body, they know that it is not your "*gift*." The Body, particularly the leadership, has to be bold enough and loving enough to help every member realize what their "*gift*" is and encourage them to find the place they best fit into the Body. That is exactly the emphasis in Ephesians 4:11–16 — trying to get people into the right niche in the Body where their giftedness blesses the Body to the ultimate. We need to encourage one another in regard to our giftedness. Christians also need to make sure we do not think people have a certain "*gift*" when they really do not. The Body will suffer because that person's giftedness is not being used in a way that will bless the Body.

Christians need to figure out what their "*gifts*" are. There are tests on the internet that you can take. That is

helpful, but it is more important to know where you fit in the dynamic of the Body in the church where you are. We need to talk to one another, try things, and communicate with one another about where the members fit into the Body. Consider looking at each other's giftedness to help each other find the best fit. We need to have the love for one another, using candidness with one another, to find where our giftedness works the best. We know that when there is a Body of members who are in the right places within the Body of Christ, that church will become a mobilized instrument in the hands of God to do incredible things in the Body and in the world. That is what the Lord wants for His Church.

The Body That Works in Love

Review

Paul started the section of practical applications to the Roman Christians in the first century with the incredible passage of Romans 12:1–2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

These verses act as an overview of this whole section of practical applications found in Romans 12:1–15:12. Paul urged them based on everything that had gone on before: “*Therefore*” and “*in view of God’s mercy*” — “. . . *offer your bodies as living sacrifices. . .*” In other words, he was talking to each individual Roman Christian: “*offer your bodies as living sacrifices . . . your spiritual act of worship . . . the renewing of your mind . . . you will be able to test and approve . . .*” The practical applications admonished the individual Christian to develop the right relationship with God so that they would be “*holy and pleasing to God.*” They needed to be the sweet-smelling “*sacrifice to God.*” This would be like the “*burnt offering*” or the “*grain offering*” in

the Old Testament that expressed, “Lord, I am all yours and everything that I have is yours.”

Then Paul continued talking about their relationships, particularly to others in the Body of Christ:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:3–8).

Paul talked about giftedness and the need to “offer” their “gifts” and themselves for the sake of the Body. There were “different gifts” to be used to build up the Body of Christ. No one was to think of themselves “more highly than you ought.” They should also not think of themselves as less than who God planned for them to be. This section on giftedness probably had something to do with the fact that the Roman church was not united. They were not using their “gifts” to build up the Body of Christ. Perhaps you have been in a congregation where someone did not want to use his “gift” to bless the Body of Christ. That is not an expression of “love” or brotherly kindness.

The Grace of God Manifested in Everyday Living — Romans 12:9–21

Romans 12:9–21 is one of the best sections on “*love*” in the Scriptures. It may be second only to 1 Corinthians 13. This is a magnificent section concerned with how Christians are to “*love*” one another. I want to note the kind of “*love*” being talked about in the text; I want to define it and give it a title. Then I want to talk about where that kind of “*love*” has been shown or not shown in the Body of Christ in examples in the New Testament.

“*Love*” is the glue that holds the Body of Christ together. If we do not have “*love*,” then we do not have anything in the Body of Christ. The main problem in the Roman church was disunity; certainly, if they were not united, they were not loving each other as they should. Can you imagine the assembly on Sunday morning with all the difficulties that were going on in the church in Rome? Can you imagine Jews and Gentiles sitting on opposite sides of the middle aisle and not really greeting each other? They did not want to look at one another. How could they sing together? How could they leave without embracing and loving one another? This church was in serious trouble. They needed a lesson on “*love*,” among other things.

“*Love*”

- *Love must be sincere.* — Anti-hypocritical “*Love*.”
The word *sincere* in the Greek is *anupókritos*. It sounds like anti-hypocritical. Hypocritical love is when a person does something but means something else. There is usually an ulterior motive and maybe manipulation. It is not being done with a “*sincere*” motive for the benefit of the other person. The word “*love*” in the New Testament is *agape*. It means always wanting and doing what is best for the other person’s welfare. Hypocritical

“love” means that what a person is doing is for himself and perhaps even harmful to another person.

Consider the history of the Church, especially in the Book of Acts. Think of an instance where somebody loved the Church in a hypocritical way. Acts 5 comes to mind with Ananias and Sapphira. They said they had given the full price for a piece of land they sold to help those who had unexpectedly stayed in Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost. They lied; God saw that they did not have the kind of “love” they were supposed to have, so He struck them dead. They had a hypocritical “love,” which needed to be stopped immediately. God could not allow that kind of “love” to come into the Body of Christ and interrupt the dynamic of what was supposed to be in the Church.

- *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* — Pure “Love.”

There are two sides to this admonition. Christians must “love” what God “loves,” and we must “hate” what God “hates.” Our “love” must be pure. In our American society “love” is all messed up. It really is about self sometimes. People do not want to cause anything difficult between themselves and others. Think about the church in Corinth. They had many problems, but one of their problems was that they were not willing to “*Hate what is evil and cling to what is good.*” In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul wrote about a man who was living with a woman who was not his true wife. This was an egregious thing, but the church in Corinth did not seem to care. It is possible that they thought “love” meant acceptance and forgiveness, so they did not deal with the problem. Paul “. . . passed judgement on the one who did this . . .” even though he was not present (1 Corinthians 5:3). Paul said, “This brother is impenitent and you seem to turn a blind eye to that. That is not New Testament love. It is

not *agape* because you are not seeing the evil in his life. You must change that to a pure “*love*” that comes from the Body.” The Roman church heard about an anti-hypocritical and a pure love.

- *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.* — A Family Kind of “*Love*.”

The New International Version does not translate this verse very well. A better translation would be, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love.” Paul actually used two words that are translated “*love*” in the Greek language: *philadelphia*, which means brotherly “*love*,” like Philadelphia, the American city of brotherly love. Brotherly love among Christians is the kind of “*love*” that locks arms and says, “Let’s go! We are a band of brothers together with each other.” The other word is *philóstorgoi*, which means kindly affectionate to one another. It is the kind of natural “*love*” that would be between family members, like the “*love*” that is between a mother and her daughter and a father for his son. Paul said the church needs to “*love*” each other in such a way that it becomes like the natural affection among family members. Actually, Christians are family members of the Body of Christ in the household of God. The Roman church did not have that kind of “*love*” for each other and needed to work toward that; otherwise, they were going to lose people. I can think back to some people in my past ministry with whom we were studying the Bible. We never could get them to come on Sunday morning or to some of the Bible classes or small groups. They did not allow the Body to embrace them and take them in. Once they became Christians, they did not have the framework that would allow that brotherly kind of “*love*.” They finally left the church because they did not embrace or really understand that kind of brotherly and family “*love*.”

- *Honor one another above yourselves.* — Honoring “Love.”

This is a strong statement — “*Honor one another above yourselves.*” Christians are to respect one another. We “*honor*” good elders (cf. 1 Timothy 5:17). We “*honor*” good masters even when those masters are not Christians (cf. 1 Timothy 6:1). If we are to “*honor*” those masters who are not our brothers or sisters in Christ, how much more should we “*honor*” one another? Christians are to give “*honor*” to one another, putting others above ourselves. The King James Version and the American Standard Version translations say, “*In honor, preferring one another.*” The word “*honor*” has the idea of assigning value to another person. As we look at our brothers and sisters in Christ, we might ask, “What does God think about them? How does He see them?” We need to see each other through God’s eyes. In spite of the fact that they might have hurt me, in spite of the fact that they have hurt God, He still assigns value to them. He still “*honors*” them, because they are very valuable to Him.

- *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor.* — An Urgent, Burning “Love.”

These words are interesting. The word for “*zeal*” is *spoudeé*. The word for burning, “*fervor*” in the New International Version, is *zéontes*. Paul said, “Have a quick, red-hot love for your brothers in Christ.” An urgent, burning “*love*” should not be a lethargic, easy-going kind of “*love*.” It should not be a whenever-I-get-around-to-it or a whenever-I-feel-like-it kind of “*love*.” This “*love*” will see a brother or sister in need and run to the aid of that brother in Christ. It is indeed an urgent “*love*.”

- *Serving the Lord.* — A Slave “Love.”

There is also a need for a slave kind of “love” — “*Serving the Lord.*” This might seem like a strange thing for Paul to say, but this goes back to Romans 1:1 when Paul introduced himself: “*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.*” The word from which we get the word “servant” is the same word Paul used here for “serving,” ***douleuontes***. It is the same word that is translated “slave” in the New Testament. In Colossians 3:22–25 when Paul was writing to the church in Colosse about “slaves” and “masters,” he told them to serve as if “*it is the Lord Christ you are serving.*” Christians are called to “serve” our masters who are sometimes not Christians and perhaps harsh; how much more should we “serve” our brother in Christ? We are to put them above ourselves. That is tough language. How many churches do you know where brothers in Christ greet each other with, “Hello, I am your slave”? We might think this puts us at someone else’s disposal. That is exactly what God wants us to do. What if they take advantage of us? Maybe they will. They did with Jesus, and He still enslaved Himself to other people. How much more should we do as His disciples?
- *Be joyful in hope.* — A Hopeful “Love.”

Literally it says “*in hope rejoicing.*” This is the kind of “love” that is optimistic. It believes in the other person. It believes all things that are good about the other person. It is not oblivious to the things that are wrong in another person. Christians need to look out for one another and rebuke one another when it is appropriate. In this case, Paul emphasized that we need to be optimists. Consider what Paul said to the church in Corinth:

Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it (2 Corinthians 8:24).

But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be (2 Corinthians 9:3)

Paul was optimistic toward the Corinthian church. Remember it was a church with all kinds of problems. Paul told them that we (Paul and Titus) are proud of you. He boasted to other churches that the church in Corinth was going to come through with the contribution for the poor Saints in Jerusalem. Sure enough, the word spread so that Corinth's participation was motivational for other congregations to help also. With all that the Corinthian church was doing and in spite of all their problems, Paul had Christian optimism for this church and her people. What an amazing thing! This should be a rebuke to others who often put a brother on probation when he has done something inappropriate or sinful, even though he is trying to do better. We tend to watch a brother to see how he is doing before we praise him. Paul had pride in his brothers in Christ and in the church in Corinth. It was very appropriate that they were able to move forward. That kind of pride is so motivational for brothers in Christ. It is good to hear, "I have hope in you. I am optimistic concerning you. I believe in you."

- *Be joyful.* — A Joyful "Love."
It is important for a Christian to choose to rejoice for the victory that God is having in someone else's life, whether it is going well in his own life or not. Sometimes it is hard to rejoice with someone else when things are going badly for me. How can I be happy for

anybody else, how can I care about someone else when I am enduring trials and tribulations in my own life? A joyful “love” rejoices for the blessings that are coming in another’s life. Think about how Paul felt about the Philippian church. He had a wonderful relationship with them and rejoiced with them. Where was Paul when he wrote the Book of Philippians? He was in jail. He could have said, “Woe is me. I can’t preach the Gospel. I am stuck here. I want to be traveling and doing missionary journeys.” In all of that, Paul still had wonderful joy for the Philippian church. That is what joyful “love” for another brother in Christ should be like. We need to rejoice in one another’s victory with no competitiveness. No need to bring accolades on myself. No need to glorify myself. It is a joyful “love” for other people. Christians “*rejoice with those who rejoice.*”

- *Patient in affliction* — A Suffering, “Patient” “Love.” The word “affliction” in the Greek is *thlipsei*, which means a person is being pressured; things are coming against him. Christians need to be “patient” with someone who is in “affliction,” “patient” with one who is hurting. Are we really “patient” when a brother in Christ is hurting? Do we give him room? In my early days when I was very immature, not married, I was chasing a certain young lady and wanted her to think highly of me. I had trouble giving her space, allowing her to have room to make her own decision. Her mother came to me and said, “You have got to back off to give her room and be patient with her.” This is particularly important when someone is in trials and tribulations. We need to show them patient “love” that will endure trials. A suffering “love” does not give up on someone who is in trials. It does not quit on those who need time to grow. How long has it taken you to grow to the point where you are now in your Christian walk? We have

valleys and dips as we grow. It is important to have people who surround you, believe in you, are “*patient*” and willing to work with you. The fact that someone was “*patient*” can be the motivation for growth. A suffering “*love*” is when someone is willing to go the extra mile with the other person — “*patient*” with someone, but also suffering with them.

- *Faithful in prayer.* — A Prayerful “*Love.*”
In Christianity there are people who do not get along with everyone perfectly. Even in the Body of Christ there are people who for whatever reason do not think highly of each other. It might stem from a problem or even just a choice to feel that way. It is hard to get past knowing someone does not think highly of you. So how can a Christian get past that? How can you minister to someone no matter what they think about you? How can I greet them and say, “Brother, I love you.” How can I show that kind of “*love*” to someone who does not think very highly of me when I am harboring some vengeful thoughts about them? One of the ways to conquer this problem is to be “*faithful in prayer.*” I used to open the church directory and pray for every single member on a particular page on a particular day. After a Christian has prayed for someone who might be considered an enemy in the Body of Christ, it is hard to hate them. It is hard to do something contrary to their growth when you have prayed for their well-being and growth up to that point.
- “*Faithful in prayer.*” — A “*Faithful . . . Love.*”
Think about the introduction to Paul’s books. How many people did Paul pray for? How many places did he pray for? I can only think of one book in which he did not thank God for the people. That would be Galatians. That was because of where they were theologically and the way they were living at that time. Paul had a long prayer

list with a lot of people and a lot of places. Not all of these people liked him. Paul was “*faithful*” in his prayers. He prayed for what they needed. That is what “*faithful*” means. They were coming against Paul and were not consistent, so how did he react in return? He was “*faithful in prayer*.” He did not quit praying for them. He did not give up on them.

- *Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. — A Sharing, Hospitable “Love.”*

The word for “*share*” in the Greek is ***Koinonia***. It means to have fellowship, to share with those in need. “*Hospitality*” has to do with loving strangers, taking care of them. The word for “*hospitality*” in the Greek is ***philoxenían***. Literally, it is love of strangers. This is a sharing “*love*.” Hopefully, in the Body of Christ no one is a stranger, but sometimes people are strangers because you do not know them very well. Paul said the Body of Christ needed to have a sharing, hospitable “*love*.”

The Body of Christ needs to get back to “*hospitality*.” Society in twenty-first century America goes out to eat a lot. There is nothing wrong with going out to eat, but isn’t there something about being in each other’s homes that changes a relationship? There is something about being across the table from one another and sharing a little or a lot of food and drink with one another. There is a relationship that takes place that must be held on to. Go back to the old days and have people in your home if you are not doing that. Be in other people’s homes from time to time. Get back to “*hospitality*” in more of the biblical way.

- *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do*

not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. — An Unconditional, Non-retaliatory "Love."

In these verses Paul said Christians need to make sure they do not have a retaliatory "love." There are more verses about this kind of "love" than any other kind of love. If a Christian is not getting along with a brother, when that brother says something bad, does he have a tendency to say something bad back to the brother? Paul said we need to stop that cycle of retaliation. When someone does something bad to you, make the decision that you will not return "evil" for "evil." In fact, not only should you not return "evil" for "evil," but you should return "good" for "evil" — "overcome evil with good." That has to do with words and with actions. Think about it! If every member of the Body of Christ in Rome were to take this kind of "love" approach, then surely the bad feelings toward one another, the enmity and disunity that they felt in the Body, would surely stop, at least for most of the people.

- *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. — An Involved "Love."* Sometimes Christians "love" from a distance. Sometimes we give a greeting of, "How are you?" when we really do not want to get involved. If something is going on in another person's life, it might take too much time. It might inconvenience us in some way. An

involved “*love*” goes back to what Jesus had with His apostles. We need to get back to what the first-century church had: “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*” (Acts 2:42). Those relationships were deep and special. That deep relationship especially comes when we get involved with others who are rejoicing or mourning or going through trials and tribulations. That happens when Christians are willing to get involved in the lives of other people. Are we willing to use our skills, our resources, and our time to take care of the needs of others while they are rejoicing or mourning?

Can you imagine what it was like in the Roman assembly on a particular morning when the Book of Romans was being read? Hopefully, all that had been read up to this point had destroyed their pride. Then someone started to read the passages where Paul told them how they needed to “*love*” each other. These were good people, but can you see the heads start to droop? Can you see their hearts start to melt and hurt because of the way they have treated one another? Can you see the brothers start to glance across the middle aisle to some brother they did not think highly of and had treated poorly? Hopefully when the invitation song was sung at the end of this reading, the whole church responded and repented. We do not know if they had an invitation song at the end or not, but surely this would change their hearts toward one another. Remember Paul knew that it was important that they make these changes because they were a church whose faith was known around the world. They needed to humble themselves before each other, love and care for one another. They had to become a united church.

The Christian and Civic Responsibility

Romans 13:1–14

Romans 13 is another part of the practical application portion of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Remember this church was having difficulty with unity. Each one of Paul's letters to the churches and to individuals like Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were written to address things they needed to hear. There were usually instructions concerning things they needed to do or things they should not do. Paul urged the Christians in Rome to “. . . *offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God*” (Romans 12:1). He talked to them about having the right relationship with God Himself. He also talked to them about their relationships with each other in the church and how they were using their “*gifts*.” He encouraged them to “*love*” one another.

Responsibility to Authorities — Obey and Pay

In Romans 13 Paul once again talked to the church in Rome about things they needed to pay special attention to:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do

so will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1–2).

In Romans 13:1–2, Paul emphasized that God had established the “*governing authorities*.” The people who are put into a political office have been put there by God. The Book of Romans was written to a group of people who lived right under the nose of the Roman government, and Nero was in power at this time. What kind of attitude should a Christian have toward the Roman government? Remember there were Jews and Gentiles in this congregation. They disagreed about some things and faced the problem of disunity. One of the things they may have disagreed about would be how a Christian should relate to and deal with the “*governing authorities*.” The Jewish people would have a hard time thinking about anyone being over them except God Almighty. They had a hard time in Jesus’ day in Palestine accepting that the Romans were ruling over them. The Jews in Rome were probably having a hard time with the same thing. Even though they had become Christians, they would still have Jewish tendencies. The Gentiles would probably be more used to the idea of someone ruling over them. They may have been Roman citizens from various parts of the Roman empire. They would have been used to the Roman government even though they might not have liked it.

Paul said Christians need to “*submit . . . to the governing authorities*.” The word in the Greek is *hupotasso*, which has to do with arranging oneself under the leadership of someone else. Paul said they needed to obey or “*submit*” to these “*governing authorities*.” This is not the only place in Scripture where this concept was taught:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness

and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1–4).

Paul encouraged Timothy to offer “. . . *prayers, intercession and thanksgiving . . . for everyone—for kings and all those in authority.*” Nero was the one in power at this time. Timothy was urged to encourage the Ephesian church to pray for those who were in power. Paul told Titus:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men (Titus 3:1–2).

Titus was in Crete, so that was another place in the Empire where Christians were told to “*submit*” to the “*governing authorities.*” Peter told “*God’s elect, strangers in the world*”:

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right . . . Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king (1 Peter 2:13–14, 17).

Peter told these Christians to make sure to “*submit . . . to every authority instituted among men.*” We know from Acts 5:29 that when the authorities say to do something that is against God’s will, Christians cannot do that; but overall, if there is no disagreement between what God is saying and what the government is encouraging us to do or by law

telling us to do, then we are to be obedient. That is what submission is.

Paul gave several reasons Christians should submit to the government. What is there about the government dynamic that we should “*submit*” to? The first reason is because these “*governing authorities*” have been put in place by God. Look back to what Paul said in Romans 13:1–2:

Everyone must submit . . . to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God . . . the authority is . . . what God has instituted . . .

It might be hard for Christians to think about God putting those who are evil and ungodly as “*governing authorities*.” There are not a lot of godly rulers in the world. They are usually in those positions for power, authority, or obtaining some kind of gain. They may want control over different situations or people. For whatever reason they have chosen to be in positions of government, they are not usually godly people. The text says that God has put these people in place. When the Book of Romans was written, the governing power was Nero. He definitely was not a good guy, but the Scripture says that God put him in place.

The Old Testament has some instructive passages in the Book of Daniel with the same message concerning “*governing authorities*”:

He [God] changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning (Daniel 2:21).

“The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may

know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes (Daniel 4:25).

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?” (Daniel 4:34–35).

He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes (Daniel 5:21).

These verses are in the context of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who was not a good man. He was full of desires for property, gain, and power over people. Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way that God put

people like him in places of authority for a reason. The Israelites were in trouble and needed to be punished. God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish them by putting them in captivity under him. Nebuchadnezzar was God's messenger for that purpose. God used him to accomplish His will. Daniel was able to tell Nebuchadnezzar what was going to happen to him. God humbled him by driving him away from people so that he had to live among the wild animals. Nebuchadnezzar himself finally agreed with Daniel and understood that God was the ". . . *Most High . . . sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.*"

Later during the time of Jesus there was a powerful man named Pilate. Jesus stood before him and Pilate questioned Him:

. . . "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:9–11).

Pilate needed to understand that his power had come from God Almighty.

Christians can survey the Old and New Testaments from Genesis to Revelation and see example after example of nations and rulers who were wicked, and yet, they were chosen by God to do His will. Included among God's chosen nations were Assyria and Babylon (nations that took the Israelites into captivity). God also used Cyrus, who was a servant of God (cf. Isaiah 45:1); Pharaoh; Pilate; and Nebuchadnezzar.

The Old and New Testaments give a record that often explains what God was trying to accomplish, even to the

point of using Nero during the Roman Empire. Christians need to think above politics and economics and even the pain of an oppressive government and see God's purpose. First, He wants to save the most men. He wants the salvation of the most people. Paul told Timothy:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:3–5).

Second, He wants the saved to become like Jesus, as Paul said in Romans 8:29: *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."* And third, God wants all things to glorify Himself (cf. Ephesians 1:3, 6, 12, 14). Christians can be secure that God is working for these three eternal purposes through even the most wicked of men who do not respect Him and the most wicked of nations on the face of the earth.

Paul said Christians need to obey the governors and rulers of the land, including the King, because God put them in place to accomplish His purposes. Then Paul said if we rebel against these *"governing authorities,"* we might be frustrating God's purposes. If God is working through these people, He is also capable of taking bad rulers down when He chooses. He knows what He is doing. Daniel said, *"he sets up kings and deposes them."* He might even move good rulers out of the way if He has other purposes in mind. We must *"submit"* to and obey *"governing authorities"* and should not rebel against them, their laws, and the policies that we do not like. If their will and God's will clash, then we have a choice to make and we will obey God rather than man. If there is not that kind of difficulty, then Christians

should obey the leaders and the laws of the land so that God can work His purposes.

Paul continued in Romans 13:3–7:

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor (Romans 13:3–7).

There is another reason the Christian should “*submit himself . . . to the governing authorities*” — rulers are put in place to punish those who do evil and to reward those who do good. That is not always the case because we know that Christians are sometimes persecuted and sometimes good people are taken advantage of by those in authority. For the most part, rulers are put in place for that purpose. Christians should generally agree with the “*governing authorities*, ” to “*submit*” to them so that they can fulfill their purposes. If we are some kind of irritant all the time, if we make their work difficult, then we are going against the purposes of God for which He put them in place.

Paul finished the section on submitting to “*governing authorities*” in Romans 13:5, “*Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible*

punishment but also because of conscience.” Paul said Christians could be punished for not submitting to the “*authorities.*” It is possible that the Lord through Paul was saying that if we rebel we could end up in jail unnecessarily and be hindered from spreading the Gospel among the people. We need to be living the life of Christ among the people in society who really need to see Christian examples. We know from the life of Paul that even in jail a person can minister. Do not make yourself a troublemaker in society so that you attract negative attention and are possibly punished for it and put out of commission as a Christian among the people.

Paul also said Christians need to “*submit . . . because of conscience.*” Through these verses and from other teachings, Christians are commanded to “*submit to the authorities.*” If we rebel, we are going against the law of God, and our consciences should bother us. We are encouraged in a number of places in Scripture, as in Romans 14:23 and 1 Corinthians 8:9–12, to live in good conscience. That conscience has to be trained and informed by the Word of God. Sometimes a person’s conscience has been misinformed concerning what is right and wrong. If we have been taught to obey the leaders of the land, then if we rebel against them, our conscience should hurt. If we speak against the authorities in such a way that we are not respected by the government, then we know we have gone against what God has commanded.

Submitting to the “*governing authorities*” is not the only thing Christians are commanded to do in regard to the government. Writing to Timothy while he was in Ephesus, Paul urged Timothy and the Ephesian Christians: “*. . . that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority*” (1 Timothy 2:1–2). We need to pray for “*all those in authority.*” We need to pray “*for everyone*” — this includes even the wicked rulers. How much more in every nation where Christians find themselves ought they to be praying for all officials in

power? Paul told Timothy why Christians need to pray for those in authority — “. . . *that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*” (1 Timothy 2:2).

Paul followed this verse with, “*This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*” His desire for “*all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*” is God’s number one eternal purpose. God’s eternal purposes are part of these commands. Praying for the “*governing authorities*” is connected to His eternal purposes. Our growth into “*holiness*” and becoming like Christ is number two of God’s eternal purpose. Christians need to pray for the “*governing authorities*” so that God can carry out His eternal purposes in the world. Obey and pray for all “*governing authorities.*”

Romans 13:6–7 says:

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”

Paul emphasized over and over that “*governing authorities*” are “*God’s servants,*” who were put in place by Him for His purposes. Paying “*taxes*” is related to obeying and submitting to the “*authorities.*” Christians are to obey the leaders of the land. In essence, he said, “If you are in a nation, you owe those people taxes.” We know that governments do not always use tax monies as God would want them to be used, but apparently that is not our decision to make. We cannot say that since the “*governing authorities*” are not using our tax monies to promote God’s ways of doing things, then we are not going to pay taxes or any revenues to them.

During the time of Jesus, when men were trying to trap Him with questions, some spies asked: “*Teacher . . . Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*” [Jesus responded] “*. . . give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s*” (Luke 20:21–25). That was an occasion when Christ surely knew that all of those tax monies given to Caesar or what the Jewish tax collectors gained were not used to promote God’s purposes. Jesus said this was not a place where they were going to take a stand and fight against those kinds of things. Paul said Christians are commanded to pay taxes, and we should “*give everyone what you owe . . . if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*” In this context, we are to “*respect*” and “*honor*” even those “*governing authorities*” and officials who are unrighteous and ungodly people. We “*respect*” and “*honor*” them for their office and what they have been put there to do. That does not mean that we have to like all their policies. It does not mean we have to like their character. Think about what “*respect*” and “*honor*” are. “*Honor*” means to put high value on something. Perhaps you do not like the rulers wherever you live, but as Christians we are told to “*honor*” and “*respect*” them. Remember what Peter said: “*Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king*” (1 Peter 2:17). We need to be careful how we talk about the rulers of the land. We may use humor that is disrespectful to another human being in regard to our officials. That is out of line. There may be some funny things that happen with officials, but we need to be careful about our humor. We need to be careful about what we say, whether it is in anger or when we are upset with our “*governing authorities.*” There is a difference between disagreeing with them about what they are doing or maybe their ungodliness and disrespecting them as a person. I think that is the line that Paul was trying to emphasize.

Responsibility to All Others — “Love”

In the second part of Romans 13 Paul was still talking about the responsibilities of Christians. Romans 13:8–10 sounds very Jewish, and Romans 13:11–14 sounds more like he was talking to the Gentiles. He used different styles of language that would speak to each of these two groups of people in the church in Rome.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8–10).

Paul had already talked to the church in Rome about “love” when he said, “Love must be sincere” and gave other ways that Christians need to love one another in Romans 12:9–21. Here Paul told them they owed that debt of “love” to their “brothers.” It is not just out of the goodness of our hearts that Christians “love one another.” It is not just because we have been saved by the grace of God and want to share some of our goodness with our “brothers.” Paul’s emphasis was that Christians are indebted to one another. We owe *agape* “love” to all “brothers.” Remember there were people in the church in Rome who were not feeling very loving toward each other. Jesus summed up the “greatest commandment in the Law” for the Pharisees by saying:

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” Matthew 22:37–40).

Paul said something similar in these verses — *“love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”* Loving *“one another”* sums up part of the Old Testament Law of Moses. Paul cited several of the Ten Commandments and then said: *“. . . whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”* If Christians do not live under the Law of Moses, why was Paul quoting from it? All of these commandments that Paul quoted are in the second half of the Decalogue, which dealt with man’s relationships one to another. All of these are part of the new covenant. Those principles have not gone away; those things have not changed. Christians need to *“love one another,”* just like the Old Testament saints were told to *“love.”* This is one more emphasis from Paul to the Roman Christians that they needed to *“love one another”* in every respect. *“‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor”* — that is **agape** “love.”

Responsibility to Love and Walk Right with God

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of

darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Romans 13:11–14).

Some have suggested that when Paul said, “*And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed,*” he was talking about 70 A.D. when the destruction of Jerusalem took place. Although the Book of Romans was written in a time that was pretty close to the destruction of Jerusalem, I do not think we can prove that was what he was saying. Some argue that the Saints, both the Jews and the Gentiles, were indeed persecuted in a significant way up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and that possibly it was lightened some after that time. Paul said, “Christian, if you are asleep in your spiritual life, you need to wake up, because you are one day closer to your salvation than when you first believed.” This is a wonderful thought for those who know “*there is . . . no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 8:1). This is a sobering thought if you are not behaving in the way that you should, as the Roman Christians were not. It was a sobering thought for these Christians to think about the way they were living before their fellowman. Paul said they needed to “*love one another.*” They needed to “*behave decently*” and “*wake up from [their] slumber;*” they did not need to be spiritually sleepy.

In Romans 13:12, Paul used a different metaphor — “*put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*” In John 8:12, Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me . . . will have the light of life.*” He also

said, “‘*You are the light of the world*’” (Matthew 5:14). In his epistle, John said:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:5–7).

As Christians they needed to live in the “*light*” as He is in the “*light*.” Paul said they needed to live in the daytime. Figuratively speaking, nighttime is a time of doing evil. Daytime is a time for doing righteous things. Paul’s use of imagery of the “*armor of light*” here brings to mind the imagery of Ephesians 6:10–18 when he talked about putting on the “*. . . full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.*”

In Romans 13:13–14 Paul began to talk about some specific things that are very similar to how the Gentiles used to behave:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature [flesh].”

Romans 13:8–10 is a bit more Jewish than these verses in Romans 13:11–14, which is a bit more Gentile.

Paul knew that the Christians in Rome were discouraged and even angry with one another. It is possible that they were tempted to go back to their old way of life — the Law of

Moses for the Jews and walking in darkness for the Gentiles. Paul said to Jewish Christians, all of those old laws concerning relationships were part of the new covenant; they were about loving *“one another.”* To the Gentile Christians Paul said that they needed to live in the *“light”* and *“clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ”* and with *“the armor of light.”* Paul urged them not to go back to living the way they used to live. The last part of Romans 13 was a subtle hint to them to move forward in their love for one another. They needed to get back on track to avoid being tempted to go back to their old way of life before they became Christians.

When Christians Disagree (1)

Romans 14:1–8

Most people who study Romans do not know that Romans 14:1–15:13 covers the heart of the problem going on in the church in Rome. They do not know that this is probably why the Book of Romans was written. There is wonderful theology and the assurance of salvation in the earlier chapters. There is Romans 8 on the Spirit and so many passages many people know from the Book of Romans, but many do not know why the Book of Romans was written. Early in the study of this book, I talked about Romans 14:1–15:13 where Paul focused on one particular problem that the Roman Christians had. The passage that best gives the purpose of the Book of Romans is Romans 15:5–6. It is in the form of a prayer. Paul said:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This section is about “unity,” and Paul’s prayer is in a section where he was focusing on a situation that was causing disunity.

Agreement on Essentials

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:1–5).

These verses tell the issues that were at stake in Rome. For those living in the twenty-first century, we might think, “Wow! These issues seem so small and insignificant in terms of issues in the church. Why were they arguing vociferously about these issues?” It is important to understand where these Christians were coming from. The two issues here were what they ate and what days they celebrated.

For the Jewish Christians those issues were related to their background in Judaism. The Jews who had been converted to Christianity would not have moved easily from Judaism into Christianity without taking some of Judaism with them. If you were born a Jew and had been initiated into keeping the Law with all its feasts, you knew about Jerusalem and might have made some trips there to celebrate the feasts that were at the Temple site. That was huge. You became a Christian, and suddenly, someone told you that the Old Testament Law had been nailed to the cross. All the feasts were gone! All the dietary laws about not eating unclean meat were gone! You were free to eat all of that, free

to do away with the feast days because those feast days were no longer sacred. Christians only keep the first day of the week, which is Sunday. This would have been hard for some Jews. From the Book of Acts, we know that the whole issue of circumcision was difficult for the Jews, especially in relation to whether or not the Gentiles should be circumcised. The Jews who had become Christians might have been wondering if they should keep the feast days and if it was okay to eat all kinds of meat even though, according to the Law, some kinds were unclean. This would have been a hard situation to be in. They wanted to hold on to some things. Did not those laws from the Old Testament come from the same God who was the God of Christianity? Would not some of those laws and principles come into Christianity? That would have made sense to them. Some of them might have held on to those laws and practices just because they were part of their culture.

The Gentiles would have had no part of any of that, but they would have come from a background of different religions. Think about where they might have come from. They had been worshiping idols and had been involved in feast days and eating meats that had been offered to idols and giving glory to some false god, an idol, some Roman god or Greek god. And then a Christian like Paul or some other messenger had come along preaching the Gospel and saying there is only one God; He is Jehovah God, the God of the Jews, and now the God of the Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentile would understand that there was only one God and that Jesus was the Son of God, and He was God, too. There was the Spirit who had come to live within the Christian when he had been baptized, and He was also God. And yet, there was only one God!

However would it have been easy for any of them to simply do away with their past beliefs? *“One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man . . . eats only vegetables.”* Maybe they would go to a shop where meat was

being sold right next to a pagan temple where people worshiped some other god. They might say, “I want a steak” or “I want that pork.” The butcher shop owner would say, “Great! This meat was offered to a pagan deity yesterday.” If they had come out of the false religion, they might have trouble buying that meat and eating it for the sake of their conscience because they still believed it had been offered to a pagan deity. Was there some kind of connection between that piece of meat and the pagan deity? They might not want to be involved in that now that they were Christians.

Some of the leftover beliefs from Judaism or from the Gentile’s false religions would have come with them. They might not have worked all of those details out in the days after they became Christians. We do not know for sure what the particular problems were for the Roman Christians. Commentaries disagree with each other on the specific details of who would have said it is all right to eat all meats. Was it the Jews who did not want to eat certain meats because they were unclean and used to be banned under Judaism? Was it the Gentiles who were not willing to eat the meat that had been offered to idols the day before? Who was having a problem with this or that?

There were similar problems considering “. . . *one day more sacred than another; another man [considered] every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*” Were the Jews still having trouble with the feast days from the past? Were they celebrating those feast days and thinking those days were still from God whereas the Gentiles did not? The Jews might have been the ones who thought one day was more sacred than another. These groups, Jews and Gentiles, were very divided over these issues. They disagreed with each other in such a way that it had become a serious issue, and they were looking down on and condemning each other. This meant that if they disagreed with each other about foods to eat or days to celebrate, they did not consider each other to be brothers. This was the

disunity that Paul was so concerned about. Christians today might question whether these brothers were about to divide over such issues as foods and days. Yes, they were!

How does all of this apply to the twenty-first century Christian? The Lord's Church sometimes has the same difficulties in principle. Sometimes we disagree about things that we feel very strongly about to the point of considering others condemned.

Important Points Concerning Matters of “Faith”

Consider the following important points before we launch into all of Romans 14: *“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters”* (Romans 14:1, NIV). Other versions use the word *“opinions”* instead of *“disputable matters.”* *“Opinions”* is not a very good translation. These are issues about which the church in Rome was arguing. I do not think they were just *“opinions”* because of what Paul said in the following verses:

One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him . . . Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:2–3, 5).

When Paul uses the word *“faith,”* Christians need to pay attention. In Romans 10:17, he said: *“. . . faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”* The Roman Christians had come to their conclusions on these matters from their understanding of God's Word. They were not making decisions on just opinions; these were important matters of *“faith.”* This was

not a small thing. These Christians believed based on their understanding of what God said was right or wrong; they believed the way they did because of what they understood to be principles from God. They did not just sit down and say, “I think I like this better. I don’t like you because you disagree with me on this opinion.”

This is a very important point — these disputable matters were matters of “*faith*.” Matters of “*faith*” are matters that convince Christians about right and wrong. If Paul were able to ask a Roman Christian why he felt a certain way about this feast, he would have said, “I am convinced that this is what I should do. I am convinced that is how everyone should think and act. It is a matter of faith to me. On the basis of my understanding of what God says in His Word and on the basis of the principles of what He teaches, this is what I believe.” This is a very important perspective to grasp when studying Romans 14:1–15:13. Knowing how important this is will help us understand these things in our day and time with the issues we face.

Often times disagreements that happen in churches between Christians are concerning matters of opinion. Maybe it involves paving the parking lot or not. Maybe it is whether we should take on this mission work versus that mission work. Maybe it is whether we should sing this song or that song. There are a lot of issues that deal with opinions and not really based on our understanding of God’s Word. They are just personal preferences! There are other things that Christians disagree on that are matters of “*faith*” based upon the study of God’s Word. Once again, remember “. . . *faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*” There have been divisions over opinions, but the disunity Paul was addressing here was a potential division related to matters of “*faith*.” **Matters of “*faith*” are doctrine** that is based upon the study of God’s Word. They are what God says about something in His

Word; what God says, we should believe and practice. These are doctrine, matters of “*faith*.”

Using Romans 14, we have indications from Paul about how Christians need to proceed when we disagree on matters of “*faith*.” In this text, Paul emphasized that the Christians in Rome needed to get along even though they disagreed. He did not tell them they had to stop believing what they believed. If this person was right and this person was wrong, would Paul let them continue to believe what they believed? Yet that is exactly what Paul did. However, he did not say, “You know we can believe anything about what the Scripture says and be okay.”

The Essentials of Christianity

Before we study Romans 14–15 in regard to how we handle disagreements in matters of faith about which we are allowed to disagree (non-essential doctrinal matter, in other words), let us address the matter of those essential doctrines about which we must agree with God and with each other in order to be saved and in fellowship with one another in Christ.

Ephesians 4 addresses the subject of “*unity*” in Christ:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:1–6).

The pivotal verse is “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). Paul

said that certain Christian attitudes are necessary to ensure that “unity” be present: “. . . live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1–2). Paul followed these attitudes naming certain Christian doctrines that are essentials of the Christian faith: *one body* (Church), *one Spirit*, *one hope*, *one Lord*, *one faith*, *one baptism*; *one God and Father* (Ephesians 4:4–6). If Christians do not hold these in common, there is no fellowship with God or one another. How could there be? The essentials of Christianity are:

- “*One body*” — If there is “*one body*,” one Church, there cannot be a multiplicity of churches. One Church is not as good as another. Paul said there is “*one body*” (cf. Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13).
- “*One Spirit*” — There is “*one Spirit*,” not many “forces,” which rule or influence our world. The “*one Spirit*” is the “*Holy Spirit*” of Scripture (cf. Matthew 28:19; Luke 11:13; Acts 2:38, 11:16; Romans 15:13–16).
- “*One Hope*” — There is “*one hope*,” that is heaven, which is a crown and a “*room*” in the mansion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the reward given to those who are faithful until death. There is no other reward waiting for Christians (cf. John 14:2; Titus 1:2, 3:7).
- “*One Lord*” — There is “*one Lord*.” Christians are called upon to confess that fact. He is Jesus. He will not accept co-regency with anyone or anything else in our lives. He is our only King. He is the Savior and was raised from the dead to prove His deity and ability to take away our sins (cf. Romans 1:3–4, 10:9–10; 1 Corinthians 8:6, 15:12–19).
- “*One Faith*” — There is “*one faith*,” meaning there is one revelation from the Lord. That is the Bible, which is inspired and equally authoritative in religious matters.

There are not multiple revelations from God. There is “*one faith*”. This is the one revelation of God that saves; there is no other (cf. Acts 6:7, Galatians 3:22–26; Philippians 1:27; Jude 3).

- “*One Baptism*” — That revelation speaks of “*one baptism*” that saves; there are no multiple baptisms that are all correct. The Book of Acts tells the stories of many who were baptized for the forgiveness of sins. In his letters, Paul often reminded Christians of their starting point in the Lord. “*Baptism*” is not sprinkling. It is not pouring. “*Baptism*” is not an afterward sign of one’s salvation immediately upon believing. It is the climax of one’s faith in Jesus, at which time God grants forgiveness of sins and salvation from sin, death, and hell (cf. Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Colossians 2:12–14).
- “*One God and Father*” — There is “*one God and Father*.” There are not multiple gods, one or more from various world religions. The God of Christianity, Jehovah God, is the only God (cf. Romans 3:30; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

These are essentials that we must hold onto and that we must believe as God intends for us to believe in the first place for there to be fellowship with God. However, there are a lot of other things that are matters of “*faith*” that God allows us to grow in our understanding of without losing our relationship to Him. He allows us to disagree with Him in those non-essential doctrinal matters that we do not yet understand. Does He want us to stay there in our understanding? Of course not! Does He want us to continue to study in that area? Absolutely! As they study throughout their Christian lives, the saved grow in their understanding of more and more truths revealed in Scripture. Faithful Christians want to know and believe more and more of the truth. We want to believe exactly what He is saying and meaning.

Disagreement on Non-Essentials

Having established that there are essential doctrines that must be accepted to remain in a saved relationship with God and in fellowship with the other saved people on the earth, what is to be our approach to one another when we disagree about other doctrinal matters?

Now we come to our text in the Book of Romans. Having seen that Christians are to agree on the essentials, now we turn to what we do in a congregation when we disagree on non-essentials. When I say non-essentials, I in no way mean that these are unimportant. Anything God comments on in Scripture is important. However, he does not impose on His children perfect understanding of every doctrinal matter revealed in the Bible. If that were the case, we would all be lost, without the hope of every attaining perfect understanding. That is the nature of imperfection. We will even at our death, even after years of intense study still not have perfect understanding or perfect belief. Therefore, we will not all ever agree with each other on every doctrinal matter either. So what do we do to retain “*unity*” when we do not agree on non-essentials?

In Romans 14–15 Paul lays out how the Roman Christians and we can retain “*unity*” when we disagree. We will investigate those principles of “*unity*” in chapter 24.

When Christians Disagree (2)

Romans 14:10–15:13

Romans 14:1–15:13 is the section of Scripture in the Book of Romans where Paul really focused on the issue of “*unity*” within the Roman church. He wrote about the problems that were related to their disagreements over certain matters of “*faith*,” which had to do with whether or not they could eat certain meat and whether or not they should celebrate certain days as sacred. The Jews and Gentiles disagreed to such an extent that they did not consider each other brothers and sisters in Christ. Each actually questioned whether or not the other was saved. The members of the church in Rome had come to their conclusions on these matters of “*faith*” based on their study of God’s Word. That was why Paul referred to these issues as matters of “*faith*” rather than opinions. Some translations use the word “*opinions*” in Romans 14:1, but the New International Version says: “*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.*” In other words, these were matters of faith about which they disagreed.

Paul wanted the church in Rome to know that “*a spirit of unity*” is a higher priority than complete agreement on every subject. He put certain **principles of “*unity*”** in place to say that they were allowed to disagree about these “*disputable matters*” — what one man’s “*faith*” allowed him to eat and how another man considered one day more sacred than another. This did not give them an excuse for not studying and continuing to investigate what things were right

or wrong. There are principles in these chapters that come forward to Christians in the twenty-first century because people in Christ still disagree about certain matters of “*faith*.” It is likely that the brotherhood in every era since the first century has had Christians who disagree about “*disputable matters*.”

There are certain matters of “*faith*” that the Lord says Christians must hold on to. These are essentials in the Christian “*faith*” (See chapter 23). There are also passages of Scripture that tell us when we are to disfellowship somebody. We have not studied these, but I challenge you to find these texts that help us to decide when a brother is no longer a brother (cf. Romans 16:17–20; 1 Corinthians 5; Titus 3:10–11; 2 John 9–11; Jude 3–16; See Appendix).

Disagreement on Non-Essentials — Paul’s Principles of “*Unity*”

What principles are Christians to apply when we disagree on non-essential doctrinal matters?

Accept One Another

In this section of Scripture, Paul said they must first of all “*accept*” each other even though they disagreed concerning matters of “*faith*”:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters . . . The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him . . . Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (Romans 14:1, 3; 15:7).

They needed to “*accept*” each other because God and Christ accepted them. They must consider one another saved and in fellowship with God and all other Christians.

Come to Your Own Conclusions

Paul’s second principle of “*unity*” is found in the last part of Romans 14:5, “. . . *Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*” Paul was not giving them permission to say that it did not matter what they believed so they did not need to study. They needed to study with the best of their ability so that they were convinced that what they believed was true, all the while accepting that other Christians might not come to the same conclusions.

Respect Sincere Differences

Paul’s third principle of “*unity*” is found in Romans 14:6–8 where Paul said they must respect the sincerity of their brothers:

He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Those who disagreed did not do so because they had some kind of rebellious attitude. They believed and acted upon their beliefs because they wanted to glorify God. In these matters of “*faith*” they needed to accept and respect one another because they were doing it to the glory of God. They were sincere in their convictions.

God Is the Ultimate Judge

Paul's fourth principle of "unity" is found in Romans 14:9–12:

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Christians must understand that God will do the judging in these matters. Some might think they have an obligation to straighten everybody else out. That was not what Paul said. He said, "Nobody is going to heaven except those who God Himself decides should be there."

There are times when a brother must be disfellowshipped — for example if he is rebellious or divisive or is teaching false doctrine that will cause someone to lose his salvation. That does not fit into this category. It is important to understand that God will do the judging in these matters of "faith." Paul has already said that God accepted these people. The business of judging one another is a separate study in the New Testament that needs to be done. Many people run to Matthew 7:1, "'Do not judge, or you too will be judged,'" to say that Christians do not have the right to judge anybody. Actually, that is not correct. First Corinthians 5 talks about judging a brother who has left the Lord and is deliberately and blatantly breaking God's law. When we judge a brother in those circumstances, all we are doing is agreeing with God's Word. Scripture does say there are times to judge and other times when men are not to judge. In these matters of "faith," Paul said they did not have

the right to judge whether or not someone was lost or saved. God is the ultimate judge; all will stand before the judgment seat of God. It is sure that “*each of us will give an account of himself to God.*” God alone will decide who gets into heaven. In my years of ministry, I have seen the difficulty among brothers to know when to judge and when not to judge, to know when to accept someone as a brother in Christ and when not to accept someone who is no longer truly a brother in Christ. We need to press forward in understanding how to do that better.

Do Not Cause Your Brother to Stumble

Paul’s fifth principle of “*unity*” is found in Romans 14:13, 22–23:

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way . . . So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Paul urged the Christians in Rome to do what was according to their “*faith*” convictions, but not to “. . . *put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way*” (This is not the passage that says we should not offend a brother).

Consider the following example: suppose a Gentile brother in Christ invites five other Gentiles and a Jewish brother over for supper. The Gentile host knows that the Jewish brother has grown up not eating unclean meat like pork because that was wrong in Judaism, but he places a pork steak in front of all of his guests. The Gentile brothers have no problem eating the steak put in front of them.

However, because of his convictions of “*faith*,” even though he has become a Christian, the Jewish brother still believes that something might be wrong with eating pork. Because there is so much social pressure in this circumstance, the Jewish brother eats so that no one will make fun of him or say bad things about him. Who sins in this situation? One sinner is the Gentile brother who put the Jewish brother in the situation where he violated his own conscience. When Paul said, “Do not . . . *put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way*” in Romans 14:13, he was talking about this kind of situation. However, Romans 14:23 says, “*But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*” In other words, do not violate your conviction of “*faith*”! So the one who goes against his conviction of “*faith*” also sins when he eats. Paul said, “Do not put your brothers and sisters in situations where they might be tempted to violate their conscience and break their convictions of “*faith*.”

Act in Love

Paul’s sixth principle of “*unity*” is found in Romans 14:14–15:

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

Paul described himself “*as one who is in the Lord Jesus*,” and we know that he was also inspired. He was convinced that in Christ “*no food is unclean in itself.*” Paul actually made a doctrinal statement about “*food*” in this passage. He

did not go on to explain his position or to argue about it. He did not try to convince the one who thought that eating meat was wrong that he should eat the meat. He simply made the statement. Again, it is important to know that he has already said, “*Accept one another!*” He could have said, “I think you are wrong and should change because I am an apostle of the Lord,” but as an apostle, he respected those who disagreed with him and said they needed to respect “*one another*” even though they disagreed. Paul said, “I respect your view. If you think that meat is unclean, then for you it is unclean, because it is a matter of faith.” Paul said they were doctrinally wrong as far as what he understood in the Scriptures, but for the one who had studied in such a way that it was a conviction of “*faith*,” it would be wrong to eat the meat because they were convicted that it was unclean.

Not only is putting a “*stumbling block*” in front of a brother wrong, but in this principle Paul said, “You need to love your brothers. So if you know that eating meat is unclean to a brother, then you must not put him in a social position that will pressure him to eat. If he knows you are eating meat and you are flaunting your freedom in Christ, then you are not ‘*acting in love*.’ You are causing him to think about you as a brother in a way that is not appropriate. If you are going to eat meat, do it in private. Do not flaunt your freedom to eat meat before a brother who does not eat meat. That is not ‘*acting in love*.’” When Christians have freedom in Christ to do something, we are encouraged not to do those things or to do them in private as an act of love for those who do not believe they have the same freedom. “*Acting in love*” involves respecting each other’s beliefs.

Do Not Allow Truth to Be Maligned

Paul’s seventh principle of “*unity*” is found in Romans 14:15b–16: “*Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.*” When a Christian flaunts his freedom

in Christ to do something such as eating meat or celebrating a certain day, it may cause another Christian who is convicted that these things are wrong to speak disparagingly about the one who believes he has that freedom. We do not want another Christian to speak badly about what is good.

Major on the Majors

Paul's eighth principle of "*unity*" is found in Romans 14:17: "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" One way of saying that is — "Major in majors and minor in minors." Make sure to bring the most important things that need to be talked about and studied to the top position. Are food and days the most important things? No! "*The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" — those are the most important things. The Roman church was arguing about food and days. They might have been matters of "*faith*" for those Christians, but they could not compare to "*righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" In the brotherhood as we argue about different things, we need to ask ourselves if we are arguing about major or minor things. We need to continue to thoroughly study anything that God talks about, but if we are not elevating what God considers to be the most important things, then we have pulled those things down to make them common and have put them alongside things that are not as important. We have made majors into minors. We cannot afford to do that.

Do What Edifies

Paul's ninth principle of "*unity*" is found in Romans 14:18–19: "*Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*" Christians must be involved in "*mutual edification.*" We must build "*one another*" up in Christ

rather than contributing to the destruction of another's "faith." If we are always criticizing another's point of view, if we are always disagreeing with him, if we do not honor and respect his opinion, then we are destroying his "faith." Our job in relation to "one another" is to ". . . make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." We need to study the "one another" passages in the New Testament, because all have to do with our being instruments of God to bring about Christ-likeness in "one another." Not only is God trying to bring about Christ-likeness in us, but we as Christians are His instruments to help each other become more Christ-like. We work along with God, His Word, the Spirit, prayer, and many other things to encourage "one another." The Roman Christians needed to ask themselves if through their treatment of each other were they really loving "one another." Were they mutually encouraging "one another"? Our relationships in Christ are so important because we need "one another." The Church is God's Body. We must help each other toward the goal of living with God forever.

Do Not Flaunt Your Freedom in Christ

Paul's tenth principle of "unity" is found in Romans 14:20–21:

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

These verses repeat the "stumbling block" principle. This time, consider whether we are loving our brothers in Christ or causing them to stumble. If a brother flaunts his freedom in Christ, is he doing that to help another brother? Paul said, "Whatever your freedom in Christ allows you to do, if that is

somehow contributing to tearing down a brother, if that is somehow discouraging a brother, if your freedom is somehow damaging the relationship that you have with a brother in Christ, then you have the privilege, responsibility, and capability not to do it at all.” Someone in this position might say that this is my right. Yes, it might be his right in Christ, but he needs to surrender his right if it somehow tears down his relationship with a brother in Christ.

Sometimes You Just Have to Be Quiet

Paul’s eleventh principle of “unity” is found in Romans 14:22, *“So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.”* Paul said, “Romans, if you cannot continue to talk about these matters without each viewing the other as one who is not saved and no longer a brother in Christ, then stop talking about these matters. Do not study them together anymore.” After they have studied a matter, brothers can reach a point of impasse where it is impossible for them to agree; they need to sincerely say to each other, “This is what I believe. I have studied, and I just do not see it your way.” Paul said to stop talking about these things because the volume of disagreement was so high that the church in Rome was going to blow apart at the seams. I have seen people in my day press a matter so far that there is disunity. I have seen them press something that they believe is so important that everybody ought to believe exactly like they do even though the New Testament does not consider it one of the major doctrines. I do not think that Paul meant they should never talk about it again, but for now there was such a threat to the “unity” of the church that they needed to stop talking about it. Later, perhaps, when tempers cooled and quieter heads prevailed, then maybe they could start the discussion again about these matters. Maybe a situation would arise so that they could talk about these things in peace and acceptance. If the “unity” of the church is

threatened, then stop talking about the matters of contention. The church in the twenty-first century needs to hear this exhortation because sometimes Christians have the view that if we just give more Scripture and state more facts, then we can turn this person or this group around to our point of view. They are probably saying, “We have heard those arguments, we have heard those Scriptures, and we still do not come to the same conclusion.” Christians need to be able to say, “I respect your view, but I do not accept it.” If further discussion is going to lead to disunity, then the discussion needs to end.

Let the Strong Be Strong

Paul’s twelfth principle of “unity” is found in Romans 15:1–3:

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

It is probable that both groups in the church in Rome thought that they were the stronger ones in Christ. According to Paul, the stronger in Christ would be the ones who believed they had the freedom to eat meat or the ones who believed they had the freedom to celebrate the day. In essence, they did have that freedom, but when they flaunted that freedom, it was wrong. Paul said, “If you think you are the stronger brother, then you need to put up with the *failings of the weak*.’ You need to go the extra mile if you think that you are spiritually stronger than your brother. It is wrong for you to believe that you have the right to impose what you believe. If you are the stronger in Christ, then be the stronger in Christ — look out for your brother who is weak, *‘bear with the*

failings of the weak.’ Try not to please yourself.” The stronger in Christ should know that **agape** love looks after the other brother. The Christian who flaunts his freedom trying to please himself has the wrong attitude. Sometimes those who think they have freedom in Christ reflect an attitude of arrogance. Sometimes they look down on those who do not think they have certain freedoms in Christ. If you think you are stronger in Christ, you need to “*bear with the failings of the weak.*”

Think about Christ’s life; think about His relationship to His apostles. He could have demanded doctrinal and “*faith*” perfection from them. When He was choosing these men, He could have asked them, “Do you believe this? Do you believe such and such a way?” He did not have a checklist of all the doctrines that He knew were right, of course, because He was perfect and was God incarnate. He did not demand agreement with Him on all those issues. They misunderstood some issues over and over in Scripture. They even misunderstood the marriage issue in Matthew 19 when the Pharisees came to test Jesus. When Jesus said that from the beginning it was meant to be one man and one woman for life, His disciples said, “*If this is the situation . . . it is better not to marry*” (Matthew 19:10). The disciples had the same basic misunderstanding that the Pharisees had. He did not demand that they have a perfect belief on that and a host of other things. In John 16:12, Jesus said, “*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.*” There were things that they were not ready to hear. He had some hard things to tell them. When Jesus went back to heaven, they were not straight on every doctrinal matter. I get the impression from Acts 1 that they were still thinking there might be a physical kingdom and maybe Jesus was going to set up the Messianic kingdom on the earth and rule from Jerusalem. When He died and ascended to heaven, they were thinking, “What now?” Jesus did not straighten all of that

out. He gave them room and space and time. That is His example for Christians, too.

Accept One Another

This last principle of “unity” found in Romans 15:7–9 is the same as the first principle:

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

Romans 15:7 is the bookend to Romans 14:1 — “Accept him whose faith is weak . . . Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Why was it so important that the Christians in Rome be united in Christ? Paul said:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written . . . ”

In Romans 15:9–12, Paul quoted a number of passages that predicted the coming of the Gentiles into the Kingdom when the Messiah came and when the Church was established:

- “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name” (Quoting 2 Samuel 22:50, Psalm 18:49).
- “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people” (Quoting Deuteronomy 32:43).

- *“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples”* (Quoting Psalm 117:1).
- *“The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him”* (Quoting Isaiah 11:10).

Paul told the Christians in Rome that they needed to understand that God’s eternal purpose and plan was at stake here in Rome. They might have thought that they were just having a little church squabble and that it did not matter whether they split to form Eastside Church of Christ and Westside Church of Christ in Rome. Paul said there was more at stake — either their “unity” would attract people or their disunity would push people away from God’s eternal purpose. The Old Testament prophecies revealed God’s eternal purpose and plan that the Jews and the Gentiles would come together in one body. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said that the mystery was made known to him by revelation — *“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 3:6). If the church in Rome split apart over meat and days, then this whole plan would come tumbling down in Rome. The Roman people who were not Christians would see that the Jews and Gentiles could not get along even as Christians. They would believe that the Jews and Gentiles were not meant to be together in one body and that the whole Christianity thing was all just a sham. There was so much at stake in this church in Rome. If they could keep the church together, they would preserve God’s plan. The Church is God’s plan to show the rest of the world that this is what Christianity is all about — Jews and Gentiles coming together as one Body of saved believers. That was Paul’s prayer in Romans 15:5–6, 13:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the church in Rome could remain united in Christ, then with “*one heart and mouth*” and with “*a spirit of unity*” they would “*glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” God’s eternal plan, His purpose, would be fulfilled. The Church in the twenty-first century needs to put these very important principles of “*unity*” into practice today.

“Accept one another”

Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles

Romans 15:14–16:27

In the Book of Romans, Paul approached the Roman Christians about the problem of divisiveness; they were having trouble getting along with one another. They were divided along Jew and Gentile lines. Paul addressed this problem specifically in Romans 14–15:13 — they were condemning each other for beliefs concerning foods and days. The problem had become very serious. The church was on the verge of splitting, and that is the reason Paul wrote this letter.

Near the end of his letter in Romans 15:5–6, he gave the following purpose statement:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Paul neared the end of this letter he had one more thing to say about “unity” and divisiveness in Romans 16:17–19:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth

talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

The problem had to be addressed by the Roman Christians, and Paul wanted them to do that before he came to Rome. Remember in Romans 1 he said:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong — that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles (Romans 1:11–13).

It would be difficult for him to encourage and edify the Christians in Rome if the first thing he had to do was to straighten out the problem of divisiveness. He wanted to have a “harvest” among them. He wanted to evangelize wherever he went. If they straightened out the problem of disunity, then Paul could conclude his stay in Rome peacefully.

Paul ended the Book of Romans in a very unique and wonderful way. He told them about his ministry as a preacher, he told them about the plans that he had in mind, and he told them about more evangelism and church planting that he wanted to accomplish beyond them. He was only going to be in Rome for a brief stay before moving on. Romans 16 is an extended greeting to more people than he included in any other letter that he wrote. These greetings

were not by accident; they had a special place in this book. These were people he knew and had worked with in the past.

Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles and the Purpose of the Letter

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:14–16).

Paul began by telling the Christians in Rome that they were a complete church — they were “*full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*” Paul told them that he wanted to “*impart to [them] some spiritual gift to make [them] strong.*” I do not think this was a miraculous “*spiritual gift.*” Miraculous “*spiritual gifts*” were given to impart knowledge and to affirm that those truths came from God. They already had the gifts they needed. They were already “*competent to instruct one another*” in the truth of God’s Word. Paul’s purpose was to remind them of some things, which he spoke boldly about. Some of the Roman Christians who did not know him might have wondered why someone from the outside would speak to them in this matter about their inner problems, which related to “*unity.*” Paul knew he had friends who respected him in Rome and realized he needed to speak to them as an apostle. He said they were “*competent to instruct one another,*” but the Greek word, **noutheteín**, is stronger than

“instruct.” It means establishing and building each other up. They had what they needed to build up one another, and Paul wanted them to share the Gospel of Christ together.

Romans 15:15b–16 is an incredible verse:

. . . because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Paul used three words in this verse related to a priest's duties. The New International Version's translation uses the following words :

- *minister of Christ Jesus* — **leitourgon**. The word *“minister”* is used several times in the New Testament to refer to a public official, but it was also used to refer to priests in the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Old Testament. This word was used to refer to the priests' duties around the tabernacle and the temple. Paul used the same word to describe his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel because he likened it to the Old Testament priests' duties.
- *priestly duty* — **hierourgounta**. Paul's *“priestly duty”*/duties were related to two things. Christians think of a priest in the Old Testament offering sacrifices, but *“proclaiming the gospel of God”* is something a priest would do also. Malachi 2:7 says, *“For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.”* That is the way Paul was using it here. There was *“the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God,”* but Paul's converts had been primarily Gentiles.

- *an offering* — ***prosphora***. Paul's converts among the Gentiles were to him "*an offering acceptable to God*," an offering of sweet smelling savor.

This verse is a beautiful passage about the ministry of a preacher.

Paul talked about his philosophy of ministry as a preacher beginning in Romans 15:17

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done — by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you (Romans 15:17–22).

Paul had "*fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ . . . from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum.*"

Paul wanted to go to Rome, but he had been hindered many times. Finally, he was able to say, "*But now*" —

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I

have enjoyed your company for a while (Romans 15:23–24).

The Book of Acts reveals that Paul's missionary journeys had primarily been in Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Crete, and some of the islands in that area. At this point in time, he had finished his ministry in those areas. Not everyone in those areas knew the Gospel and there were still churches to be planted, but Paul was the kind of pioneer who wanted to be a path finder. Others could come in behind him to continue preaching the Gospel and to establish churches. Paul basically said, "You know my ministry is that particular kind of ministry in the Kingdom, so I am finished here, and it is time for me to move on to more virgin territories where the Gospel is not yet known." Apparently, that was Spain. Paul was going to Jerusalem first, then on to Rome to spend a little time with them, and then on to Spain.

Scholars believe Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth. He had been commissioned by the church in Jerusalem to communicate to the churches he had visited or established on his second missionary journey that they should take up a contribution for the poor:

Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ (Romans 15:25–29).

The churches had agreed during Paul's second missionary journey to give a monetary gift to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. On his third missionary journey, he was collecting those monies. In 2 Corinthians 8–9, Paul said the Macedonian churches had already given their contributions, and he challenged the Corinthian church to follow through on their giving. He said, *Now I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there*, which would mean he was finished collecting the contributions.

Consider Romans 15:30–33:

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul urged them to pray for him and even asked them to pray for two specific things. He asked that he be delivered from the “*unbelievers in Judea*,” which might refer to people who might try to kill him considering the man he was as Saul of Tarsus. He was the champion who had persecuted Christians in the early days. Now that he had been converted to Christianity, his old friends in the Judaistic religion might not be very excited about seeing him there. He asked that the church in Rome ask God to spare his life. He believed he had more to do in preaching the Gospel, more missions in Spain, more souls to save, and more churches to plant.

While he was in Ephesus, he said, “*I must visit Rome also*” (Acts 19:21). He traveled from Ephesus to Corinth and through Macedonia and Greece on his way to Jerusalem. While he was in Miletus, he sent for the elders from Ephesus to meet him there. He told those men, “*And now, compelled*

by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there . . . Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again” (Acts 20:22, 25). He wondered if he was going to live. Later on while Paul was in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus actually prophesied that Paul would be bound by the Jews of Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 21:11), but Paul did not know what would happen while he was in Jerusalem.

The second thing Paul asked the Roman Christians to pray for was that the Jerusalem and Judean saints would receive the gift — *“that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there.”* Remember that the Jews were the ones through whom the Gospel started to spread in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). Jews from all over the world spread out and started planting churches and saving souls. Then in Acts 10 after Cornelius became the first Gentile convert, the Gentile world began to hear the Gospel, but that was because the Jewish Christians shared the Gospel with them. It was the Gentile Christians who had the funds to take care of the Jews who were in need. The Jews could possibly react in a negative way, being too proud to accept something from the Gentiles. They needed to receive this gift and needed to feel indebted to the Gentiles for the physical blessings just as the Gentiles needed to feel indebted to the Jews for the spiritual blessings. Paul urged the Roman Christians to pray for a healthy relationship between the Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles needed to be able to give, and the Jews needed to be willing to receive the gift.

Greetings to Many

There are scholars who think that the Book of Romans ends with chapter 15. I recommend that you check some of the commentaries for this information. Leon Morris gives

some arguments as to why some people think along these lines.⁷ There are others who argue that Romans 16 was part of the original letter. I am convinced that this chapter is a part of the original.

This is a chapter about greetings and has a place in the book. I do not think that Paul did this by accident. This had to do with his credibility with the Roman church. If his message was going to be received, then those who did not know him needed to be convinced that he loved them, that he was a reliable source, and that there were people in their midst who knew Paul and believed that he wanted only the best for them. There was a reason that he mentioned these people and said what he did about them.

First consider the bookends of Romans 16:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me (Romans 16:1–2).

Cenchrea was an eastern seaport for Corinth. Most people think that Phoebe was the carrier of Paul's letter to the Roman Christians. She was a trusted Christian and may have been a business woman who traveled and was entrusted to carry this letter to Rome. There has been some discussion about Paul's use of the word "servant," *diakonon*, to describe Phoebe. Sometimes the same word is translated "deacon," as in 1 Timothy 3:8, "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain." It is also a general

7. Morris, Leon, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), pp. 24–31.

word that is used for a “*servant*” as well as a specific word used for “*deacons*” in the Lord’s church. I do not think there is a particular way to settle once and for all whether this woman was some sort of appointed official of the church in Cenchrea as a woman “*deacon*.” Personally, I think she was just a good “*servant*” of the church. I do not think it matters a great deal whether a person is noted as an official “*servant*” of the church or whether that person is a great “*servant*” because they have a “*servant*” heart.

The second bookend for Romans 16 is found near the end of this chapter:

Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings (Romans 16:21–24).

At the beginning of this chapter Paul commended Phoebe, who probably carried the letter to the church in Rome. Then near the end, Paul mentioned others who wanted to send their greetings. “*Timothy, my fellow worker*” was one who was well known by Paul. “*Tertius*” was mentioned as the one “*who wrote down this letter*.” He mentioned others: “*Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives . . . Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy*.” His home was where the church met in Ephesus or Corinth; he was mentioned in Acts 19:29 as one who was “*seized by the people*.” Then *Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus*,” who was possibly the local minister. Paul mentioned all these names to build consensus and to give himself credibility. He was telling the

church in Rome that this letter was not just from him; there were many others who all agreed with what Paul was saying.

Romans 16:3–16 is an interesting roll call that contains some house churches. Paul said, “*Greet [so and so] and . . . the church that meets at their house.*” There has been some discussion as to the structure of the Roman church. I do not know exactly how it was set up, but Paul certainly indicated that there were house churches. There may have been more than one congregation. They may have met in homes at other times during the week and all met together on Sunday. We do not really know. There were nine strong women mentioned in this chapter. They were Gospel-believing, sharing women, which speaks well of the congregation in Rome. There were two Latin names, Ampliatus and Urbanus, but most of the names in this chapter were Greek or Jewish. This church was a heterogeneous church made up of Jews and Gentiles. The Latin names would indicate that those individuals were Romans. This was a diverse church whose members were having trouble getting along. It is interesting how many of these Christians Paul knew. He listed 26 by name and two others. That was more than he listed in any other letter. He knew these people well and called attention to that fact by listing them.

Paul said some interesting things about some of them:

- “*Priscilla and Aquila . . . fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.*”
- “*My dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.*”
- “*Mary, who worked very hard for you.*”
- “*Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*”
- “*Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord.*”

- *“Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ.”*
- *“My dear friend Stachys.”*
- *“Apelles, tested and approved in Christ.”*
- *“Those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.”*
- *“Herodion, my relative.”*
- *“Those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.”*
- *“Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.”*
- *“My dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.”*
- *“Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.”*
- *“Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them.”*
- *“Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister.”*
- *“Olympas and all the saints with them.”*

“Priscilla and Aquila,” a husband and wife team, were known as Paul's *“fellow workers”* and tentmakers in Corinth and Ephesus from Acts 18. Some were his *“dear friends”* and even one *“who has been a mother to me, too.”* *“Tryphena and Tryphosa”* were possibly sisters and even twins. There were three whom he listed as *“relatives,”* which was probably a term that did not refer to blood relatives, but family together as Jews and countrymen. Two men were mentioned as *“my relatives who have been in prison with me.”* Many of the commentaries, like those by Wiersbe, Hendrickson, and Whiteside talk about the individuals in this chapter. They suggest possible stories with these individuals, using a connection to the same name in other places in Scripture. They may have used stories from the church fathers or other writings. Quite frankly, we do not know whether these were the same people or not. Many of the names might have been common names just like John, Bob, or Bill.

I like what Fred B. Craddock said concerning this text in an online sermon at <http://www.preachingtoday.com>.⁸ He tells a story about when he and his wife were getting ready to leave a church to move to another congregation. The church gave them a quilt made of squares, and in each square was the name of a congregant, the people to whom they had ministered and who had ministered to them. The quilt was a reminder to the Craddocks about their relationship to the precious people in their lives at that time. I like to think about Romans 16 not as a list of names that Paul was rattling off, but as something more than that to him. The Vietnam Wall in Washington, D.C. and the 9/11 Memorial in New York City do not just have a list of names, especially to the ones who knew the people who lost their lives. Romans 16 is not just a list of names of the people Paul knew in Rome. Think about these people and their stories; think about the relationships that Paul had with these people. Paul intended to see them, then he planned to head on to Spain.

As Paul finished this letter, he made the powerful statement in Romans 16:16: *"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings."* What an incredible statement to make, believing that this church was having *"unity"* problems. I doubt that their Sunday morning assembly was all that joyful. They were probably not wrapping their arms around each other to give a hug or a *"kiss,"* which was the typical way people greeted each other in that culture. As Christians, that *"kiss"* became a *"holy kiss"* because it communicated so much more about their relationship than just being countrymen or friends. Even though they were members of the Lord's church, they were not considering each other to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul wrote to encourage them to restore the *"unity"*

8. <http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/2010/july/whentheolliscalleddownhere.html>.

that Christ brought us into as Christians. Ultimately we all want to be a part of that.

In Romans 16:17–20, Paul said:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

The word “urge,” **parakalo**, has a strong message to it. Those who are divisive, deceitful, and stumbling blocks serve only their own physical appetites and use scheming words to deceive others. Ultimately Satan was behind it all. Paul made a clear reference to Genesis 3:15: “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” Satan struck the heel of the Messiah at Calvary, but the Messiah crushed the head of Satan at His resurrection. Eventually when we die, we will get to be with Him for eternity. In some ways, Satan’s head is crushed every time somebody becomes a Christian. Every time Christians meet, they solidify their faith in Jesus Christ. God would be glorified and victorious again among the Roman Christians.

Paul closed out his letter to the Romans by saying, “I believe in you. I believe you can work through this disunity and be united together in Jesus Christ.” He closed with a beautiful doxology:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen (Romans 16:25–27).

Appendix

God's Reasons for Disfellowship

In conjunction with Chapters 23–24 in this book on Romans, I want to present materials related to the subject of disfellowship. We indicated in the first part of our study of Romans 14 that the Roman Christians were considering some of their brethren as “condemned” or “judged,” meaning they did not consider them saved.

In 1 John 1:3, the author declared:

*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,
so that you also may have fellowship with us. And
our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son,
Jesus Christ.*

The necessary inference of this passage is that if we are in fellowship with God, we are in fellowship with every other saved person on the face of the earth. If by becoming a Christian, I am placed by God in fellowship with Him (meaning I have been declared righteous, I am saved), because He has done the same to every other saved person, therefore I am in fellowship with every other saved person. If I am in fellowship with God, and if another person is in fellowship with God, we are in fellowship with each other also. We cannot be otherwise. I cannot not be in fellowship with someone who is in fellowship with God, if I, too, am in fellowship with God. I should not, therefore, declare anyone else not saved if God has saved him. Of course, the only way I know if someone is saved is if they have become a Christian the way the New Testament says one is saved. Therefore, if someone has heard the Gospel of Christ, believed Jesus to be the Son of God, repented of their sins, confessed Him as his Lord and Savior, and been immersed for the remission of sins — that person is in fellowship with

everyone else who responded likewise to the Gospel. I should not declare myself not to be in fellowship with those God says I am in fellowship with, and like-wise, I should not declare myself to be in fellowship with those God has not declared Himself to be in fellowship with. That is not my prerogative. It rests in God's revelation.

The New Testament does spell out when a body of believers, a congregation, is to declare someone no longer in fellowship with God (and therefore themselves). It also spells out how that is to be carried out, at least in general terms. This appendix will not deal with the latter but will speak to when we are to disfellowship a once-saved person. I say once-saved, because the person is now no longer in fellowship with God, no longer in a saved condition. What would remove a person from the fellowship of God? It seems to me the New Testament delineates three basic reasons how one separates himself from God after having been saved.

First, when a brother stubbornly refuses to receive and obey the teachings and practices of Scripture, he is no longer living by faith and no longer in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul urged the church in that city to deal forthrightly and lovingly with a brother who was living with his father's wife, presumably his stepmother:

But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:11–13).

Consider for a minute, the make-up of this church. In 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Paul listed multiple kinds of sins and sinners:

*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And that is what some of you were.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

When they became Christians, they repented of those habitual practices that condemned them. They were washed clean of the condemnation of those sins. I do not think that implies that every one of the Corinthian Christians had completely conquered these temptations and sins. They were determined to be free from their slavery. They did not want to practice those sins anymore. However, to propose that after their conversions not one of the faithful brethren ever gave into any sin ever again is naive and wrong. If they were walking in the light (cf. 1 John 1:7), walking by faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7), walking by the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:16); they were in the process of putting away the works of the flesh that had enslaved them before. The difference between the struggling saved person and the man in 1 Corinthians 5 is that he was not trying! He was no longer walking by faith, submitting to the will of God. He had removed Jesus from the throne of his heart and was directing his own steps. He was in rebellion. Such an attitude and practice took him out of fellowship with God. By disfellowshipping this man, the church was signaling to him

that they agreed with God that he was not in a saved condition. He needed their tough love, rather than seeming to accept him as fine in his adulterous relationship. The man was lost, and the church must agree with God in that determination and let the rebellious one know that he was lost.

To generalize this principle, rebellion by any saved person towards any obvious revelation and righteous practice of God in Scripture renders that person no longer saved. The particular sin or practice is not the point; a rebellious attitude is. Rebellion could be refusing to quit slandering others, not wanting to stop gossiping, not fighting one's urges to disrespect others. Any attitude and activity that displaces the Lord from the throne of our hearts is rebellion, and Jesus will not share that throne with anyone or anything else. He is either its sole King or He leaves you to rule your own life. However, when a person chooses to rule his own heart, he takes himself out of fellowship with God.

Second, false teaching is damnable. Jude identified the men who secretly slipped in among the church to which he wrote as condemned (cf. Jude 4). He also said those Christians needed to "*snatch others from the fire and save them*" (cf. Jude 23). Apparently, some who had believed their false doctrines of grace as a license for sin and denial of the Lordship of Jesus (cf. Jude 4) were lost. Not only were the false teachers of those doctrines lost, but their doctrines, if believed, rendered the believers also lost. False teachers were identified by Paul in Galatia. They were false teachers because their doctrine of Grace + Law = Salvation was legalism (cf. Galatians 5:4). False teachers are noted in other churches as well (including Colosse, cf. Colossians 2; and Corinth, cf. 2 Corinthians 11).

It is important to define "false teaching" and "false teachers." Unfortunately, these terms are used loosely and destructively at times. Someone who is walking in the light

and disagreeing with me on some non-essential doctrinal matter is not a false teacher. False teaching is not any and every doctrine in the New Testament. False teaching renders someone lost. Every Christian who is walking in the light is flawed not only in their practice but also in their beliefs. If we are covered by Jesus' blood for our imperfect practices, would the Lord not also cover our imperfect beliefs? No, not in the essentials from Ephesians 4, but in the non-essentials. Let us be very cautious about labeling someone a false teacher. That term is very serious in its New Testament meaning and connotation.

Romans 14–15 is our example in regard to doctrines that are believed by some Roman Christians. They had come to those conclusions on the basis of their study of God's Word. They had taken different interpretations, so both interpretations cannot be right. However, Paul did not label either conviction as "false teaching." He said, "*Accept one another*" (Romans 15:7) even when the other person is wrong. It must not be false teaching then.

In his second epistle, John wrote "*to the chosen lady and her children,*" presumably a particular church. He said:

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work (2 John 7–11).

There were certain basic teachings about Jesus that could not be compromised. If someone was teaching those things, he did “*not have God.*” It sounds like they were no longer in a saved condition. Such destructive teachers were not welcomed into your home or your church. That is disfellowship!

Third, when someone is divisive, that person has to be stopped. Listen to the New Testament speaking to this malady:

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned (Titus 3:10–11).

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people (Romans 16:17–18).

We have learned in Romans 14–15 that “*unity*” of the body is very precious and to be preserved, especially if it is threatened by disagreements that are not damning in their individual import. However, if someone is going to attempt to divide the congregation, even if it is simply through sharing their interpretations on non-essential doctrinal matters, he is to be stopped. What he believes is not what condemns him. It is his divisive spirit that condemns him.

Charles Speer



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