

# **Commentary on the Letter to the Romans Bible Study Notes and Comments**

**by David E. Pratte**



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## ***Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*** ***Bible Study Notes and Comments***

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### Notes to the Reader

To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). When I do quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. Often – especially when I do not use quotations marks – I am not quoting any translation but simply paraphrasing the passage in my own words. Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

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## Introductory Thoughts about Commentaries

Only the Scriptures provide an infallible, authoritatively inspired revelation of God's will for man (2 Timothy 3:16,17). It follows that this commentary, like all commentaries, was written by an uninspired, fallible human. It is the author's effort to share his insights about God's word for the purpose of instructing and edifying others in the knowledge and wisdom found in Scripture. It is simply another form of teaching, like public preaching, Bible class teaching, etc., except in written form (like tracts, Bible class literature, etc.). Nehemiah 8:8; Ephesians 4:15,16; Romans 15:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 5:12-14; 10:23-25; Romans 10:17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 3:15.

It follows that the student must read any commentary with discernment, realizing that any fallible teacher may err, whether he is teaching orally or in writing. So, the student must compare all spiritual teaching to the truth of God's word (Acts 17:11). It may be wise to read several commentaries to consider alternative views on difficult points. But it is especially important to consider the *reasons or evidence* each author gives for his views, then compare them to the Bible.

***For these reasons, the author urges the reader to always consider my comments in light of Scripture. Accept what I say only if you find that it harmonizes with God's word. And please do not cite my writings as authority, as though people should accept anything I say as authoritative. Always let the Bible be your authority.***

**“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”  
– 1 Corinthians 1:31**

## Abbreviations Used in These Notes

ASV – American Standard Version  
**b/c/v** – book, chapter, and verse  
ESV – English Standard Version  
f – the following verse  
ff – the following verses  
KJV – King James Version  
NASB – New American Standard Bible  
NEB – New English Bible  
NIV – New International Version  
NKJV – New King James Version  
RSV – Revised Standard Version

# Introduction to Romans

## **Author**

The apostle Paul was the inspired author of this book – 1:1.

Horne states: “...this Epistle has always been acknowledged to be a genuine and authentic production of Saint Paul ...”

Consider a few facts we know about Paul:

- \* He was present at Stephen’s death (Acts 7).
- \* He persecuted the church (compare 1 Timothy 1:12ff; Acts 8,9).
- \* He was converted as a result of Jesus’ appearance to him on the road to Damascus. Ananias was sent to baptize him (Acts 9,22,26).
- \* He then preached in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and later went on three preaching trips, preaching even in Rome (Acts 9-26).
- \* He especially preached to Gentiles and worked to prove that they need not be circumcised and obey the Old Testament to be saved (Acts 15; Galatians, Romans)
- \* He wrote more New Testament books than any other man.

## **Date written**

It was likely written in 57 or 58 AD, from Corinth. It was surely written before Paul visited Rome (1:10-15), so it had to be before his prison epistles and before his trip to Rome as a prisoner. The connection between Romans 15:25-27, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, and 2 Corinthians 8&9 implies it was written during Paul’s third preaching trip as he was traveling to Jerusalem. This would make Romans one of the earlier epistles of the New Testament. Epistles that Paul wrote before Romans probably include Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 and 2 Corinthians.

Horne states:

“The most probable date is that which assigns this Epistle to the end of 57, or the beginning of 58; at which time Saint Paul was at Corinth, whence he was preparing to go to Jerusalem with the collections which had been made by the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia for their poor brethren in Judaea. (Rom. xv. 25—27.)”

## **Theme**

Justification for all men is through the gospel rather than through works of the Old Testament law.

Romans is generally considered to be one of the most difficult New Testament books to understand, mainly because it includes in-depth discussion of challenging issues about justification. It is meat, not milk.



## ***People addressed***

Paul addresses the church at Rome (1:7).

The origin of the church in Rome is unknown. It may have been begun by Jews who came to Rome after Pentecost (Acts 2:10) or after the dispersion from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1ff). The church was composed of Gentiles (1:13; 11:13) and Jews (7:1; 2:17-29). This would lead to questions about the Old Testament law and about how to treat one another in light of ancient animosities. Since Rome was the capital city of the empire, the existence and strength of the church there would have special influence for God.

## ***Outline of the book***

Chapters 1-11 – Explanation of justification by faith

All people, Jew and Gentile, need the gospel – chapters 1-3.

Introductory Remarks – 1:1-15

The Gentiles, having rejected God, need the gospel – 1:16-32.

The Jews, also having sinned, need the gospel – 2:1-29.

All men have sinned and need the gospel – 3:1-31.

Man's need is met by faith in Christ under the gospel – chapters 4,5.

Abraham demonstrates justification by faith apart from the law – chapter 4.

Jesus' death justifies man from sin – chapter 5.

Jesus frees from the law, but requires obedience and spiritual mindedness – chapters 6-8.

Grace forbids continuing in sin – chapter 6.

Jesus freed us from the law – 7:1-6.

The sinner struggled to keep the law – 7:7-25.

The spiritual mind must overcome the fleshly mind – 8:1-18.

God plans and provides for those He has forgiven – 8:19-39.

God's eternal purpose required using Israel – Chapter 9-11.

God used Israel to accomplish His purposes – 9:1-21.

The gospel offers salvation, but the Jews rejected it – 9:22-10:21.

Israel yet had hope for the future – chapter 11

Chapter 12-16 – Applications to personal lives

General practical admonitions – chapter 12

Attitude and conduct toward civil government – 13:1-7

Love for others and proper conduct in Jesus – 13:8-14

Matters of liberty or personal conscience – 14:1-15:7

Paul's ministry among the Gentiles – 15:8-33

Paul's closing remarks and personal greetings – chapter 16

## ***Summary of key terms***

The following terms are key to understanding the book. We will define and examine them before we begin the book. Since Romans is a difficult book, remember that none of its teachings will ever contradict the simpler teachings found in other New Testament books.

## **“Gospel”**

The gospel is the message of the good news of salvation through Jesus.

Romans 1:16 – The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who truly believe.

Romans 10:14-17 – Faith in the gospel comes by hearing the word of God, not by a blind “leap of faith” or by direct operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the word.

## **“Law”**

In Romans, “law” refers primarily to the Old Testament system of commands or rules. This is similar to the book of Galatians, so the teaching of Galatians (and other books) confirms and helps us understand the teaching of Romans.

Romans 2:17-20,25; 10:5 – In order for one to be considered righteous before God under the law, he had to keep or do it. Note that the “law” here refers to the law that the Jews relied upon, including circumcision (2:17,25; compare 7:7). That law itself had a blessing only for those who did everything it required without ever sinning (compare Galatians 3:10).

Romans 3:19-23,28 – What the law could not do was justify sinners. Instead, it gave people the knowledge that they are all guilty of sin (verses 19,20,23). When people violated “the law,” it had no provision to permanently forgive (Hebrews 10:4). So what the law really did was prove that all men are sinners, but then it could not justify them from those sins (compare Galatians 3:11,16,22). This showed how much we need the sacrifice of Jesus that can forgive our sins.

Romans 7:1-7 – Now that the gospel has come so we can be justified from sin through Jesus, we are no longer under the Old Testament. We are dead to it (verse 4) and have been delivered from it (verse 6). (Compare 6:14f; Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.)

Note that, when Romans says we are not saved by “law” or “works,” it is talking about the works of the old law, which required sinless perfection in order to have hope. We will see that it is not denying that we must obey the gospel in order to be forgiven by Jesus. The principles taught apply to the Old Testament law, but the same conclusions would apply to any system of justification which, like the Old Testament, offers justification only to those who sinlessly obey the commands (“works of law”), but then has no provision to permanently forgive violations.

## **“Grace”**

Grace is undeserved favor by which God offers forgiveness to those who have violated His commands and therefore do not deserve His reward.

Romans 5:1,2,20,21 – By God’s grace we rejoice in hope and receive righteousness to eternal life through Christ. Since the old law could never justify from sins, everybody who violated it would stand condemned. One had to live a sinless life in order to have hope under “the law.” But the gospel provides the sacrifice of Jesus that can forgive sins. So we now have grace – favor with God that we do not deserve. This is the basic difference between “works of the law” and “grace through faith.” (Compare 3:23f; 4:4f; 6:14f; 11:6.)

### “Faith”

Faith is belief and trust in Jesus and His gospel message.

Romans 5:1 – We are justified by faith so we have peace with God through Christ. Faith is essential to salvation (1:16; 3:22,25; 4:5,16,19-25; 10:13-17) because, after man has sinned, he cannot earn salvation by a life of sinless law-keeping. So we need God’s unmerited favor to forgive us through Jesus’ death. This requires us to trust Him since, by our own efforts, we do not deserve eternal life.

### “Obedience”

Obedience means keeping God’s commands or instructions. Some people claim Romans proves that, since people are saved by faith and grace, obedience is not necessary. But note:

Romans 2:5-11 – In order to receive eternal life, we must continue patiently doing good.

Romans 6:3,4,16-18 – To be set free from sin, we must obey from the heart the doctrine delivered to us.

Romans teaches, as do many other Scriptures, that obedience to the gospel is essential to salvation (see also 1:5; 4:12; 16:26; 15:18). The difference between the gospel and “the law” is that the law required a lifetime of sinless perfection, which would **earn** God’s favor. But the gospel offers forgiveness to those who have sinned and therefore can never earn God’s favor. Yet, to receive the forgiveness offered by God’s grace, the gospel requires as a necessary condition that each person recommit himself to serving God obediently. Those who truly trust God and appreciate His grace must willingly submit to His conditions, so they can be saved. Note that these conditions include confession and baptism (10:9,10; 6:3,4).

(See also Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; 2:38; 22:16; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6. See also other passages about the necessity of baptism.)

Obedience to the gospel is essential, but it does not earn salvation. It is a necessary condition to receive forgiveness offered by God’s grace.

Keep these teachings in mind, so we do not become confused when dealing with the deeper statements in Romans. Nothing here will contradict these clear teachings of Scripture.

***A list of verses in Romans that show obedience is essential to salvation or is included in salvation by faith.***

Many claim that Romans teaches salvation by faith only without obedience. This can be disproved by comparing the teaching to many other passages in other books (see above). But the book of Romans itself repeatedly teaches that obedience is necessary to salvation and that obedience is in fact an essential part of saving faith. Paul makes this absolutely clear in Romans even before he begins his discussion of salvation by faith apart from works of the law (Old Testament).

Here is a list of passages in Romans that demonstrate the need for obedience:

1:5 – Obedience to the faith

2:2-11 – Judgment and eternal destinies will be determined on the basis of “deeds” (“works”), practices, obedience as contrasted to disobedience.

4:12 – We must **walk** in the **steps** of Abraham’s faith.

6:3-7 – Baptism puts us into Christ, into his death, to walk in newness of life, so we are freed from sin.

Chapter 6 – Baptism must lead us to not return to sin.

6:16-18 – We present ourselves as instruments of righteousness and are made free from sin when we obey from the heart the doctrine delivered.

8:1-13 – In order to be free from condemnation, so we live spiritually and do not die, we must “walk” (live) according to the spirit, not according to the flesh.

10:9,10 – Confession with the mouth (an outward act of obedience), in addition to faith, is necessary to salvation.

(16:26; 15:18)

**For further discussion of the role of obedience, faith, grace, and law in our salvation, see articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

Note that the book of Romans is often erroneously cited as evidence for various Calvinistic doctrines, besides salvation by faith only. We will discuss many of these concepts at the appropriate points in the book. This will especially include discussions of election and predestination, as well as inherited depravity and once saved, always saved. **For further discussion of the tenets of Calvinism, see also our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

# **Part 1: An Explanation of Justification by Faith – Chapters 1-11**

## **Romans 1**

### **Chapters 1-3 – All People, Jew and Gentile, Need the Gospel.**

#### **1:1-15 - Introductory Remarks**

***1:1,2 – Paul was a servant of Christ, called to be an apostle separated to the gospel that God promised through the Old Testament prophets.***

#### **Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ**

As in nearly all his epistles, Paul identified himself from the outset as the author. He also described his role in God's plan.

He was a servant or bondservant of Christ. All Christians are servants of Christ, because He is our Lord and Master. As His disciples, we must obey Him by submitting our will to His (Luke 6:46). This requires obedience. Paul was no different from us in this regard; we are all servants of Christ. His role as an apostle and an author of many books of the New Testament did not change his responsibility to serve God by faithful obedience. In this we are all equal.

## Called to be an apostle

He was also called as an apostle. Compare Galatians 1:1,15 – In many of his epistles Paul affirmed he had been “**called** to be an apostle,” not by men, but by Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:1).

Many people doubted Paul’s apostleship, since he was not among the original apostles. So, he often asserted it in his writings, reminding people that he did speak with authority of one who was revealing God’s commands directly from the Holy Spirit.

“Apostle” (αποστολος) – “1. a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders ... 2. Specially applied to the twelve disciples whom Christ selected, out of the multitude of his adherents, to be his constant companions and the heralds to proclaim to men the kingdom of God ... With these apostles Paul claimed equality ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

*Apostles were especially chosen and called personally by Jesus to be apostles.*

Apostleship was not something one could take upon himself, nor was it something that just anyone could obtain by choosing to meet certain requirements (as one can choose to become a Christian). One had to be selected by Christ, and Christ Himself had to directly reveal each man whom He individually selected.

Luke 6:12-16 – Jesus personally chose 12 men and named them to be apostles.

Acts 1:24 – When one was chosen to take Judas’ place and be numbered among the 12, God indicated which man **He** had **chosen** to fill the office. (Compare John 15:27; Acts 10:40,41.)

In particular, Paul was personally chosen and called by Jesus to be an apostle.

Acts 26:16; 9:15 – Jesus said He appeared to Paul to make him a minister and witness of what he had seen (Acts 22:14,15). Jesus personally appeared to Paul, then told Ananias to teach and baptize him because Paul was “a **chosen** vessel” to preach Jesus’ name to Gentiles, etc.

*Apostles had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ.*

Acts 1:15-26 (especially verses 21,22) – The one chosen to replace Judas had to be an eyewitness. Apostles repeatedly affirmed that they were eyewitnesses – Acts 2:32; 10:41; 13:15; 1 John 1:1-4; etc.

Paul also possessed this qualification.

Acts 22:3-16; 26:16 (especially verses 14,15) – Paul saw and heard Jesus so he could be a witness. Jesus said he appeared to Paul to make him a witness. Though the time at which Paul became a witness was exceptional, still he was just as qualified to do this job as were other apostles (Acts 9:1; 1 Corinthians 15:4-8; 9:1-5).

*Apostles were empowered by the Spirit to do miraculous signs to confirm to others that they were inspired by the Spirit.*

Matthew 10:1-4 – Jesus gave the 12 power to perform miracles (Hebrews 2:3,4).

Mark 16:14,20 – As they preached, apostles confirmed the word by miracles.

The Bible contains many examples showing that the apostles performed such miracles – Acts 3:1-10; 8:14-24; 9:32-41; etc.

Paul also was empowered to do miraculous signs.

2 Corinthians 12:12 – He accomplished the signs of an apostle among the Corinthians.

Luke records many signs performed by the Spirit through Paul – Acts 14:8-10; 19:1-7; 20:8-12; 16:16-18; Romans 15:19.

*Apostles could lay hands on others and bestow on them the power to do miracles.*

Acts 8:14-21 – Apostles went from Jerusalem to Samaria to lay hands on Christians there and give them the Holy Spirit.

Paul could lay hands on others and bestow miraculous powers on them.

Acts 19:6,7 – He laid hands on 12 disciples so the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

2 Timothy 1:6 – He gave Timothy a gift through the laying on of his hands (Romans 1:11).

2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11 – For all the reasons we have listed, Paul claimed apostleship fully and equally with the other apostles (1 Corinthians 9:1-5; Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; etc.).

**For further discussion of the role of apostles in the purpose of the Holy Spirit, see articles on miracles and direct revelation for today on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

### **Separated to the gospel of God**

All of us are separated to the gospel in the sense that we are purchased by the blood of Christ to be His followers. This makes us sanctified or holy – set apart from the world. We do not live by the world's standards but according to the teaching of the Lord Himself. See verse 7; compare 1 Peter 1:13-19.

However, Paul was separated in a special sense in that he was called to the work of preaching and teaching the gospel around the world. He had a special duty as a preacher and an apostle. See Acts 9:15; 13:2; Galatians 1:15.

Note that this separation to the gospel did not give Paul or any apostle the right to decide for themselves what they would preach. They did not invent the rules they revealed according to their own human wisdom. Rather, they were empowered only to preach and teach the message God revealed to them.

## **An introduction to the gospel**

Here Paul for the first time mentions a major theme of the book: the gospel. The gospel is the message of the good news of salvation through Jesus. This message is the power of God to save those who hear it (10:14-17), believe it (1:16), and obey it (16:25f). We will read much about the gospel as we proceed through the book.

See also Mark 1:14; 16:15; Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 2:12; 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2,8,9; 1 Peter 4:17.

“Gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) – “...1. a reward for good tidings ... 2. good tidings ... In the N.T. spec. a. the glad tidings of the kingdom of God soon to be set up, and subsequently also of Jesus, the Messiah, the founder of this kingdom ... the glad tidings of salvation through Christ; the proclamation of the grace of God manifested and pledged in Christ; the gospel ... b. As the Messianic rank of Jesus was proved by his words, his deeds, and his death, the narrative of the sayings, deeds, and death of Jesus Christ ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## **Promised before through the prophets in the Scriptures**

The gospel was not, as some think, an unexpected change in God’s plan. Rather, God had planned from eternity that He would save men by the death of Jesus, and that the message about this salvation would be preached in the gospel. The prophets of the Old Testament had promised this. The fact that Jesus and the gospel fulfilled Old Testament prophecy should compel anyone who believed the Old Testament to also believe the gospel.

This gospel was promised when God said to Abraham that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed – Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14. This was fulfilled in that Jesus was born as an Israelite who brought the blessing of salvation from sin for people of all nations – Galatians 3:8; Acts 3:25,26.

Other prophecies also predicted the gospel and its provisions:

\* Jeremiah 31:31,32 compare Hebrews 8:6-12; 10:1-4,9,10,14-18

\* Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1,6-10 compare Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15,16; Romans 15:12-16

\* Romans 16:25,26; Ephesians 3:3-6

(Compare Ephesians 3:3-11; 1 Peter 1:9-12; Luke 1:69,70; Romans 3:21.)

The fact that the gospel was promised and predicted in the Old Testament will become another common topic in Romans. Note how, even in his introduction, Paul is introducing the main themes of the book.



**1:3,4 – Jesus was born of the seed of David, declared to be God’s Son with power by the resurrection from the dead.**

**Jesus was God’s Son, born a physical descendant of David**

Some say “concerning” refers back to the gospel (verse 1) which concerns the Son. Others say it refers back to the promise (verse 2) made before by the prophets. Either way, the point is the same, since the gospel is that which was promised in the Scriptures (see verse 2 above).

The gospel that was promised is a message about Jesus who was Christ (the anointed One) and Lord (Ruler) of God’s people, because He was the Son of God. This is, of course, a central theme of the gospel. Jesus was born in the flesh, but was not just a man. He was the very Son of God, Deity by eternal nature. See John 1:1-3,14; 20:28; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:2,8,9; Philippians 2:5-8.

Yet, this verse affirms, as elsewhere in Scripture, that the Son of God came to earth in the flesh as a man (John 1:14; Hebrews 2:9-14; Philippians 2:5-8). In particular, he was born of the seed of David – i.e., He was a descendant of David, just as the Old Testament had predicted. As the seed of David, He had the right to rule on the throne of David as the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed Ruler of God’s people.

Note that this was true “according to the flesh” – that is, He was a descendant of David as a man in His physical birth or ancestry. We will see in the next verse that His spirit had existed from eternity. That eternal spirit was embodied in human flesh, but He was the descendant of David only as regards the flesh.

See also Matthew 1:1; 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalms 89:3,4; 132:11; Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1; Luke 1:32,69; John 7:42; Acts 13:22,23; Revelation 22:16.

**Declared to be the Son of God with power**

In contrast to his physical ancestry as the descendant of David, Jesus was more than that: He was the Son of God. He was Deity from eternity, Divine in His essential nature. See references on verse 3 above.

This truth was declared with power. It was powerfully preached whenever the gospel was preached (compare Acts 9:20; 2:36; 13:33). This declaration was that He is the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness.

“Spirit of holiness” could refer to the Holy Spirit, who declared Him to be the Son of God by revealing and inspiring men to proclaim the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. Others claim it refers to Jesus’ spirit (which was pure or holy) in contrast to His flesh in verse 3. So, in spirit He was the Son of God, but in the flesh he was the descendant of David. The parallel expressions comparing verse 2 to verse 3 makes this latter a reasonable explanation. However, both ideas are true; it is just a question of which is meant here.

## By the resurrection from the dead

Here we are told what it is in this context that powerfully declared Jesus to be the Son of God: the resurrection from the dead.

Some say this should be translated “resurrection of the dead,” then they claim it refers to Jesus’ miraculous ability to raise the dead. He claimed to be the Son of God, and His claims were confirmed when He raised the dead.

However, all the standard translations say “resurrection from the dead,” which would appear to refer to Jesus’ own resurrection. And even “resurrection of the dead” could refer to His resurrection: He was dead and was raised, hence resurrection of the dead.

The apostles and other inspired men so often used Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead as proof of His claims, that I hardly believe any other meaning could apply here. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was the crowning miracle that validated His claims to be the Son of God – compare Acts 13:33.

The resurrection proves Jesus is:

\* The Christ, the Son of God – John 20:24-31; Romans 1:4

\* Lord and Christ – Acts 2:32-36; 17:3; Romans 14:9; Ephesians 1:20-23

\* One who forgives sins – Acts 13:30-39; Romans 4:25; Luke 24:46,47; 1 Thessalonians 1:10

\* Judge of all mankind – Acts 17:30,31

The apostles preached repeatedly that they were eyewitnesses of these events, and that His resurrection proved their claims regarding who He is – Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 10:39-41; 13:30-32; 22:14,15; 26:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,15.

As he begins his explanation of the importance of the gospel, Paul reminds us of the crowning proof for the claims of the gospel: the resurrection.

**For further discussion of the resurrection and fulfilled prophecy in the evidence for Jesus and the Bible, see articles on evidences on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

***1:5,6 – Through Christ Paul received grace and apostleship unto obedience of faith for all nations, including those in Rome.***

### **We received grace and apostleship.**

Paul here returns to His opening thoughts that he was an apostle. This apostleship came “through Him” – i.e., Jesus made it possible for Paul to be saved and become an apostle, and Jesus personally chose Paul. See notes on verse 1 regarding the meaning of apostleship and the fact that Paul was chosen as an apostle.

“Grace” could refer to the fact that Jesus granted the grace whereby Paul, like us, can be saved by receiving forgiveness of our sins by the blood of Christ – 1 Timothy 1:12-16. However, Paul also spoke of his being chosen as a preacher and apostle as an act of grace. He considered it a great blessing, of which he was completely unworthy, to be chosen as a preacher and apostle – Ephesians 3:8; Acts 9:15; 26:15-18; 1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 2:7-9.

### For obedience to the faith

“For” (εἰς) is translated “unto” (ASV) or “to bring about” (NASB, ESV). It looks forward and states the goal or purpose of Paul’s apostleship. Jesus made Paul an apostle so that he could bring others to obedience to faith (Acts 6:7; Romans 16:26).

“Faith” can be objective, referring to the gospel as the revelation or standard of truth in which we must believe. So, it is “the faith” (KJV, NKJV). For instances, see Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; Galatians 1:23; 6:10; Jude 3,20.

However, the original here has no article and says literally simply “obedience of faith” (ASV, NASB, RSV). This could be faith in the subjective sense – the faith that we have in our hearts as a result of hearing and placing confidence in the gospel message.

In either case, the lesson is the same. To be saved, we must hear and believe the gospel message, then we must obey that which we have believed.

Note that another theme of the book has been introduced. We are saved by faith, but that faith must be **obedient faith**. We will be instructed repeatedly throughout the book about the need for faith. See 1:16; 3:22,25; 4:5,16,19-25; 5:1f; 10:13-17.

And we will also be instructed repeatedly about the need for **obedience**. See 1:5; 2:5-11; 6:3,4,16-18; 10:9,10; 16:26; 15:18. See also Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

Note that, from the very outset of the book, there can be no doubt that both faith and obedience are necessary to salvation. To deny the necessity of either one is to contradict the teaching of this book, as well as the teaching throughout the gospel. Whenever anyone claims the book of Romans teaches that obedience is not necessary to salvation, they have completely misunderstood its meaning. From the outset, Paul makes clear that saving faith must be obedient faith. The gospel he preached requires obedience to the faith.

**Again, for further discussion of the role of obedience and its relationship to faith and grace in our salvation, see articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

## Among all nations for His name

Here another theme of the book is introduced: The gospel offers its blessings – especially the blessings of obedient faith – to people of all nations. It is not just for the Jews, like the Jews thought and as was primarily the case under the Old Testament. It is also for Gentiles. See Acts 9:15; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; etc. This theme too will be repeatedly emphasized in the book.

Jesus' name often stands for Jesus Himself. We honor His name when we honor Him. It especially stands for His authority (Colossians 3:17). His name stands behind the message that all nations must believe and obey to be saved.

## Among whom you also are called of Jesus Christ

Those whom Paul here addressed were among the number of those who had been called by Jesus to receive the blessings of the gospel. See verse 7; Jude 1; Revelation 17:14.

Hebrews 3:1 refers to Christians as “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.”

Philippians 3:14 – I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 4:4 – You were called in one hope of your calling.

Consider what it means to be called of Jesus Christ.

*God calls us to receive special blessings.*

\* We are called to receive spiritual blessings in this life.

1 Peter 2:9,10 – We were called out of darkness into light, that we might be the people of God, an elect race, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people for God's possession. We were guilty of sin (darkness), but God called us to leave sin and become His own special people.

Acts 2:38,29 – The blessing of remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit is a promise offered to all, as many as God shall call. This is how we leave darkness and become the people of God: by having our sins remitted (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14).

1 Corinthians 1:9 – You were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God calls us to return to communion, harmony, and unity with Jesus.

(1 Thessalonians 2:12; Romans 1:6; Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 2:11; Matthew 5:9; Acts 15:17; 1 Peter 1:17; James 2:7; Isaiah 43:1; Zechariah 13:9)

\* We are called to receive eternal life.

1 Timothy 6:12 – Lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called...

Hebrews 9:15 – Those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

(1 Peter 3:9; Colossians 3:15; Galatians 5:13; 2 Peter 1:10,11; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 5:23,24; 1 Peter 2:9; 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14)

*God calls us by the gospel.*

Some think God calls people to salvation by direct, mysterious means: you see a sign in the sky or hear a mysterious voice, etc. Most of these mysterious callings simply amount to an emotional feeling, which the person takes as a sign God has saved Him.

This idea results from the doctrine of Calvinistic predestination: God chooses each individual personally and unconditionally without regard to the character, life, desires, or choice of the individual. Then He sends the Holy Spirit to work directly in the heart of the sinner to save him and then give him an experience whereby he is convinced he is saved.

The Bible, however, says God calls men to salvation by the gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 – We are called to salvation by the gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:38,39 – The promise of salvation is for as many as God calls. The whole chapter is an example of this calling: people in sin were told by the preaching of the gospel how to be saved (verses 14-40). As many as gladly received this message obeyed it (verse 41).

John 6:44,15 – For people to come to Jesus, the Father must draw them. This drawing is done when men are taught, hear, or learn from the Father.

Acts 11:14 – Cornelius had to hear words whereby he might be saved.

Romans 1:16; Mark 16:15,16 – The gospel is the power of God to salvation. This message must be preached to all men. Those who believe and obey it will be saved (Galatians 5:13).

The gospel should be preached to people of all nations. As they hear the message, God through that message is calling them to receive salvation. Those who then obey are referred to as the “called” – they have accepted the message and by it become the special people of God.

(Revelation 17:14; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:2,3)

***1:7,8 – Paul wrote to those in Rome, called to be saints, and thanked God that their faith was proclaimed throughout the world.***

### **To all in Rome, called to be saints**

Here Paul specifically identified those to whom he was writing: the saints of God in Rome.

They were beloved of God. God loves everyone on earth (John 3:16), but He has a special love for those who are children in His family. These are especially beloved, because they have responded so as to receive the benefits of God’s love. See 1 Thessalonians 1:4; Romans 5:5-9; 8:39.

All who respond to the call of the gospel (see verse 6 regarding this call) by obedience of faith (verse 5), then become saints. So, they are called to be saints. See Acts 9:13; 1 Corinthians 1:2.

“Saint” means a person who is sanctified or holy. “Sanctify” means to set apart for special purposes (especially spiritual purposes); to dedicate, to consecrate. “Holy,” in Greek, comes from the same root word as “sanctified.” “Holiness” means the same as “sanctification.”

*\* We are sanctified by the word.*

John 17:17 – “Sanctify them by the **truth**. Thy word is truth.” (Compare verse 19.)

Ephesians 5:26 – Jesus gave Himself for the church that He might **sanctify** and cleanse it by the **washing of water by the word**. (Hebrews 10:10)

What does the word do for us? When we hear it with a good heart, it causes us to believe, obey, and be forgiven (Mark 16:15,16; 1 Peter 1:22,23; Acts 11:14; etc.).

*\* We are sanctified by Jesus’ blood.*

Hebrews 13:12 – Jesus suffered that He might sanctify people through His blood.

Hebrews 10:10 – Under the New Testament, we are sanctified through the offering of Jesus’ body. (Hebrews 10:29; 9:12-14; Ephesians 5:25,26)

So, to be sanctified, we must be forgiven by Jesus’ blood. This happens when we are converted.

*\* We are sanctified by faith.*

Acts 26:18 – In Christ, men receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are **sanctified by faith**.

*\* We are sanctified when we are baptized.*

Ephesians 5:26 – Jesus died to **sanctify** and cleanse the church by the **washing of water** by the word. There is nothing this can refer to except baptism.

1 Corinthians 1:2 – Saints or sanctified people are in the church.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – People enter the church (body) by baptism.

Acts 2:38,47 – Those baptized for remission of sins are saved and added to the church.

Many other Scriptures confirm that baptism is essential to be converted. But we have seen that conversion is the point at which people become sanctified. (Mark 16:16; etc.).

So to be set apart to God’s service, one must **hear** the **word**, which is the message of the **Holy Spirit** about the **death of Jesus**. One must **believe** that message and obey in **baptism**. God then forgives the person, sanctifies him, and adds him to His church.

So any Christian is a saint. If you know how to become a Christian, you know how to become a saint. Paul is here addressing all the saved people in Rome who were sanctified by Christ when they obeyed the faith of the gospel.

(Ephesians 2:16,19-22; Acts 9:41; Romans 16:15; 12:13; 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 1:2,3; 16:1,15; 14:33; Hebrews 6:10; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12; Ephesians 4:12; 1 Timothy 5:10; Isaiah 35:8; Jude 1)

### **Grace and peace from our Father and Jesus**

Paul then sought for them to receive grace from God and peace. This is a common greeting in letters. It appealed for people to remain in God's favor (grace) and the peace with God that results.

See 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3; 2 John 3; 2 Peter 1:2.

### **Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.**

Paul expressed gratitude for the saints in Rome and for the fact their faith was known and mentioned throughout the whole world. Since Rome was the capital city of the empire, this gave the church there a special opportunity to make known the gospel. An active, zealous church in Rome would be much more likely to become known throughout the empire than would a church in some other city. Paul was glad that their faith was such that people throughout the empire did know about the church at Rome.

Compare Romans 16:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4 and other similar comments.

***1:9,10 – Paul unceasingly mentioned the Romans in his prayers, requesting that by the will of God he could visit them.***

### **Without ceasing I mention you in my prayers.**

Paul refers to God as knowing that he often prayed for the church in Rome. Paul frequently began his epistles by assuring the Christians to whom he wrote that they were regularly remembered in his prayers. See Philippians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 1:9; etc.

Since these prayers were offered to God and no doubt often in private, no one but God would witness those prayers (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:5,10). Paul seems especially concerned to make sure they did realize his genuine concern for them. It appears that, as with other churches, there may have been some at Rome who doubted or even impugned Paul's sincerity or authority. This was typical among the Judaizers, who opposed Paul's teaching about the Old Law (see the book of 2 Corinthians). Since Paul deals at length in this letter with the views of the Judaizers, he makes special efforts to assure the saints that he does care for them and remembers them regularly in his prayers (compare Philippians 1:8).

He adds that he serves God from the spirit in harmony with the gospel (compare 2 Timothy 1:3). Note again the reference to the gospel, which becomes a common theme of the book. Service to God under the gospel must come sincerely from the inner man, not just as an act of outward motion (Romans 6:17,18; John 4:24; etc.). This expression shows that Paul was genuinely, sincerely concerned about the Roman brethren.

### **I may find a way to come to you**

Paul specifically requested in his prayers that some means might be made available whereby he could visit the Romans. In the following verses, he assures them that he had intended for some time to visit them personally, but his plans had been thwarted by other circumstances (see verses 11,13; 15:32). It may again be that some had implied that the reason he had not come was that he did not care for them or was afraid to face the Judaizers among them, etc.

Paul prayed that he could visit them, yet he knew that his going must harmonize with the will of God (compare 15:32; Acts 18:21). Sometimes we as humans make plans that do not work out. It may be that God has other plans for us, or that circumstances hinder us and God does not see fit to overcome those circumstances. God had, on occasion, directed Paul to go preach in some place other than where Paul had intended to go. We must always remember God in our plans and always pray according to His will (James 4:13-16).

***1:11,12 – Paul longed to visit so he could impart some spiritual gift to establish them, and so they could be mutually comforted by one another's faith.***

### **I may impart to you some spiritual gift.**

Paul repeats the desire expressed in verse 10 that he wanted to visit Rome. He says even that he longed to see them. He wanted them to know, regardless of what they may or may not have heard, that he strongly desired to visit them. See notes on verses 10,13 (15:23,32; Acts 19:21).

He expressly desired to see them in order to impart some spiritual gift. As shown in our notes on verse 1, imparting supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit was one of the unique works of apostles. It is likely that some in Rome already had some spiritual gifts (see 12:6), but they could receive other gifts only by having an apostle lay hands on them. As shown in verse 1, Paul as an apostle had this ability. The fact they had spiritual gifts, but needed an apostle to come to bestow additional gifts, confirms our view that only apostles could impart such gifts to others. If anyone who possessed spiritual gifts automatically had the power to pass them on, then Rome would not need Paul to come to impart some spiritual gift.



He here states his desire that the spiritual gift he would impart would help establish or strengthen them. For a list of the spiritual gifts and a statement of their purposes, see 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14. Different spiritual gifts served different purposes. Prophecy served to reveal God's word and thereby give encouragement and strength (see 1 Corinthians 14). Paul, however, does not specify what gift he expected to give them – probably, he would not know till he arrived.

**Again, for further discussion of miracles, direct revelation, and the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing and confirming God's word, see articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

**I may be encouraged with you by our mutual faith.**

As the saints at Rome would be strengthened by Paul's presence, so he hoped they could mutually encourage one another by their common faith. Being with other faithful Christians gives strength, not just to one or the other, but to all who can be involved. This is exactly how having a visiting preacher for a gospel meeting serves as a source of encouragement, both to the church and to the preacher.

***1:13-15 – Paul had often intended to visit them but had been hindered. He was a debtor to preach to Jews, barbarians, wise, and foolish, so he was ready to preach in Rome as well.***

**I often planned to come to you, but was hindered.**

As in verses 10,11 (see notes there), Paul repeats his desire and determination to visit at Rome. In fact, he says he had “often” planned to come to them. His repeated statements, both at the beginning and the end of the book, make it reasonable to conclude that he was responding to someone who was implying that he did not really want to visit them. He says he does not want them to be unaware of his deep desire to visit them (compare similar language in 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

However, his past plans to visit them had been hindered (compare 15:22-24). He does not state what circumstances had hindered him. Inspiration and even apostleship did not mean that an individual was directly guided by God in every personal decision, not even regarding where or to whom he would preach. Sometimes Paul or other preachers made plans to preach in a certain area, but God would reveal that He wanted them to preach elsewhere (Acts 16:6-10; 8:26,29). So perhaps the Holy Spirit had changed Paul's plans to visit Rome.

On other occasions, God would allow Satan to hinder the plans of inspired men in their work. See 1 Thessalonians 2:18. Obviously, Satan did not have greater power than God. So, Satan could hinder the plans of God's inspired workers only if, for some purpose of His own, God allowed Satan to cause a hindrance. In that case, God would still use His

inspired servants to preach in other places. We are not told what caused the hindrance in this specific case. If even inspired apostles did not always know exactly where or to whom God wanted them to preach, how could uninspired preachers claim such knowledge today?

Having given reasons why he wanted to visit them in verses 11,12, Paul here adds another reason. He wanted to be able to produce some fruit among them, as he had among other Gentiles. His work had emphasized preaching among Gentiles. He had converted Gentiles in many places. The “fruit” here most likely refers to making converts also in Rome. Compare John 4:36; Philippians 1:22; Colossians 1:6. It is possible some other fruit would be included (note Romans 15:28), but I suspect he has in mind especially making converts. This fits the work of preaching Paul describes in verses 14-17.

### **I am debtor to preach the gospel.**

In Romans 1:14-16 Paul discusses his responsibility to teach the gospel and the attitudes he had toward preaching.

*Paul was in debt, but not because of what people had done for him.*

Many debts are incurred because someone did something for us and we owe them in return. Paul considered himself in debt, but it was **not** because the people to whom he wanted to preach had done good for him. In fact, some had opposed and even persecuted him.

Likewise, we should not think that the only people we are obligated to teach are people who have done good for us. Like Paul, we are obligated even to people who have harmed and opposed us.

Paul does not here explain why he is indebted to preach, but note other passages:

Romans 13:8-10 – We **owe** it to men to **love** our neighbor and so fulfill the law. We should even love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

1 John 4:7-11 – We **ought** to love one another because God loved us and gave His Son for us.

Until we have the kind of love that does what people need, even when they have mistreated us, we don't have the kind of love God had. We should have this love because **God** first loved **us**. We **owe** love to God because of what He did for us. But He says we pay our debt to **Him** by showing love to **others**. And one of the greatest things we can do for others is to teach them the truth. Compare 1 Corinthians 9:16.

Illustration: Some medical students get loans from school but pay it back by giving medical care in underprivileged regions. So a debt may be transferred from one who has done something for us to one who has done nothing.

So you and I owe this debt of love to others as surely as Paul did. Christ died for us as surely as He did for Paul. We are obligated to help others as surely as he was. Men need the gospel, and we are obligated to give it.

*Paul was indebted to teach all people: Greek and Barbarian, wise and unwise.*

But this includes **everyone**. Barbarians were any people who did not know Greek language and culture. Everyone was Greek or Barbarian, wise or unwise. So, Paul was in debt to **all** people, not just to a certain class or certain number. This does not mean Paul had to personally teach everyone on earth. There are limits on our ability (see verse 15). But there are no limits based on the **kind** or **number** of people we should teach.

Paul could not say he was obligated to one kind (Greek, educated), but not to another (Barbarian, uneducated). Nor could he say he had filled his quota, so he could quit.

We too have a universal obligation to teach all people. Mark 16:15,16 – Jesus wants the gospel preached to **every** creature. We must not think we are obligated to teach only certain **kinds** of people:

- \* White people but not black, red, etc. (or vice-versa).
- \* Rich or middle-class, but not poor (or vice-versa).
- \* Educated people but not uneducated (or vice-versa).
- \* Young but not old (or vice-versa).
- \* Men but not women (or vice versa).
- \* Americans but not other nationalities.

We are debtors to **all** men. Our obligation ends only when every person on earth reaches the point he needs no more teaching. And that will never happen, so we are **always** obligated to teach.

Paul was a “**debtor**” to preach the gospel, and so are we.

### **I am ready to preach the gospel.**

“**So**” – because Paul was a debtor, he was **ready** to pay the debt by **preaching**. It is one thing to **be** in debt, but another thing to be **ready to pay** the debt. Not everyone who owes is ready to **pay** what they owe. Consider two points:

*Being ready to preach requires ability to preach.*

Some people are in debt but are not **ready** to pay because they are not **able** to. Paul was ready to preach “**so much as in me is**”: to the fullest extent of his ability (compare Romans 12:18). God requires people to do only what they are **able** to do. In some aspects of service to God, ability may vary from person to person.

Matthew 25:14-30 – The master gave different responsibilities to men according to their **ability** (verse 15). One man accomplished less than another, but both were rewarded because both did the best they were **able** to do.

Acts 11:29 – In giving, we contribute according to ability – as we have prospered (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). People who have little are not expected to give as much as those who have more.

Luke 12:48 – To whomsoever much is given, much will be required. One who has greater ability will be required to accomplish more.

2 Timothy 2:2 – **All** faithful men will be **able** to teach others. We may have little ability at first, and may never have as much ability as some. But all of us can develop some ability in teaching, and God expects us to do so.

*Being ready to preach requires willingness to preach.*

Paul was **willing** to do **as much as** he was able. Some people have debts and are **able** to pay, but are not “**ready**” because they are not **willing** to pay. God requires us to be **willing** to use all our ability in teaching, and to develop new ability as we can.

Matthew 25:14-30 – The one-talent man had less ability than the other two servants, but he was not condemned for having less ability. He was condemned for **not using the ability he had**. He was “wicked and **slothful**” (lazy – verse 26).

Too often, people excuse themselves from obeying God saying, “I **can’t** teach a class,” “I’m not **able** to go visiting,” or “I don’t have time,” “I don’t know how.” In fact, many of these **could** if they were **willing**, but they’re not **willing**.

Others may be doing much, but they have so much ability that they could be doing **more**. But instead they say, “I’m already doing more than most people,” so they refuse to do more when they **could** do more.

Be careful with excuses. Remember, God requires us to do “**as much as is in us**.” He knows our real ability and will judge us according to what we really **can** do, not according to what we **say** we can do.

2 Corinthians 8:12 – If there is a willing mind, a person is accepted on the basis of what he **has**, not on the basis of what he does not have. We must be **willing** to do whatever we are **able** to do.

Paul said, “I am **ready** to preach the gospel.” What about you and me? We are in debt like he was. Are we ready to pay the debt?

*Note that Paul would “preach the gospel” to Christians, as well as non-Christians.*

Some tell us that “gospel” is the message to be preached to those who are not disciples in order to convert them, but “doctrine” is the teaching that should be given to those who are saved. Those who make this distinction then usually go on to claim that “gospel” is essential to salvation, but “doctrine” is not.

But note that Paul hoped he could “preach the gospel” to “you” who are in Rome. Since he was speaking to saints, this meant he intended to preach the gospel to the saved as well as to the lost.

Compare 1 Timothy 1:10,11 – Sound **doctrine** is that which is according to the **gospel**. Anything contrary to sound doctrine is contrary to the gospel. This includes moral sins listed plus lawlessness, ungodliness, unholiness, and being a “sinner” (verses 6-11). Further, it includes that we must not teach a different doctrine (verses 3,4). **Anything sinful** is contrary to sound **doctrine** and so contrary to the

***gospel.*** But sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), so the gospel includes all God's commands! The gospel-doctrine distinction is a figment of the imagination.

## **1:16-32 - The Gentiles, Having Rejected God, Need the Gospel.**

***1:16 – Paul was not ashamed of the gospel for it is God's power unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.***

***Verse 16 states the theme of the book of Romans: The gospel of Christ (not the old law) is God's power to save all men who believe it.*** Paul has completed his introductory thoughts, so he here states the theme of his letter, then he uses it to introduce a section of the book that reveals man's need for the gospel. In chapter 1, Gentiles need the gospel, because generally they have rejected God. In chapter 2, Jews need the gospel, because they did not keep the law. In chapter 3, Paul summarizes showing that all men need the gospel, since all are guilty of sin.

Note the following important lessons from verse 16:

### ***The gospel is God's power to save the lost.***

***"For"*** introduces another reason Paul was ready to preach (verse 15). He was ready to preach the gospel, because he knew it was God's power to save the lost. Paul introduced the gospel at the very outset of the letter in verse 1. See notes there for a definition and other passages about the gospel. We will see as we proceed that Paul's point is that men can be saved only by the gospel, not by the Law of Moses.

*The gospel is the message of Jesus and His power to save men.*

Ultimately, men are saved by the sacrifice of Jesus that forgives their sins. But the gospel is the message that instructs men about Jesus' death and informs them how to receive the saving power of that sacrifice. See 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 15:1-8; 1 Peter 2:24; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14.

The gospel message must be believed and obeyed in order for men to be saved. But in order to believe and obey the gospel, men must learn and understand it. Men cannot be saved without the gospel.

### **The importance of the Gospel**

1 Corinthians 1:18-24 – The message of the cross is the power of God to those who are saved.

Hebrews 4:12,13 – It is living and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 – Men are called to salvation by the gospel.

John 12:32; Matthew 11:28-30 – Jesus draws men to Himself by inviting them, teaching them, and giving them reasons why they should come.

John 6:44,45 – Those who hear and learn may come to Jesus. Otherwise, they cannot come.

Acts 20:32 – The word of God's grace is able to give men the eternal inheritance.

Ephesians 6:17 – The word is the sword of the Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 – Scriptures make us wise unto salvation.

Romans 10:17 – Faith comes by hearing God's word (compare verse 14).

Mark 16:15,16 – The gospel must be preached to every creature so they can believe and be baptized and be saved.

Romans 1:16 – The gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

(Compare James 1:21; John 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; Revelation 3:20.)

*Many fail to demonstrate faith that the gospel is the means by which men are saved.*

The main application that Paul will make in the book of Romans is that, when people return to the Law of Moses, they demonstrate a lack of appreciation for the gospel as the means of salvation. He will show that the law never could save anyone from sin, so we must believe the gospel. However, there are other ways people show they do not appreciate the gospel as God's power to save.

Some teach that every person inherits the guilt of Adam's sin and is so depraved that he is incapable of understanding God's will and incapable of choosing to respond to it by faith and obedience. So, God must send the Holy Spirit directly into the person's life to compel him to believe and be saved. Such a view effectively denies that the gospel is the power of God to save sinners. It makes the irresistible direct intervention of the Holy Spirit the power of God to save, since the sinner could not respond to the gospel without the Holy Spirit's intervention.

However, men do not inherit guilt of Adam's sin, nor are they so totally depraved as to be unable to respond to the gospel. See Ezekiel 18:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Exodus 32:32,33; Hebrews 2:14,17 and 2 Corinthians 5:21; Mark 7:20-23; 1 John 3:4; Romans 6:16,19; 2:6-10; 14:12; James 1:14,15; Matthew 7:21-23; Psalms 106:37,38; Jeremiah 19:4,5; Matthew 19:14; 18:3.

As on the day of Pentecost and other Bible examples of conversion, when people learn the message of the gospel, they are able to understand, believe, and obey, if they choose to open their hearts and accept the conditions required by the gospel. The individual has power to choose to believe or to disbelieve the gospel, to accept or to reject it, to obey or to disobey. Each one is therefore responsible before God for

the choice he makes. See Genesis 2:16,17; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15; 11:25; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; Psalm 119:30.

**For further discussion of original sin and total inherited depravity, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

Then there are people who use other means besides the gospel to appeal to people to come to Christ and the church. Many churches offer fun, food, entertainment, and excitement to attract people. Others appeal to the skill of the preacher, the beauty of the building, the impressive choir, etc.

Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,11,19; 19:8,9; 24:24,25 – The apostles converted the lost by preaching the gospel to them. They never offered carnal promotions to get people to listen. They just told people about Jesus. (Acts 5:42; 8:4,5,25,35; 13:5,16; 14:1,7,21; 16:13; etc.)

The greatest motivating power we have is the story of God's love, Jesus' death, and the eternal life we can have through Him. If we trust the power of the gospel, we will not appeal to man's carnal, fleshly, physical desires.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – Our weapons are not fleshly, but have power to lead men to Jesus.

Ephesians 6:10-18 – Because we fight a spiritual enemy, we have spiritual armor. This includes God's word, the sword of the Spirit, but no carnal methods are included. The spiritual armor is sufficient. (Romans 14:17)

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5 – We save men by preaching Jesus' death, so their faith stands in God's power, not in man's wisdom. Those who reject the message will perish (Acts 13:46).

Clearly, Jesus and His apostles refused to use physical appeals, like many people use today.

**To be saved by the gospel, men must believe.**

A second major lesson stated in this theme of the epistle is that men must believe the gospel message to be saved by it. Paul has already introduced the need for faith (see verse 5 and notes there). This will become another major theme of the letter. The problem is that all of us at times have failed to obey God's word. The solution is found in trusting the sacrifice of Jesus to forgive our sins. And the gospel is the means that instructs about that sacrifice and gives us reason to believe in it. All men, Jew or Gentile, can be saved by it; but in order to be saved, any individual must believe it.

That faith is essential to salvation is taught in many other passages: Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16.

Despite the misuse of the book of Romans by many, nothing Paul says here or anywhere else is intended to deny the necessity of obedience

in order to be saved by the gospel. It would be impossible to sustain such a view in light of the fact that Paul has already proved in verse 5 that the gospel he preached was intended to produce **obedience** of faith. Faith in the gospel must lead to obedience and actually includes obedience. The faith that saves is always an obedient faith. This point will also be discussed repeatedly throughout the book. See our introductory notes for more passages about the necessity of obedience.

### **Salvation is available to all men through the gospel.**

The old law was given by God to the nation of Israel, not primarily to Gentiles. However, we will see that the purpose of the law was, not primarily to save men from sin, but to guide God's people until Jesus came and to convince them of their sins.

The gospel, however, is given to save men from sin. And since all men are guilty of sin, then all need the gospel. This applies to people of all nations, Jews and Gentiles. One of Paul's main points in Romans will be that Gentiles need and may receive the gospel, the same as Jews. Judaizing teachers thought the gospel was mainly for Jews, like the Old Testament; Gentiles could submit to it, but only by also submitting to the Law of Moses (compare Acts 15). Dispelling this view will be one of Paul's main purposes in the letter.

The gospel saves the Jew "first" in that it was preached first to Jews, beginning at Pentecost in Acts 2 (compare Acts 3:26). It was preached just to Jews until Acts 8, when it went to Samaritans. Then in Acts 10 the Gentile Cornelius received the gospel. From then on, the gospel was increasingly preached to Gentiles. Yet even so, whenever the gospel went into any city, it was taught first to the Jews especially in the synagogues, then it went to the Gentiles after the Jews demonstrated rejection. Paul's ministry was especially to Gentiles. Compare Acts 13:46; Romans 2:9,10.

For other verses on the universal nature of the gospel see Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; Titus 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:4,6; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 2:9; John 1:29; 3:16; Acts 10:34,35; Matthew 11:28; Luke 2:10.

### **Therefore, we should not be ashamed of the gospel.**

Paul began the verse by affirming he was not ashamed of the gospel. Whether or not we are ashamed of a thing depends on how valuable we consider it to be. We tend to be ashamed of bad or worthless things. We are usually not ashamed of good things. The greater value we see in something, the less likely we are to be ashamed of it.

When we appreciate the gospel, like Paul did, we will not be ashamed of it, but will see the need to preach it. One of the main reasons we neglect to teach is that we don't appreciate how much people **need** the gospel. All are condemned without it; but millions will be saved if they hear it.

So, why are we often ashamed to talk about Jesus and His word? Usually this happens because other people belittle the gospel or make



fun of us. Like Paul, we should not be ashamed to speak out for the gospel, despite other people's attitude.

*Paul set an example of bold preaching.*

2 Timothy 1:11,12 – Though he suffered many persecutions, Paul was not ashamed, because of his trust in God.

Acts 20:18-27 – Paul endured trials and plots from Jews (verse 19), and knew bonds and afflictions were ahead of him (verses 20,22), yet was willing even to lose his life if necessary to accomplish his work of preaching (verse 24).

2 Corinthians 11:22-33 – Paul describes at length the difficulties he faced because he had preached the gospel. But he did not stop preaching.

No amount of opposition could stop Paul's preaching. He was not ashamed of the gospel.

*We need to follow Paul's example and preach boldly.*

"Be followers of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

2 Timothy 1:7,8 – God does not give us a spirit of fear, but of **power**. We should not be ashamed of the Lord's testimony, but preach boldly and be willing to suffer hardship. One of the biggest hindrances to the spread of the gospel is the fact too many are ashamed to stand for the gospel.

Do we appreciate man's need for the gospel enough that we are ready to teach it boldly without shame?

***1:17 – The gospel reveals the righteousness of God from faith unto faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.***

### **The righteousness of God is revealed**

"For" shows that verse 17 continues to explain the previous verses. It gives additional explanation showing how the gospel is God's power to save and/or why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel but was ready to preach it. He holds this view of the gospel because it reveals the righteousness of God.

"Righteousness" is a form of the word often translated "justify" and is itself sometimes translated "justification." The word basically refers to the state of being right or acceptable to God. We are righteous when we are free from guilt.

As the book of Romans proceeds, we will see that there are theoretically two ways of being "right" or "justified" before God. If one has never sinned, he would be "justified" in the sense of a man who is acquitted of guilt in a court trial. He is declared to be innocent, because he never committed a crime (Deuteronomy 25:1). So, one who has never violated God's law would be righteous or have a right standing before God, because he has done nothing to alienate himself from God. This is the only way one could ultimately stand justified before God under the Old Testament law. But no one but Jesus ever achieved this, because all

have sinned (3:23). Therefore, no one will be declared righteous before God in this way (Galatians 2:16).

The only other way one may stand right before God is by having his sins forgiven or cleansed. This means he has not lived a sinless life; he has committed sin. Yet, God has provided the means for the guilt to be removed, so the sinner stands before God as if he had not sinned. He is “justified” or declared righteous. This means of righteousness, we will see, could never have come under the law. It is available only by means of the sacrifice of Jesus, which is part of the gospel. In Romans, this is called justification by faith, because it requires faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice. We are made righteous, because we are cleansed or made free from our sins – Romans 6:17,18. Note how the word “righteousness” is used, explaining these concepts, in Philippians 3:9; Galatians 2:16; Acts 13:39.

Philippians 3:9 also helps explain why this is called “the righteousness of God.” The point is not that the gospel declares God Himself to be righteous – that was known long before the gospel came. The meaning here is that God has planned and revealed a way of making men righteous. See also Romans 3:21; 9:30; 10:3.

“Righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) – “...1. in the broad sense, the state of him who is such as he ought to be, righteousness ... ; the condition acceptable to God ... a. univ. ... b. integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting: ... c. in the writings of Paul (it) has a peculiar meaning, opposed to the views of the Jews and Judaizing Christians. ... the Jews ... supposed that they secured the favor of God by works conformed to the requirements of the Mosaic law, as though by way of merit; and that they would thus attain to eternal salvation. But this law demands perfect obedience to all its precepts, and threatens condemnation to those who do not render such obedience (Galatians 3:10,12). Obedience of this kind no one has rendered (Romans 3:10) ... On this account Paul proclaims the love of God, in that by giving up Christ, his Son, to die as an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of men he has attested his grace and good-will to mankind, so that they can hope for salvation as if they had not sinned. ... (it) denotes the state acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through that faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ...”  
– Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **From faith to faith**

This expression requires some explanation to make it clear. The best explanation I can find – and one that surely harmonizes with all other Scripture – is to tie the first phrase “from faith” back to “the righteousness of God.” So, the gospel reveals God’s way of making men righteous from faith – the gospel teaches that being right before God

requires faith. God's plan for justifying people who possess faith is revealed in the gospel. Compare Romans 9:30, where righteousness "of faith" is identical to the Greek which is here translated "from faith."

The second phrase, "to faith" or "unto faith" (ASV), refers to the fact that, when people learn the gospel plan for justifying man from sin, this produces faith in those who have an honest and open heart. Faith comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:14-17). So, ***faith results when men learn the gospel plan of justifying men by faith.*** Anyone who honestly hears the gospel should be moved or impelled himself to have faith, because the gospel has taught him that faith is what is required for him to be justified.

Compare Galatians 2:16, which shows that we believe on Christ, when we come to realize (from the gospel) that we will not be saved by works of the law, but can be saved only by having faith in Christ. So, ***God's way of declaring us righteous by faith is revealed in the gospel for the purpose of leading people to possess the faith necessary to salvation.***

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

This is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4. If we assume the verse means that righteous people will make a practice of living their lives by faith, that would teach truth (2 Corinthians 5:7). But in this context it seems that the more likely meaning would be to tie "by faith" to "just."

"Just" is the adjective form of righteousness, meaning "righteous." This fits with the first part of the verse if we understand that ***the ones who are righteous because they have faith are the ones who will live*** – i.e., they will have spiritual life in harmony with God and ultimately eternal life. So, those who are righteous by faith will live. This seems to me to fit the context better. If this is the correct meaning, then Habakkuk's statement confirms what Romans is teaching about the means of being justified before God.

### ***1:18,19 – God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hinder the truth, because what is known of God is manifest in them.***

In verse 18, Paul begins a description of the general state of the Gentiles, who had rejected God to serve idols and practice immorality of all kinds. His point is to show that Gentiles surely need justification by the gospel. As we proceed, note how failure to respect the true God leads to false religion and immorality. Specifically, note how idolatry typically goes hand-in-hand with immorality.

### **God's wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness.**

"For" again ties verse 18 back to the previous verses. God has revealed a plan of righteousness in the gospel. This is necessary because, without the gospel, men stand condemned under wrath since they are

not righteous. Note how verses 15-21 contain a sequence of some seven or so “for” or “because” statements.

God’s wrath refers, not to an uncontrolled fit of temper, but to the condemnation that justice requires on those who disobey law. Those who violate law are subject to the wrath of the law, so those who violate God’s law are subject to His wrath and deserve to be punished. This wrath is revealed from heaven against all forms of ungodliness and unrighteousness practiced by men.

“Ungodliness” is obviously the opposite of godliness. Godliness does not really mean godlikeness. Godliness is piety, reverence, or respect and devotion to God. It is the attitude that honors and respects God as Deity, the object of worship, the source of religious truth, the Ruler of all, on whom we depend for all blessings. So, anything that belittles or denies these views of God would constitute ungodliness.

Note that the reference is primarily to an attitude rather than an action. Godliness is the mindset of a person whose thoughts, goals, and hopes are directed toward God. Such an attitude, like faith and love, must express itself in action, but the emphasis of the word is on attitude. It can be summarized as spiritual-mindedness. Ungodliness is that mindset of a person whose thoughts, goals, and hopes are not directed toward God, either by deliberate antagonism to His will or simply by neglect and disbelief. See Titus 2:11,12; 1 Timothy 6:11; 4:8; 6:5,6; Hebrews 12:28; 2 Timothy 3:4,5; Acts 10:2; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:10,12.

“Unrighteousness” seems obviously to be the opposite of righteousness, which we have discussed at length under verse 17 above. So, it refers to the practice of that which is not right, not pleasing or acceptable to God, and therefore leads to guilt before God. In short, it is sin and iniquity.

It seems to me that “ungodliness” emphasizes here the attitude that leads men to disrespect God and his word, then “unrighteousness” emphasizes the life and conduct that follows from the ungodliness. (This differs from the view of Whiteside and Lard, who think the terms refer respectively to sin against God and sin against man. But I see no reason why “unrighteousness” in verse 18 should not simply refer to the opposite of the “righteousness” of verse 17.)

Whiteside uses the opportunity to point out that the ultimate reason men perish is, not because they reject the gospel, but because they commit sin! The gospel is the solution to the problem of sin (verse 16), but the problem existed long before the cure was revealed. God’s wrath is on men because they are guilty of ungodliness and unrighteousness, not primarily because they reject the gospel. Men deserved to be punished regardless of the gospel. Rejection of the gospel may make the case worse, but it was a terminal case before the gospel ever came. If a man has a terminal illness but refuses to take a cure, refusal to take the

cure is not the ultimate cause of his death. The illness is the cause of his death. By rejecting the cure, he just assures that he can never overcome the disease.

“Godliness” (εὐσεβεία) – “reverence, respect; in the Bible everywhere piety towards God, godliness...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Ungodliness” (ἀσεβεία) – “1) want of reverence towards God, impiety, ungodliness” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Unrighteousness” (ἀδικία) – “...1. an act that violates standards of right conduct, *wrongdoing* ... 2. the quality of injustice, *unrighteousness, wickedness, injustice*...” – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

See Romans 1:29; 2:8; 3:5; 6:13; 1 Corinthians 13:6, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 John 1:9, Luke 13:27, 2 Corinthians 12:13, Hebrews 8:12, 2 Peter 2:13, 2:15, 1 John 5:17.

### **Suppress the truth in unrighteousness**

When men live in unrighteousness, as described in the context, they suppress (“hinder” – ASV, “hold down” – NKJV footnote) the truth. They may be guilty of this in several ways. As shown by the context, they suppress the truth and its power in their own lives by refusing to live by it. They refuse to accept God and His will, but live rather in idolatry and immorality. We will see that the problem is not that they could not know the truth – in fact, it had been made available to them. The problem is that they don’t believe or accept the truth but choose instead to live according to error.

Such people also suppress the truth in the lives of others. They may do this deliberately by actively opposing the spread of the truth. Many examples of this are recorded in the book of Acts where men persecuted Christians and faithful teachers. They may argue against the truth or ridicule and slander those who accept it.

Such people also hinder the spread of the truth by their influence and example. Their devotion to error sets a bad example for others who are influenced by them.

God’s wrath is revealed against such people, not just because they reject God’s word and refuse to serve Him themselves, but because they also stand in the way of other people’s acceptance of God’s word. Do not think that God will hold guiltless those who reject His ways and hinder His word.

### **What may be known of God is manifest**

Another “because” word introduces this verse. God’s wrath is revealed against men who live in ungodliness and unrighteousness (verse 18), because they have had the opportunity to know God and His will (verse 19). If they had no way to know better, one could understand their conduct. But God made manifest and showed to them that which may be known about God.

Acts 14:17 and 17:24 show that even the Gentiles had no excuse for their rebellion against God. True, they were not the nation God chose to receive the special revelation of the Old Testament. Yet, they had opportunity to know about God and His will even before the Old Testament and long before the coming of the gospel.

Paul will show in the next verse that anyone can know there is a God, just by observing the universe. In addition, the Old Testament shows that God gave opportunity for men to know of Him apart from the giving of the Law of Moses. All descended from Noah, who surely knew God (Genesis 6-9). Melchizedek was a servant of God (Genesis 19). Many nations besides Israel descended from Abraham and Lot.

God revealed Himself in a mighty way to Egypt in Moses' time, and did this deliberately so that people all over the earth would know about His greatness (Exodus 9:16). The people of Canaan had heard about this, even before Israel arrived (Joshua 2:10,11). Jonah prophesied to Nineveh. Israel and Judah had contact with many nations around them, and they carried the knowledge of God with them to Assyria and Babylon, when they went into captivity. Their contacts with Gentiles are described in the books of Daniel and Esther.

These are just a few of the evidences that people besides the nation of Israel had received the knowledge of the true God. Doubtless, there were many other examples not recorded in Scripture. And these events would have been passed on by word of mouth, if not in writing, to the descendants and acquaintances of those who are specifically mentioned in the Bible accounts. The point is that Gentiles generally rejected or neglected to serve the true God, but it was not because they could not have known about Him. They had the opportunity to know, and could have learned more if they had been willing to investigate. So, there was no excuse (verse 20) for their rejection of God.

If this was true of the Gentiles that God gave up on before the coming of Jesus, how much more so is it true of people today who have generally rejected to serve the true God? People often seek to rationalize that God must somehow excuse people in "darkest Africa," because they have never heard the gospel. Worse yet, some accuse God of injustice for condemning such people. But what God here says of the Gentiles is also true of heathen nations in our day. We should seek to take the gospel to them. But they are without excuse even so, for they could know that the true God exists. And if they would diligently seek Him, He would provide a means for them to receive the gospel (Acts 17:27,28; Matthew 7:7ff).

***1:20,21 – The invisible things of God are perceived through the things that are made, His power and divinity. So they are without excuse who do not glorify God but become vain in their reasoning.***

**God's invisible attributes can be clearly seen by the things that are made.**

Another “for” shows that verse 20 reveals one way that people could know about the true God (verse 19). Even though God Himself is “invisible,” yet all people can “clearly see” that there must be a God, when they observe what He has made. This has been true for all men from the creation of the world onward. It was true for the Gentiles before the gospel came, and it is just as true for people today.

Note that here is one of many passages that confirm that the Universe was created. It did not evolve. Anyone with an honest heart and common sense can tell, by simple observation of nature, that such things could not come into existence except by the power of a supremely powerful and intelligent living Being.

Life comes only from life; therefore, non-living matter could not by itself create life. Intelligent beings come only from other intelligent beings; therefore, there must be an eternal, intelligent, living God who made all that we see. Evolutionists and atheists may rationalize and ridicule to their hearts' content, but honest people continue to realize what their own eyes and investigation confirms: the Universe was created by God. This is the same concept expressed in Psalms 19:1-4. See also the verses cited earlier in Acts 14:17; 17:24ff.

Note that God here, as elsewhere, argues for His own existence and Deity. While it is true that many passages assume we know there is a God, there are still others, like this one, that plainly state the evidence. Faith is not just a blind leap in the dark. Nor do we just accept God's existence because other people say so. God provides evidence upon which to base our faith.

Here are a few other passages about God's work in creation: Genesis chapter 1; Exodus 20:11; Psalm 33:6-9; 102:25; 89:11; 90:2; 104:5-9,24-28; 19:1; 24:1,2; 95:5; 146:6; 136:5-9; 8:3,6-8; 148:5; Jeremiah 10:12; 27:5; John 1:1-3; Acts 14:15; 17:24; Isaiah 42:5; 45:18; 40:26; Hebrews 1:10; 11:3.

**For further discussion of creation as evidence for God, see our detailed study about evidences on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

### **His eternal power and Godhead**

Not everything about God can be known by observing the Universe. We cannot know all of His attributes, let alone can we know His will for us and how we ought to live. But we can know that the true God exists –

i.e., we can know His Deity or Godhead. Whoever made the Universe, that is God, because only God could make the Universe.

We can also know His eternal power. Only one possessing supreme power could be an adequate explanation for the Universe. Humans could never make it. Whoever made the Universe, must be supremely powerful compared to us. And that powerful Being must be eternal, since He must have existed before the Universe that He created (compare John 1:1-3).

We can also deduce from the creation that God is infinitely wise and intelligent, for supreme intelligence would be required to create the Universe, just as supreme power would be required. Perhaps Paul intended to include God's wisdom in his reference to Godhead. Or perhaps he did not intend to list here all that we can know about God from the creation.

Nevertheless, there are limits to what we can know about God from observing nature. There is much about God that we can know only by means of revelation. He must speak to man in some form in order for us to know His will and His dealings with man. This purpose is served by Scripture. But all who observe the Universe can come to know that the true Creator God must exist. This should lead them to sincerely seek to know His will. If they do search with zeal and devotion, He will see that they receive the opportunity to find the revelation of His will (Matthew 7:7-11; Acts 17:27,28).

### **They are without excuse**

All this means that people who do not know about God and His will are without excuse. People may try to excuse the "ignorant savages in Africa." They may even blame God for condemning those who are ignorant. Yet the fact remains that people in ignorance are without excuse just as surely as were the Gentiles to whom Paul here refers (see notes on verse 19). All men can know from observing the Universe that God must exist. And further, the Creator God cannot be something in nature, since all that we see in nature is that which was created (see verses 23,24). God cannot be mountains, seas, sun and heavenly bodies, the earth itself, nor plants or animals. Nor can that God be anything made by man, such as an image or statue; since such "gods" were made by men, they could never have made us.

Those who sincerely search for the true Creator God will reject the heathen gods and will continue their search till they find the true God. This is why no one can truly plead ignorance of God as an excuse for evil. They could know, if they would know. Therefore, they are without excuse when they do not know. See Acts 17:30.

### **They did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful**

Another "because" introduces verse 21, showing that the people were without excuse (verse 20), since they had the opportunity to know God, but they refused to properly acknowledge and honor him (verse 21).



Once again Paul affirms that all people, even those in the depths of idolatry, have a way to know God. He affirms that “they knew God.” That is, they have heard about the true Creator God in some way. It may have been in traditions handed down from past events (as discussed on verse 19), or it may be simply from observing the Universe. But in some way, they have some knowledge of God.

The problem was that, despite this knowledge, they refused to give God the glory and appreciation that was His due. They did not glorify Him, nor were they thankful. This affirms the fundamental truth that God, and only God, deserves our worship. There is a fundamental glory that belongs only to God. It must not be given to any other (Matthew 4:10; Isaiah 42:8; Acts 10:25,26).

But not only is it wrong to give to others the worship and glory that belongs to God, it is just as wrong to fail to give to God that glory He deserves. This failure to worship God and be thankful is the first step Paul describes in the downward path of the Gentiles. They knew God. But before they worshiped idols and became foolish and immoral, first they failed to worship and give thanks to the true God for all He has done.

The same pattern is typical in any individual or society that falls from faithfulness to God. They begin by knowing God. But they become indifferent and ungrateful. They neglect worship, miss church meetings, and prefer to do other things instead. Unless they repent, soon they become involved in more extreme forms of error. As time passes, they become more hardened, and given enough time, they end up in extreme religious error and often in obvious immorality. In a society, unless there is repentance, this progression becomes worse and worse till the society falls.

Yet, it all begins with failure to express our worship and thankfulness to God. See how this ought to teach us the importance of worship and thankfulness?

Here are other passages about the importance of showing thankfulness to God: 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 2:7; 1:12-14; Philippians 4:6-8; 2 Thessalonians 1:3,4; Matthew 15:36; Luke 17:12-18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; Romans 1:20-23.

### **Futile thoughts, and foolish, darkened hearts**

The next step, after the failure to worship God, came futile thoughts accompanied by foolish, darkened hearts. These terms describe ignorance and lack of understanding. But this did not result, as we have seen, from lack of opportunity; it is willful ignorance. It is that silly, foolish, futile human reasoning that comes when people have denied the truth and seek to rationalize their rejection of truth.

Such folly is described repeatedly in the book of Proverbs. That book shows that true wisdom comes only from acknowledging the true God and His revelation (Proverbs 1:7). This leads to searching His will and

becoming truly wise. But those who refuse God's wisdom will become consummately foolish (Proverbs 1:20-2:12).

We see a classic example of this in the theory of evolution. The theory is propagated primarily by those who do not want to accept the existence of God and the Bible as His word. True, some claim to believe in God and still believe in evolution, but their compromise invariably leads them to reject some or much of God's word. But defenders of evolution come up with the most bizarre efforts to rationalize their theory, despite the clear evidence in nature and in Scripture against it. The result is ultimately all the perversions we see described in this chapter.

***1:22,23 – They claimed to be wise but instead became fools who exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of man or animals.***

***Professing great wisdom, they were actually great fools.***

Amazingly, those who have rejected true wisdom and have therefore become ultimately foolish (verse 21), are the very ones who claim to possess the height of wisdom! They boast boldly and loudly that they are the ones who are educated, informed, and "scientific." They claim overwhelming evidence for their position, and they say those who believe in God and the Bible are ignorant, foolish, and unscientific. It is an incredible, yet all too common example of people in the deepest error, who are the first to accuse others of having the very problem that they themselves epitomize! These people claim ultimate wisdom and accuse others are being ignorant and foolish, when the truth is just the opposite.

Like the Athenians, many spend their time in nothing else but telling and hearing new things – Acts 17:21. Yet when they hear the true wisdom of God, many mock and reject it – verse 32. Like the Greeks, many seek after wisdom yet reject the message of the cross as being foolishness – 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5. They follow what is falsely called knowledge and as a result are always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth – 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 3:7.

Some people, whom society exalts as ultimate sources of wisdom, are often some of the greatest scoffers against the true gospel: college professors, philosophers, scientists, intellectuals, and scholars of all kinds. This is the obvious case with defenders of evolution (see verse 19). A man, who claims that a watch or a computer could come into existence without a maker, is indisputably ignorant and foolish. And likewise, a man who claims the Universe with all its complexities came into existence without God, is equally ignorant and foolish, no matter how many degrees he may have and no matter how learned he may be in other matters. See Job 12:7-9.

But this also applies to many others who defend a rationalistic view of religion and morality. Humanists and others claim that ethics and

morality should be determined entirely on the basis of human reason, completely without Divine revelation. They sometimes claim to be religious, but in other cases openly admit their atheism. In all cases, they seek to determine truth by human wisdom without regard for Scripture. And sure enough, they profess that they are the ones who are wise, and all who follow the Bible are ignorant fools. (Compare Jeremiah 10:23.)

These are the kind of people that Paul describes here in Romans 1. They were the philosophical great granddaddies of the rationalists and Humanists of today. In his day, Paul found them in Athens in Acts 17. The Greeks had used this approach for years (1 Corinthians 1:18-24). And the leading Romans had admired and adopted these Greek philosophies. And sure enough, many of them worshiped idols and became incredibly immoral, just as Paul describes in the following verses. The same had characterized many Old Testament idol worshippers (compare Jeremiah 10:14).

The world may fume against it, but the truth remains that ultimate wisdom belongs only to those who acknowledge the true God. All other courses lead to ignorance and darkness.

**They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like people or animals.**

Despite the evidence that there is a Creator God, men refuse to recognize and honor Him (verses 20,21). They claim this shows great wisdom on their part, but really it shows their ignorance and folly (verse 22). One evidence of their folly is that they often end up worshiping idols: images of people or animals or creeping things (“reptiles” –ESV).

As discussed previously on verses 19-21, even common sense must tell that these cannot truly be God. The true God is the Creator of the Universe (verse 20). But man could never create the Universe. We have never created an animal or plant of any kind and made it come alive. How could we create the whole Universe? And if we cannot, then surely the animals, that are less intelligent than us, could never do so. So how could we or they be God (see more on verse 25)? And even more, how could an image made by the hands of men ever be our Creator?

Yet, men are by nature religious. They will worship something. The ultimate reason they do not worship the true God is that He makes demands of them. If they honor Him, they must submit to His will. But they do not want to sacrifice their own will to serve the will of another. They do not want restrictions on their freedoms, their time, and their money.

So, people reject the true God and make gods that please themselves. Their gods are supposed to offer them protection and benefits in time of need, yet the gods demand only what the people imagine they demand (since the people invented the gods to begin with). The results are gods that please the people. They let the people live as

the people please, which naturally leads to immorality and selfish wickedness of all kinds, exactly as described in verses 26-32.

And people want gods they can see. An invisible God (verse 20) is not satisfactory. Their lives are based on physical, material interests and pursuits. Some believe that this life is all there is. In any case, this life or a life like it is their main objective. So they want a material god – one they can see and touch. The result is idolatry: worship of things in nature or things made by men's hands.

So, the God who is eternal and immortal – who cannot die, decay, or corrupt – is replaced by gods that do die, decay, and corrupt (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15,16; Deuteronomy 4:16-18). They are really like the people and animals, only supposedly a little stronger, wiser, etc. See Exodus 32:4; Deuteronomy 4:19; 5:7-9; 17:2-5; 2 Kings 21:1-6; 23:4,5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 10:7,14; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 5:21 (verses 18-25).

One would think that people, who profess such great wisdom, would be able to figure out that idols cannot be gods. Yet, the Greeks, known for their great human wisdom, were also known for elaborate mythology regarding their gods. And the Romans adopted almost the same concepts. Paul had dealt with this at Athens and repeatedly in teaching the Gentiles. The same beliefs were held by the nations around Old Testament Israel.

We see a similar progression today in modern American society. In the name of science and human learning, people increasingly reject the God of the Bible and become antagonistic toward believers. The evolutionists, Rationalists, and Humanists claim superior learning. Yet, at the same time, the people who are influenced by these philosophies end up in the Occult and the New Age Movement, with their emphasis on unexplainable spirit forces and even the gods of Hinduism and Buddhism. They increasingly bow before images like Paul describes. But even when they don't actually bow before images, their real gods are people – they worship their own ideas and trust in themselves to solve their problems.

People will have gods, whether or not they have formal worship rituals. Invariably, those who turn from the true God will worship lesser gods of human invention.

***1:24,25 – God gave them up in their lusts that their bodies might be dishonored among themselves, for they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.***

***They exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.***

As in verse 23, those who follow this path end up worshipping people, animals, and images. They exchange the true concept of God – truth that

they once knew (verses 18-21) – and instead end up worshiping and serving that which was itself created! A “creature” is something that has been created. Instead of worshiping the God who made the Universe, people end up worshiping part of what the Creator made. It is incredibly foolish – which is exactly what verses 22,23 said about it. See the notes there for a description of how this happens and the evidence that we see it even around us. Note that this philosophy is here plainly identified as a “lie.”

And note how closely the true God is identified with His work as Creator. So much is this so that the work of creation becomes, by itself, a unique identifier of the true God. The true God created the Universe. There is no other explanation for its existence (verse 20). So, whoever did the work of creation must be God, and whatever or whoever did not do the work of creation cannot be God. To honor as god anything that was itself created, is to believe and practice a lie. It is just that simple.

And note the consequence of this for Jesus. John 1:1-3 shows clearly that Jesus is the Creator. All things that have been made, were made by Him. Therefore, He was not created. According to the argument here in Romans 1, if He is the Creator, He must be God. If he was created, He cannot be God. Any view that claims Jesus was created is denying His true nature. But of course, if He is the Creator, then as described here in Romans 1, He deserves our worship, service, and honor. He possesses Deity.

**For further discussion of the Deity of Jesus, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

**God also gave them up to uncleanness, lusts, and dishonoring their bodies among themselves.**

What Paul is here describing is the typical pattern practiced by unbelieving, heathen Gentiles (1 Thessalonians 1:9). As a result of their refusal to worship and honor God, they ended up in idolatry (verses 18-25). They gave up on God by refusing to worship Him, so God gave up on them (compare verses 26,28). Similar language is used regarding Gentile idol worshipers in Acts 14:16; 17:30. God determined to simply leave them alone. There was no point in further efforts to rebuke them, call them to repentance, or protect them from the consequences of their own evil. So, He simply allowed them to go according to their own will and suffer the consequences.

Note that God gave up on them only after they gave up on God. This does not fit the Calvinistic concept of unconditional predestination. They were not rejected from before the world began. God gave up on them only after they chose to give up on Him. They had the power to choose. They made the wrong choice and persisted in that choice till God gave up on them.

The next step in their downward progression was immorality of all kinds: uncleanness, lusts, and acts that mutually dishonored their bodies (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:5). Note how immorality is here associated with idolatry. Individual idol worshipers might live relatively decent lives, but the general pattern of idolatry is that it condones and is practiced by people who also practice immorality.

The idol worshipers of the nations that surrounded Old Testament Israel were incredibly immoral. They often practiced immorality with the approval of their religious leaders, and often even in the name of religion as part of their service to idols. Their worship often involved drunken, gluttonous banquets and sexual uncleanness of all kinds, including fornication. Often the temples had female and male prostitutes as priests and priestesses with whom the people “worshiped” by means of sexual rites. Note Israel’s involvement in such immoral idolatrous worship in Exodus 32 and Numbers 25.

Likewise, the idol worshipers in Rome were extremely immoral. This had been true of the Greek idol worshipers and was likewise true of Roman idol worship. The church in Corinth largely consisted of people who had come from this background, and Paul lists the immoralities they had practiced in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Why is this so often the case? One reason is that idol worship is the product of human invention, so men make it what they want. They seek religion that justifies them as “good” people, even when they do whatever they want to do. If you want to commit fornication, you find a god that accepts the practice. If you want to commit drunkenness, you find a god that accepts that practice, etc. The result was that, instead of making the people better, idol worship condoned whatever the people wanted to practice. The people molded the religion to please themselves, rather than the religion molding the people to serve the higher standards of God’s word. How much different is this from many denominations today that claim to be Christian?

Verses 26-32 will proceed to list many of the sins that the Gentiles committed after they began to accept idol worship.

***1:26,27 – God gave them up to vile passions: women changing the natural use into what is against nature, and men leaving the natural use of woman, burning in lust toward one another and receiving the penalty of their error.***

### **Homosexual practices among those who desert God**

Verse 24 says God gave up on these who had given up on Him (compare verse 28). They then went into uncleanness and lusts and dishonored their bodies among themselves. These descriptions surely include various forms of sexual immorality. Here in verses 26,27 Paul becomes more specific in describing one form that was taken by this uncleanness, lust, and dishonoring of the body.

Some today seek to deny that Paul here refers to homosexuality, but the conclusion is absolutely unmistakable to any honest person. The practice of homosexuality has occurred throughout most of history, but is especially common in corrupt societies. It is said to have been common in ancient Greece and in ancient Rome, even among prominent leaders of society and government. There is every reason why Paul should deal with the practice, especially here in the midst of a discussion of the moral corruption that often accompanies idolatry.

**They leave the natural use to practice what is against nature.**

Genesis 1:26-28 – From the beginning, God created **male and female** and told them to reproduce. God's natural order is for male and female to mate and reproduce. Fundamental human anatomy confirms this. But homosexuality is an unnatural abuse or perversion of reproductive mating. Any attempt to mate with another person of the same sex is inherently and undeniably against nature. It simply is not the natural way. The physical anatomy simply provides no natural way to mate with another person of the same sex.

So when lesbians seek sexual fulfillment, they have “exchanged the natural use for what is against nature,” exactly as Paul describes here. And when homosexual men burn in lust for other men, they have “left the natural use of the woman.” The natural order is for a man to mate with a woman. When a man attempts sexual fulfillment with another man or a woman with a woman, they have forsaken the natural rule of man mating with woman. These are the undeniable basics.

(See 2:27 to see that not all that is unnatural is sinful. But some things are a perversion of nature and so are sinful.)

“Nature” (φύσις) – “... nature, i.e. a. the nature of things, the force, laws, order, of nature; as opp. to what is monstrous, abnormal, perverse ... Romans 1:26; ... as opposed to what has been produced by the art of man ... Romans 11:21,24 ... as opposed to what is imaginary or fictitious ... Galatians 4:8; nature, i.e. natural sense, native conviction or knowledge, as opp. to what is learned by instruction and accomplished by training or prescribed by law ... (i.e. the native sense of propriety) ... 1 Corinthians 11:14; ... guided by their natural sense of what is right and proper, Romans 2:14; ... b. birth, physical origin ... c. a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature ... d. the sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others, distinctive native peculiarities, natural characteristics ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. (Related words are used in Romans 1:26; 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 10.)

“...1. condition or circumstance as determined by birth, *natural endowment/condition, nature*, esp. as inherited fr. one's ancestors, in contrast to status or characteristics that are acquired



after birth ... 2. the natural character of an entity, *natural characteristic/disposition* ... 3. the regular or established order of things, *nature* ... 4. an entity as a product of nature, *natural being, creature* ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

### **Men burn in their lust for other men, men with men.**

Lust means desire. So Paul describes men who lust or desire to do with men what naturally would be done with a woman. But men leave the natural use of the woman and burn in lust for other men, men committing with other men what ought to be done with a woman. The meaning could not be clearer. Instead of using the term "homosexual," Paul uses the language available to him to describe the act unmistakably.

Note the connection to Old Testament prohibitions in Leviticus 18:22,23; 20:13,15,16 – A man lying with a male was an abomination. The expression "as with a woman" proves that "lie" here refers to sexual mating (see any dictionary), and it confirms that the natural order is for a man to do this with a woman. (Compare Genesis 30:14-17; 39:7-14; Numbers 5:13, etc.) God then associates homosexuality (verse 22) with mating with a beast in verse 23 (note: "nor"), obviously because both are unnatural defilements of reproduction.

Now note the parallel between Leviticus and Romans 1. The language is nearly identical: A man burns in lust for or lies with another man, like a man normally or naturally would do with a woman. The language is similar in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

So Leviticus says homosexual acts are an abomination, just like bestiality. Paul in Romans says, by inspiration of God, that this is "vile passion," "shameful," "error," "against nature" (NKJV). Other translations use "unseemliness" (ASV), "degrading passions" and "indecent acts" (NASB), and "vile affections" (KJV).

The context shows this is a practice of those who, regardless of their claims, have given up on God, so He has given up on them (verses 21,24,26,28). They are subject to God's wrath, guilty of ungodliness and unrighteousness (verse 18), futile and foolish and darkened in heart though they profess to be wise (verses 21,23), walking in lusts and uncleanness they dishonor their bodies among themselves (verse 24), along with others who have a debased mind and do things that are not fitting (verse 28). They are classed with those who commit other kinds of immorality that lead to **spiritual** death (verses 28-32). And God rebukes alike those who actively participate in the practice and those who approve, defend, or justify it (verse 32).

### **They receive in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.**

There are many penalties for sin, especially the ultimate punishment of the lake of fire and loss of eternal life. But the penalty Paul describes here for homosexuality is something "in themselves."



This could be guilt and shame, such as most homosexuals feel, even when they try to “come out of the closet” and defend their sin. But it seems more likely to me to refer to the diseases that so often accompany sexual promiscuity, especially homosexuality.

Dr. Fred Schwarz points out male homosexuals seek pleasure in the sewer of the body. Harm is inevitable. Venereal disease is rampant because of multiple partners. Studies show that, while comprising about 3% of the population, homosexuals account for 80% of America’s most serious sexually transmitted diseases, including about two-thirds of all AIDS cases. Homosexual youths are 23 times more likely than heterosexual youths to get a venereal disease.

In addition, there are the problems of alcoholism, drug addiction, and physical violence that are far more common per capita among homosexuals than heterosexuals. Whereas the average American can expect to live into his seventies, the average age at death for homosexuals, according to one study, is 41 (“Sexual Disorientation,” page 6).

### Other passages regarding homosexuality

Genesis 1:26-28 – God told male and female to reproduce. He specified that man should be “one flesh” with his **wife** (2:24). The New Testament confirms that this refers to the lifetime marriage bond, and man has no right to change God’s order (Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-33; compare Romans 7:2,3). “One flesh” includes the sexual bond (1 Corinthians 6:16). The sexual union and reproduction must occur within the marriage bond. The result of that reproduction gives children a family with **both a father and a mother** to raise them (Ephesians 6:1-4). Throughout Scripture, only heterosexual marriage gives children the family relationship God ordained.

Hebrews 13:4 – The sexual relationship (the “bed”) is undefiled only within marriage. A sexual relationship outside marriage constitutes “fornication.” But remember that marriage is honorable only between a man and a woman. So, homosexuality must be fornication.

1 Corinthians 7:2-4 – To avoid fornication, a man should have his own “wife” (i.e., woman). Husband and wife should give one another due affection, because neither has authority over his/her own body. Note: God here expressly confirms that marriage companions must be of the opposite gender and that each may satisfy sexual desires only with his/her marital companion. It necessarily follows that same-sex unions never constitute proper marriages, but rather constitute “fornication.” See also Genesis 19:1-11; 2 Peter 2:6-8; Jude 7.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-11 – Homosexuals and sodomites (NKJV) are listed with other sins that are “contrary to the gospel” and cause people to not inherit the kingdom of God. These terms definitely refer to homosexuality, and are so translated in virtually all

modern translations (NKJV, NIV, NASB, RSV, etc.; see NKJV footnotes; compare Thayer and other Greek dictionaries).

Paul's approach to the subject leads to an interesting observation. The prevalence of homosexuality in society is not just a problem in of itself. Rather, it is a indicator of a much deeper problem in the society. To the extent that a society turns its back on God and loses its appreciation for His blessings, to that extent they become much more prone to such practices as homosexuality and the other evils that Paul is about to discuss. So the extent of homosexuality is actually a symptom of a much deeper problem in a society.

None of this means homosexuals cannot be saved. Some in Corinth had been – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. But as with other soul-defiling sins, those who practice it must repent of the practice, turn from it, and be cleansed by the blood of Christ according to the gospel. In fact, Paul's whole point in context is that he is describing people who need the gospel so they can be saved from sin.

**For further discussion of homosexuality, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

***1:28,29 – Since they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to do things not fitting: unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whisperers.***

***God gave them over to a debased mind, to do things that are not fitting***

Paul has repeatedly said that God gave up on these people, because they gave up on Him (verses 24,26). Here he says it was because the people did not like to retain God in their knowledge. They “disapproved” of God (ASV footnote). They “did not see fit to acknowledge God” (NASB). They knew about God (verse 19), yet nevertheless chose to not honor Him (verse 21) and instead followed their own human concepts of God and of morality (verses 22-32).

Since they refused to honor and acknowledge Him as God, He gave them up to uncleanness (verse 24), vile passions (verse 26), and a debased mind (verse 28) or depraved mind (NASB). When people forsake God, all kinds of evil will fill their lives instead. Their lives become characterized by things that are “not fitting” or “not proper” (NASB).

The following verses list many of these things. This does not mean that everyone who refuses to believe in God will practice all these things. But they will usually practice some of them, and many will practice many of them. As we have described, one main reason people refuse to accept God is that they do not want to live by His rules. Having rejected Him,

they feel free to live by their own desires and opinions. Since the goal was to live as they please, immorality of all types generally results.

Nor is this intended to list all the sins wicked men may commit, but it is a reasonably detailed list and surely gives the sense of the kind of people that result when people are no longer restrained by faith in God. Do these kinds of people make the world a better place or a worse place? If these people do not make for a better society, then perhaps for this and many other reasons we should consider the possibility that serving God is the better choice.

Whiteside observes that these people are clearly not in covenant relationship with God, yet God still held them accountable for their sins, including fornication and other sexual sins. If people are not accountable for obeying God simply because they have not committed themselves to serve Him, then they cannot be guilty of sin. But sin is exactly the problem that Paul attributes to them here and throughout chapter 1-3. If they are not accountable for sin against God's law, then they don't need salvation, don't need Christ, and don't need the gospel. But the whole point here is that they do need salvation through Christ under the gospel, because they are sinners. ***Any view, that claims alien sinners are not subject to God's laws, including his laws of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, is a view that directly contradicts Paul's main point.***

We are told that those who reject God are filled with the following:

### **all unrighteousness**

"Unrighteousness" seems obviously to be the opposite of righteousness, which we have discussed at length under verse 17 above. So, it refers to the practice of that which is not right, not pleasing or acceptable to God, and therefore leads to guilt before God. In short, it is sin and iniquity (see definitions and other references listed under verse 18).

Distinguishing technical distinctions among the words in the list is not always easy. I am not sure that God intended us to view the terms as all mutually exclusive. I see no reason why the meanings of some words cannot overlap one another. "Unrighteousness," in particular, seems to me to be a general word for all kinds of sinful conduct, which introduces the list and perhaps includes everything in the list.

### **sexual immorality**

Fornication is a general term for sexual relations outside of scriptural marriage (Hebrews 13:4). It includes all kinds of illicit sexual relations, including adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, etc. (This term is not found in the ASV, NASB, etc.)

See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21;

Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23.

“Fornication” (πορνεία) – “...fornication ... a. prop. of illicit sexual intercourse in general ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **wickedness**

This also appears to be a broad, general word for wickedness or “evil” (ESV). It is often translated “iniquity.” Thayer on “malice” (see below) concludes that wickedness is the outward expression of the “malice” which abides in the heart. See Matthew 22:18; Mark 7:22 (plural); Luke 11:39; 1 Corinthians 5:8; Ephesians 6:12.

“Wickedness” (πονηρία) – “depravity, iniquity, wickedness ... malice” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **covetousness**

Covetousness is greed (NASB): love for money and material things to the point that one sins or is hindered in his service to God. Anytime we are willing to sin because of love of money, we are covetous. One can covet money or possessions or even people. Exodus 20:17 warned not to covet your neighbor’s wife. So, this can also have an application regarding sexual morality.

See Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27.

“Covetousness” (πλεονεξία), – “lit., ‘a desire to have more’ ... always in a bad sense...” – Vine.

### **maliciousness**

Malice is the ill-will or attitude of heart toward another that causes one to seek to harm others or take unfair advantage of them. As Thayer points out, it is the attitude that leads to the outward manifestation of “wickedness” (see above).

See 1 Corinthians 5:8; 14:20; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:1,16.

“Malice” (κακία) – “...1. malignity, malice, ill-will, desire to injure ... 2. wickedness, depravity ... 3. Hellenistically, evil, trouble ... κακία denotes rather the vicious disposition, πονηρία the active exercise of the same ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **envy**

Many people are characterized by a bitter envy and self-seeking. They develop a contentious rivalry in which each one wants his own way, wants to be exalted or glorified before others, wants to have for himself what he sees others enjoy, and perhaps resents good things that happen to others, especially when he would like to have those things for himself.

See 1 Peter 2:1; Matthew 27:18; Titus 3:3; James 3:14-17; 1 Timothy 6:4; Galatians 5:19-26; Romans 13:13; Philippians 1:15.

“Envy” (φθονος) – “the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others; this evil sense always attaches to this word ... Note: Zelos, ‘zeal or jealousy’ is to be distinguished from phthonos ... The distinction lies in this, that ‘envy’ desires to deprive another of what he has, ‘jealousy’ desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for itself.” – Vine.

## **murder**

This refers to taking the life of another human being. People are in God’s image, therefore killing a man (male or female, regardless of age or physical condition) is sinful, whereas killing a plant or animal is not (Genesis 9:2-6). This would include the modern practice of abortion, since the unborn is considered by God to be a child or baby just the same as those who have been born.

Others have as much right to live as we do. So, killing another is not doing good, but is unloving (Romans 13:8-10). We would not want others to do it to us, so we ought not do it to anyone else.

See Genesis 9:2-6; Matthew 15:19,20; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Romans 13:8-10; Exodus 23:7; 20:13; Proverbs 6:16,17; Deuteronomy 27:25.

## **strife**

Some folks are obnoxious and contentious, always stirring up conflict over something. Others are just determined to run things their way regardless of the impact on others. They often cannot get along with their family, their co-workers, their neighbors, or even other church members.

This is translated “debate” in the KJV, but does not refer to a sincere effort to resolve a difference based on Scripture. Rather, it is an attitude that seeks to exalt one’s own ideas and opinions, regardless of Scripture and regardless of the harm done to others. This attitude leads to frequent quarreling, often for the sake simply of winning an argument, proving oneself right (or avoiding admitting one is wrong), or getting one’s own way. The standard has become our human desires and will, not the will of God.

“Strife” (ερις) – “...contention, strife, wrangling: Romans 1:29; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 1:11; 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:9...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## **deceit**

“Deceit” originates in the idea of the bait of a trap that offers someone something apparently good, only to seduce them to a situation that will result in their harm instead. So, it is the idea of misleading someone to believe something is true, when it is not, especially for the sake of taking unfair advantage or cheating them. It is the art of the con man.

See examples of lying and deceit in 1 Peter 2:1,22; 3:10; Matthew 15:18-20; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8,27; 22:14,15; Proverbs 6:16-19; 19:22; Psalm 24:3-5; 40:4; Exodus 20:16; John 8:44; Acts 5:1-9.

“Deceit” (δολος) – “primarily ‘a bait, snare;’ hence, ‘craft, deceit, guile’” ... – Vine.

### **evil-mindedness**

This is also translated “malignity” or “maliciousness.” It is similar to the previous word for “malice.” Vine adds that it is an evil disposition that tends to put the worst construction on everything. Perhaps the idea is malice, but especially that which is always attributing the worst to others. It is the attitude that leads sinful people to accuse Christians of the worst of motives, even when they cannot find fault in their deeds.

“Evil-mindedness” (κακοηθεια) – “...bad character, depravity of heart and life ... specifically used of malignant subtlety, malicious craftiness...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **whisperers**

A whisperer is a slanderer who seeks to spread unfounded or false statements harmful to another person’s reputation, especially for sinister motives (compare 2 Corinthians 12:20). He may have a grudge against another and so seeks to harm his reputation, or he may simply delight in spreading dirt about others. In any case, he reviles others, spreading things that make them look bad from impure motives or without first proving them to be true.

“Whisperer” (ψιθυριστης) – “a whisperer, secret slanderer, detractor” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**1:30,31 – Backbiters, hateful to God, violent, proud, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful.**

### **backbiters**

Like the whisperer (verse 29), a backbiter is a slanderer who seeks to spread unfounded or false statements harmful to another person’s reputation, especially for sinister motives (compare 2 Corinthians 12:20). Vine says, “the distinction being that (a backbiter) denotes one guilty of open calumny, (whisperer) one who does it clandestinely.”

“Backbiter” (καταλαλος) – “a defamer, evil speaker” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **haters of God**

This term is surely appropriate for the Gentiles described in this context. They refused to acknowledge God despite the evidence that they had seen. This amounts to hating God, and in many cases involves open opposition to the true God. Some will plainly speak their hatred of God’s

will and His Divine revelation. But whether one admits it or not, one who refuses to love God thereby demonstrates hatred of God.

“Hater of God (θεοστυγης) – “hateful to God, exceptionally impious and wicked” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **violent**

Other translations have here “insolent.” This is closely related to “pride,” the next item in the list. The NKJV emphasizes how this pride and haughtiness often leads people to act harmfully toward others. Thayer shows that it also includes speaking insults to another, again done for the purpose of hurting them. The common element in all these definitions is that of doing injury to others.

“Violent” (υβριστης) – “‘violent, injurious, insolent’ ... (AV, ‘despiteful’).” – Vine.

“1) an insolent man; 2) one who, uplifted with pride, either heaps insulting language upon others or does them some shameful act of wrong” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **proud**

This is also translated “haughty” (ASV, ESV) or “arrogant” (NASB). It is strongly related in concept to “boastful” (see the next term). This emphasizes the attitude of one who thinks he is above others, more important, or ought to have preeminence. He often looks down on others with contempt. As a result, he often refuses to admit his errors and is determined to have his own way. Such attitudes often lead to strife and conflict with others.

People who turn against God are often proud, because pride involves selfishness and self-exaltation. People pursue their own pleasures, wealth, power, honor, beauty, and anything that pleases them or exalts them above others. See 1 Peter 5:5,6; Psalm 138:6; Matthew 23:12; Luke 18:9-14.

To obtain the blessings of God’s grace, men must cease being proud and must instead humble themselves before God. They must realize whatever good things they receive from God come, not because men are so good they deserve them, but because God is so good He offers them to those who are unworthy.

See also Romans 12:3-5; Philippians 2:2-5; Proverbs 6:16-19; 16:5,18; 13:10; 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 1:30,32; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Timothy 3:2; Luke 14:7-11; Galatians 6:1; Colossians 3:12,13.

“Proud” (υπερηφανος) – “...1. showing one’s self above others, overtopping, conspicuous above others, pre-eminent ... 2. especially in a bad sense, with an overweening estimate of one’s means or merits, despising others or even treating them with contempt, haughty...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.



## **boasters**

A boaster is one who displays his alleged achievements and good qualities so others can exalt and honor him. It is closely related to the previous term “proud,” in that an arrogant person wants to be treated as more important than others. He wants everyone to praise him and view him as better than others. One way to try to accomplish this is to brag or otherwise display the reasons one thinks he is better than others.

The Bible teaches that we should seek praise and glory from God (Matthew 6:1ff). If He approves of us, what does it matter how poorly others view us? Many of the greatest servants of God have been ridiculed and rejected by men. On the other hand, if God disapproves of us, what does it matter how great people think we are? Many of the most exalted men on earth were spiritual failures.

“Boaster” (αλαζων) – “1) an empty pretender, a boaster” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## **inventors of evil things**

The seven things that are an abomination to God include “a heart that devises wicked plans” – Proverbs 6:18. God destroyed the world in Noah’s day, because the thoughts (imagination) of men’s hearts were only evil continually – Genesis 6:5; 8:21.

As if there were not already enough evil in the world, some people deliberately invent evil things to do. Consider a group of young people planning their evening or weekend “entertainment.” Perhaps they plan a party, a date, or worse. Often these plans deliberately include sinful activities, and in many cases they seek new ways to do evil – things they have not tried before.

People want new thrills, new experiences. They profess to “live it up” and really enjoy their wicked lifestyle, yet they continually want new things they have never tried. Doesn’t this indicate that they are not really satisfied with the physical thrills of sin?

Then there are people who plot new ways to commit crimes, new ideas for cheating others or stealing or even practicing violence.

Such consequences follow when men cease to acknowledge the true God.

## **disobedient to parents**

The meaning is fairly obvious. We live in an age of rebellion against authority of all kinds. This is generally associated with the other terms in the list. Remember that people usually reject God because they want to live to please themselves. Such people will also generally seek to rebel against the authority of others. In particular, children who grow up rebelling against parents will often end up in rebellion against God. When we realize the value of God’s plan and the importance of parents’ using their authority, then we realize the need for children to submit.



The Bible clearly requires children to obey their parents. See Ephesians 6:1,4; Colossians 3:20,21; Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; Luke 2:51; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; 2 Timothy 3:2.

### **undiscerning**

Other translations here have “without understanding” (ASV, NASB, KJV). The ESV has “foolish.” Thayer adds “unintelligent ... stupid.” These words come to mind repeatedly when we think of people who so obviously reject the evidence for God’s existence. They profess great learning, and argue their case on the basis of supposedly intelligent human wisdom. But their rejection of obvious truths demonstrates instead their utter foolishness (verses 18-23). In fact, the same word is used to describe their “foolish” ways in verse 21.

The result also is an inability to discern good from evil, since that takes understanding and experience with God’s word (Hebrews 5:14). The result is that people who reject God often have little or no concept of right and wrong. They continually confuse the two, justifying sin of many kinds, yet opposing what is good and wholesome.

“Undiscerning” (ασυνετος) – “‘without understanding or discernment’ ... in Romans 1:21, RV, ‘senseless’ (AV, ‘foolish’).” – Vine.

“unintelligent, without understanding, stupid” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **untrustworthy**

This is translated “covenant-breakers” (ASV, KJV), “faithless” (ESV). The Bible repeatedly teaches the importance of keeping our promises.

Hebrews 10:23 – God is faithful to His promises to us.

James 5:12 – Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes,” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No.” The Old Testament describes many oaths and the importance of keeping them (Numbers 30:1,2; Jeremiah 34:8-22; Ezekiel 17:12-16). But the New Testament says we should not need an oath to confirm our statements. We should be people of our word, so that others can believe what we say without our needing to take oaths. (Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22; 2 Corinthians 1:15-20)

Galatians 3:15 – Even from a human standpoint, people know that a covenant made cannot be changed but must be kept.

Matthew 7:12 (22:36-39) – The Golden Rule requires us to do to others as we want them to do to us. If it bothers you for people to make promises to you that they don’t keep, then don’t treat others this way.

Notice that people who respect God will also understand the importance of keeping their promises. But when people reject God, we can no longer trust their promises. That is the sad result Paul describes here.

“Untrustworthy” (ασυμβετος) “1) uncompounded, simple; 2) covenant breaking, faithless” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“...pert. to such as renege on their word, faithless...” – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

### **unloving**

This is translated “without natural affection” (ASV, KJV), “unloving” (NKJV, NASB), or “heartless” (ESV). It emphasizes a lack of love for those whom we would naturally be expected to love. This would especially include family members, and above all the love of parents for children. See 2 Timothy 3:3, where the word is used in another similar list of evil conduct.

Christians should love everyone. However, there are some people whom many people do not naturally love (enemies, etc.). But other people we can naturally be expected to love. Even people of the world recognize we should love some people, especially family members and, above all, our children (Titus 2:4). Those who do not show even this natural love are the ones described by this word. See Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 6:27,28,31-33; 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13.

Parents who abuse their children would be an excellent example of those who are unloving (this does not refer to proper discipline, which is an act of love). Some parents abandon their children or give them up for others to care for. Others beat their children to the point of wounding them or causing lasting damage. But the greatest example of all would be those who kill their own children, including especially those who kill them before birth in the crime of abortion.

“Unloving” (αστοργος) – “signifies ‘without natural affection’ (a, negative, and storge, ‘love of kindred,’ especially of parents for children and children for parents ...” – Vine.

### **unforgiving**

The KJV translates this “implacable.” It is missing in the ASV and related versions. But it is used in 2 Timothy 3:3, where it is translated “unforgiving” (NKJV) or “implacable” (ASV, RSV), “irreconcilable” (NASB), “trucebreakers” (KJV), “unappeasable” (ESV).

Many passages teach us to be willing to forgive others. See Luke 17:3,4; Matthew 18:21-35; 6:12-15; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; Ephesians 4:32.

However, this word is not simply the negative of a word for forgiveness. It is the negative of a word for entering into treaties (see definition below). So, the idea is especially one who is not willing to make or keep the peace. They just make it extremely hard for anyone to get along with them.

These are people who will not put away the past (hence, “unforgiving”). They will not make peace (“irreconcilable”). And if they do enter into a peace treaty, they soon break it (“trucebreakers”). Efforts of others to maintain peace are generally fruitless. These folks are

determined to have their way, and no one will be permitted to stand in their way.

See these verses on being peaceable: Matthew 5:9; James 3:13-18; Romans 12:18; 14:19; Genesis 13:8; Proverbs 20:3; Psalm 133:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-6; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 3:11.

“Unforgiving” (ασπονδος) – “1) without a treaty or covenant; 1a) of things not mutually agreed upon e.g. abstinences from hostilities; 2) that cannot be persuaded to enter into a covenant, implacable” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### unmerciful

This is generally translated “unmerciful,” but also “ruthless” (ESV). It is also used in James 2:13 as a rebuke of one who shows no mercy. Instead of making unfair judgments of others, we should have mercy. Mercy is better than being critical or treating people as worthless or unimportant, especially when they have really done nothing wrong.

We are required to make some judgments (John 7:24; 1 Corinthians 5; etc.). Specifically, we are required to rebuke sin: Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:10-13.

But some people make unfair judgments, treating people as if they had done something worthy of punishment or mistreatment when they have done nothing wrong. Even those who have sinned need people to care for their souls enough to help them be saved and not drive them away by egotistical indifference.

God’s example shows that it is better, wherever possible, to have compassion on people rather than condemn them. Compassion surely teaches us not to condemn people who have not violated His law but who have problems due to circumstances beyond their control.

God’s example also shows that some people do conduct themselves such that they must be rebuked. If they do not repent, He will punish them. But He hopes they will repent, so He can forgive them. So mercy does not **eliminate** judgment, but mercy is the better course where it Scripturally permissible. (See also Matthew 5:7; 7:2; 18:32-35; Luke 6:37f.) If we do not show mercy where we can, then God will likewise condemn us without mercy.

For passages on mercy see Matthew 5:7; 23:23; Luke 10:25-37; 6:36; 15:20; Romans 12:8; 1:31,32; James 2:13; 3:17,18; Philippians 2:1-4.

“Unmerciful” (ανελεημων) – “without mercy, merciless” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Mercy” (ελεος) – “...mercy, kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Mercy ... is the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it ...” – Vine.

***1:32 – God’s ordinance is that those who practice such things are worthy of death. Yet some who know this, nevertheless practice them and consent with those who practice them.***

### **Those who sin are worthy of death.**

These people knew the evidence for God and His existence (verses 18ff), yet they rejected the knowledge of God and engaged in sins of all kinds. Even in these sins, their consciences must have often rebuked them. People generally know that such conduct is shameful, even as they participate in it (compare 2:14,15). Most people who are deep in sin somehow know something is wrong about their lives. This is why they often have a sense of guilt, and often why they have depression and other indications of guilt.

Such people may not know the full consequence of their lives, but Paul here states it. They are worthy of death. Death has ever been the consequence of sin. This includes the fact that physical death exists, because sin is in the world (Genesis 3; 1 Corinthians 15:21ff). But the death referred to here specifically is spiritual death.

Genesis 2:17 – God warned Adam and Eve that sin would lead to death.

Ezekiel 18:20,24 – The soul that sins shall die.

Romans 6:21,23 – The wages of sin is death, which is the opposite of eternal life. See notes there and on 5:12ff.

Revelation 20:11-15 – At judgment, those not faithful will enter the second death, the lake of fire (compare Matthew 25:41,46).

Far too often, people do not take sin as seriously as God does. Sin will separate and alienate us from God in this life (this is the meaning of spiritual “death” – Isaiah 59:1,2; Luke 15:24,32; Ephesians 2:1-5,12,13). But if the problem is not solved by repentance and forgiveness, it will lead to eternal death in the lake of fire. This is the consequence of the sins described here by Paul. (Nothing here states or implies that godly people are supposed to cause physical death to those who commit these sins.)

**God condemns, not just those who practice these evils, but also those who “approve” of those who practice them.**

When people are rebuked for error, sometimes other people will come to their defense and try to justify their conduct. They themselves may not actively practice the act that they defend, but maybe it is a friend or loved one or family member involved, so they try to protect him from rebuke, etc.

Exodus 23:7 – God does not justify the wicked, so we should not either, but should keep **far from** a false matter. Not only must we not commit sin, we must also not justify those who do it.

Proverbs 17:15 – He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are **both** an abomination to God. If people don't sin, we have no right to treat them as sinners. But if they are in sin, we have no right to justify or defend them nor to protect them from the Scriptural efforts of others to rebuke them. (Leviticus 5:1; Psalm 50:16,18; Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 24:24,25)

Ephesians 5:11 – Don't fellowship sin, but reprove (expose) it. Some think they are all right if they aren't doing the sin. But if we justify and defend those who do it and protect them from those who would rebuke them, are we exposing and reproving the sin? Such is still disobeying the passage even if we don't commit the act.

1 Timothy 6:3 – Some won't consent to sound words. Instead of accepting truth, they object to it, and defend those who practice error.

Deuteronomy 13:8 – If even a nearest friend or family member sins (verses 6,7) people should not go along with the sin nor protect the sinner from disciplinary action. Rather, they should join in the discipline (verses 9ff).

No church or teacher has the right to rebuke or discipline those who are not in error. But if they are in error, anyone who defends them becomes a partaker of that error.

For other passages consider: 2 John 9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1; 1 Timothy 5:22; Psalms 1:1,2; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20. See also the passages above (under “unmerciful”) about rebuking sin.

#### *Other translations:*

“consent with them...” – ASV, Marsh, Berry, Green

“have pleasure in them...” – KJV

“approve of those...” – NKJV, NIV, RSV

“give approval to” – ESV

“give hearty approval to...” – NASB

“applaud such practices” – NEB, (TCNT)

“countenance such a manner of living” – Knox

#### *Definitions*

“Approve” (συνευδοκεω) – “a. to be pleased together with, to approve together... b. to be pleased at the same time with, consent, agree to...; to applaud..., Romans 1:32...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“...join in approval, *agree with, approve of, consent to, sympathize with* ... approve of someone Romans 1:32...” – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

### **Conclusion**

Paul's description of the sins of the Gentiles is graphic and extremely repulsive. Surely, such conduct must be firmly rebuked as evil. Yet, we must remember that Paul's real point here is that these people

need the gospel. The goal is not to dismiss them all as hopeless. God basically left them alone in their sins in many cases and for many years. But He intended ultimately to offer them salvation through Jesus. We must remember that salvation is available through the gospel even for these terrible sinners, if they will repent. We will see in the next chapter that, horrible as the Gentiles were, the Jews were little better and with less excuse. The ultimate point is that all men, Jew and Gentile, need the gospel (verse 16).

# Romans 2

## 2:1-29 - The Jews, Also Having Sinned, Need the Gospel.

***2:1,2 – Those who judge others also condemn themselves because they practice the same things, and God’s judgment is against those who so practice.***

**Those who condemned the Gentiles were without excuse for their own sins.**

“Therefore” shows that this discussion connects back to chapter 1, but the connection is not at first obvious. In chapter 1 Paul had talked about a group of people in the third person (“they”). This was obviously the idol-worshiping Gentiles. But here in chapter 2 Paul begins addressing people in second person as “you” and “O man” (compare verse 3). He does not yet state who these people are. First, he describes them.

His purpose is to prove that these people, whoever they are, are in sin just as surely as were the Gentiles whom he had described in chapter 1. After he has given the evidence sufficient to convince any honest person that these people are sinners, then he will show who they are. He finally directly names them in verse 17: “you are called a Jew.” So, he refers throughout this context to the Jews. (Paul has often done this sort of thing in other epistles, referring to the Gentiles as “you” and the Jews as “they” or “we.”)

The connection to chapter 1 is that Jews would have joined Paul in his forceful rebuke of the sins of the Gentiles in chapter 1. They “judged” them to be guilty of all for which Paul had rebuked them. Yet Paul is about to rebuke the Jews and show that they were guilty of sins just as bad as the Gentiles. This shows that they were “without excuse.” That is, if they could see so clearly the sins of others, they ought to be able to likewise see their own sins.

The end result of the discussion will be to show that the Gentiles and Jews are both under condemnation for their sins. Chapter 3 will summarize that all have sinned. And the ultimate conclusion is that all need the gospel of salvation through Jesus.

Note that the Gentiles were “without excuse” (1:20), and the Jews are likewise “without excuse” (2:1). There is really no excuse for anyone in sin. Most of us want to rationalize and justify our sins. But sin is inexcusable, no matter who you are. This is important, because it shows that everyone in sin deserves punishment. That is true of people in “dark

Africa” who don’t know the gospel and people who have a dozen Bibles in their home. No people can successfully excuse their sins.

“Judge” (κρίνω) – “...4. to determine, resolve, decree ... 5. to judge: a. to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong ... of the judgment of God or of Jesus the Messiah, deciding between the righteousness and the unrighteousness of men ... b. to pronounce judgment; to subject to censure; of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in the matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others ... 6. ...to rule, govern; to preside over with the power of giving judicial decisions ... ” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

‘...1. to make a selection, *select, prefer* ... 2. to pass judgment upon (and thereby seek to influence) the lives and actions of other people ... a. *judge, pass judgment upon, express an opinion about* ... b. esp. *pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn* ... 3. to make a judgment based on taking various factors into account, *judge, think, consider, look upon* ... 4. to come to a conclusion after a cognitive process, *reach a decision, decide, propose, intend* ... 5. to engage in a judicial process, *judge, decide, hale before a court, condemn*, also *hand over for judicial punishment*, ... a. of a human court ... b. of the divine tribunal ... 6. to ensure justice for someone, *see to it that justice is done* ...” – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

**In judging others, these people condemned themselves, because they practiced the same things for which they condemned others.**

God’s word repeatedly rebukes people who judge or condemn other people, while they themselves are guilty of similar things for which they judge others. See also verse 3; Matthew 7:1-5; 23:1-4; 2 Samuel 12:5-7; Romans 14:22. That this was the case with the people Paul addresses is emphasized at length in verses 21-24: “You who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” The Jews roundly condemned the Gentiles as unworthy of God’s favor or of Jewish association. Yet, Paul’s point is that the Jews themselves were just as guilty as the Gentiles, and there was even less excuse for them since they had God’s law. See verses 21-24.

The Jews, while not directly worshiping idols, yet committed the idolatry of putting their own will before God’s will. They bound human traditions and worshiped God by outward ritual without meaning it from the heart (Matthew 15:1-14). They sought the praises of men rather than God (Matthew 23; 6:1-18). They were covetous and sought wealth (Luke 16:14). They were hypocritical and self-righteous, denying their own sins while disdaining the sins of others (Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 23).

They were willing to violate God’s law whenever it sought their own purposes, committing sins of all kinds against other people (Matthew 23). The greatest proof of their corruption was the murder of the Son of



God. And this is just a brief summary of some of their sins as recorded in the New Testament. The Old Testament describes their repeated sinful conduct from the time Moses led them out of Egypt till they went into Babylonian captivity.

Not all Jews committed all these sins, true. But then not all Gentiles committed all the sins in chapter 1. The point is that the Jews in general were corrupt in many ways, just as the Gentiles in general were corrupt in many ways. Some Jews sincerely sought to please God (like Jesus' mother Mary and the parents of John the Baptist, etc.). But all people commit some sins. And the sincere servants of God would acknowledge their own sins, too. But the point here is that Jews in general were quick to condemn the Gentiles, but would become incensed when anyone pointed out that they themselves were sinners just as surely as were the Gentiles.

### **Judging others versus rebuke of sin**

Some people today will take any passage that mentions "judging" other people and twist it to make out that no one ever has permission to rebuke the sins of others. They do so with this passage claiming that, simply by the act of judging the Gentiles, the Jews themselves became guilty of the same sins as the Gentiles. The conclusion is that anyone who rebukes the sins of others is immediately thereby as guilty as the person whom he rebukes!

Such is an absolute perversion of Scripture. In fact, Paul has just spent most of chapter 1 rebuking the sins of the Gentiles and will use chapter 2 to rebuke the Jews. If rebuking sin is sinful judging, then Paul is here committing that very sin even as he writes! Who can believe it?

Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever taught that all judging is wrong. On the contrary, they themselves rebuked people frequently, and they commanded us to do the same. Those who use the principle of "judge not" to condemn everyone who rebukes sin, need to reckon with Jesus' statement of John 7:24, which commands us to "judge with righteous judgment." (See also Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Proverbs 10:17; 15:31-33.)

"Righteous" judgment includes several important principles. One is that judgment must be based on the standard of God's word, not human doctrines, man's wisdom, or personal opinions (Matthew 15:1-14; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Galatians 1:8,9; Proverbs 17:15; Romans 14:1-4,10-13; etc.).

Another principle is that we must speak from proper motives, sincerely seeking the well-being of everyone involved, not just to exalt self or win an argument, etc. See 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; James 3:14-18; 1:19,20; Romans 12:17-21.

But the principle that Paul here especially emphasizes is that our own lives must be consistent with our judgments. If we condemn others

for practices that we ourselves commit, then we condemn ourselves in condemning them. This does not mean we should not rebuke the sin, but it means we need to clean up our own sins first.

In this context, the main point is simply to show that the Jews could recognize sin in others. So, they should be just as quick to recognize it in themselves. When they did, they would see that they needed salvation through Jesus just as surely as the Gentiles did.

**God's judgment is according to truth against those who practice such things.**

Verse 1 had described how the Jews judged the Gentiles to be guilty, yet failed to judge themselves to be guilty. Their judgment was faulty. Here Paul describes in contrast the judgment that God will render. God judges according to truth. As John 7:24 said, He judges righteous judgment (see verse 5). He judges according to the real facts of the case. He knows the truth of what men do, and He judges by comparing men's conduct to the truth of His word. This differs from the judgments of men, who often fail to take proper account of the true facts or the proper standard of right and wrong.

God's judgment is against those who practice such things. "Such things" refers to the "same things" mentioned in verse 1: the things the Gentiles practiced that were also practiced by the Jews. God judges according to the practices of people – their conduct. The point is that this is true regardless of who it is that commits the practice. Jew or Gentile, it makes no difference. What matters is the practice. If a person does wrong, God judges them to be wrong, no matter who they are. So, His judgment is without partiality or respect of persons – verse 11. This is where Paul's argument is leading.

So, when the Jews committed the "same things" that the Gentiles committed, the Jews judged the Gentiles to be guilty and themselves to be innocent. But God judged them both to be guilty. The practice is what matters, not who commits it.

Here Paul introduces the subject of the judgment of God. He will continue referring to it through verse 16. The final judgment will come on the "day of the righteous judgment of God" (verse 5). These verses serve as one of the most complete statements of what that judgment will involve. The lesson to the Jews is that the judgment rendered by God is the only one that truly matters. Men may judge themselves or others to be guilty or innocent, but that judgment will not ultimately send anyone to heaven or hell. Only God's judgment matters. And since He judges by men's conduct, the Jews stood as guilty as the Gentiles.

**2:3,4 – When these people practice the things for which they condemn others, do they think they will escape God’s judgment? Do they despise His goodness and longsuffering, not realizing that this should lead them to repent?**

**Will God allow one to escape judgment, if he condemns others for the kinds of things he himself practices?**

Paul continues speaking to “you” “O man” – i.e., the Jews (verse 1). He had accused them of practicing the same kinds of things for which they condemned the Gentiles (verse 1). Now he asks if they really thought they could do this and not be judged for it by God.

The Jews seemed to think that God would condemn the Gentiles, but the Jews could act similarly without condemnation. They trusted in the simple fact that they were descendants of Abraham, heirs of God’s promises, His special people (Matthew 3:8-10; John 8:33). They were circumcised (verses 25ff), so surely their conduct would not be held against them.

No doubt, this view was a commonly held bias among Jews. However, McGarvey points out that it was actually a formalized doctrine. He quotes the following statements from the Talmud: “Everyone circumcised has part in the kingdom to come.” “All Israelites will have part in the world to come.” “Abraham sits beside the gates of hell, and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go down to hell.”

Paul is assuring them this will not be the case. God is not partial (verse 11). He will judge according to how men act (verses 3,6,7,8,9,10). When the Jews act like the Gentiles act, they will not escape. God will judge them both alike. This means that the Jews also needed salvation, for they were guilty like the Gentiles.

Some people today also act as though they think they will really escape God’s judgment. They know they have done wrong. They even recognize such conduct to be wrong when they see it in others. Yet, they somehow think they are going to avoid punishment. They may be rich or powerful, so they are accustomed to using their wealth or influence to obtain better treatment than others receive, even at the hands of those responsible to enforce the law.

Some do a similar with baptism that Jews did with circumcision. “I’ve been baptized. God won’t condemn me.” So we think we can live like the world lives, and God will yet condemn the world but not us. Of course, as Paul asks the question, he implies the answer. No one will escape the righteous judgment of God. All will be judged (see verses 6,9,10). Surely if they thought about it, they ought to know God would not allow them to escape.

Later in Romans, Paul will return to discuss further this special privileged status the Jews thought they had.

**Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?**

Paul suggests another alternative to try to explain the Jews' conduct. Did they despise or fail to appreciate – fail to give proper respect for – God's kind conduct toward them? God has been extremely good to men. He gives us every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). He gives salvation and the hope of eternal life through Jesus. In Him we have every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). See 11:22; Ephesians 1:7,18; 2:7; Colossians 1:27; 2:2.

But God was especially good to the Jews. They had the law and the promises to Abraham (verse 17; 9:4,5). They had the tabernacle worship and the priesthood. And they had the promise that the Christ would come through them to bless all nations.

In particular, God has shown incredible forbearance and longsuffering. God is forbearing with all men. He passed over sins that were grievously committed (3:25). He could righteously destroy us all for our sins. Nothing about us deserves or merits His forgiveness. Yet, He has offered it richly and repeatedly. That is great forbearance.

God has likewise been longsuffering with men. He forgives if we repent. But even when people do not repent, He has waited patiently, warning and admonishing, hoping they would come to repentance. Romans 9:22; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:15; Exodus 34:6.

In dealing specifically with the Jews, God had been exceptionally forbearing and longsuffering. Time and again throughout their history, they sinned, rebelled, and complained against Him. He had every right to destroy them completely. Yet, He was patient, giving them the chance to repent, and then forgiving them when they did repent.

Why does God show such forbearance and longsuffering toward men? One main reason is to motivate us to repent. Compare 2 Peter 3:9. He hopes that, as He gives us time, we will eventually see our error and return to Him. And He hopes we will appreciate His forgiveness and will show our appreciation by returning to His service.

But Paul suggests that the Jews, though richly blessed by God even above the Gentiles, did not respect or appreciate God's blessings. In fact, they "despised" them in the sense of failing to value them as they ought. This perhaps explains the fact that they continued in sin, even though they could recognize their conduct as sinful when they saw it in the Gentiles.

Either the Jews thought somehow they could escape God's righteous judgment (verse 3), or else they just did not appreciate all God had done for them (verse 4). Paul offers no other explanations for the Jews' sinfulness. But the same applies to anyone who continues in sin. Either somehow he must think that he will manage to avoid being punished, or else he simply does not appreciate how good God has been

to him. In any case, such people are sadly mistaken and are without excuse (verse 1).

“Longsuffering (patience)” (μακροθυμεια) – “...1. patience, endurance, constancy, steadfastness, perseverance; especially as shown in bearing troubles and ills ... 2. patience, forbearance, long-suffering, slowness in avenging wrongs ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“...1. state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome, *patience, steadfastness, endurance* ... 2. state of being able to bear up under provocation, *forbearance, patience* toward others...” – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

**2:5,6 – Their hardened, impenitent hearts treasured up wrath at the revelation of God’s righteous judgment, who will render to each according to his works.**

**The Jews’ hardness and impenitent heart treasured up wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.**

Paul has shown that the people whom he addressed (the Jews) condemned the Gentiles for sin and yet were themselves just as guilty. They either thought they could get away with it (verse 4), or they just did not appreciate God’s goodness (verse 5). In either case, they were without excuse for their sins (verse 1).

The result was that their hardened attitude kept them from appreciating God’s goodness. And their refusal to repent and humble their hearts, despite all God had done, made it all the more certain that God would punish them. The Gentiles deserved to be punished for their sins, and the Jews agreed it was so. Yet, the Gentiles lacked many of the special blessings the Jews had. So how much more so was it obvious that the Jews deserved punishment!

Their conduct heaped up, as in a great treasury, the wrath of God against themselves. Instead of repenting, so God could forgive them and they could escape wrath, they had continued in sin. The result was to pile God’s wrath higher and higher.

If they did not repent, this wrath would finally break upon them at the day of wrath – the day when God reveals His judgment against men. The Bible repeatedly warns that God’s wrath will come upon impenitent sinners. Paul has already assured us that God’s wrath would come upon the Gentiles (see on 1:18). Now he assures the Jews that they too deserved God’s wrath as surely as the Gentiles did. They would not escape it, no matter what they thought. See Romans 5:6-11; Psalms 110:5; Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Deuteronomy 32:34,35; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10; Colossians 3:6.

This discussion of God’s judgment on sinners was introduced in verse 2. Many other passages describe the final day of judgment of God.

It will be a day when God rewards the righteous eternally, but He will also punish the wicked eternally. Much more about this judgment is discussed here in Romans 2:4-11. See also Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 1:9-11; 10:42; 17:30,31; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-31; Revelation 20:11-15; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.

This judgment of God is “righteous.” 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9 – It is **righteous** for God to judge and punish the disobedient. Many people think God is so sweet and wishy-washy that He could never bring Himself to punish evil people. Others accuse God of being unfair or unloving if He punishes men. They say a loving God could never send sinners to hell. Be not deceived! God is righteous and just, and this part of His nature demands that evil people be punished.

God considers all sin to be grave and terrible. To save us from the consequences of sin He paid the most awesome price imaginable: He gave the life of His only-begotten Son. He did this so we could receive eternal life in heaven with Him, when we ought to receive eternal punishment. When God has done all this for us, if we yet refuse to repent, then surely we deserve to be punished eternally. God’s justice demands it.

Furthermore, on earth wicked people often prosper more than righteous people, and righteous people often suffer more than wicked people. God would not be just and righteous if He simply allowed people to die without correcting these injustices. God’s righteousness demands that justice be done after death.

But again, remember, the point of all this is that the Jews need the gospel as surely as the Gentiles did. They needed forgiveness. Without it, they have no hope in the judgment.

“Wrath” (οργη) – “1) anger, the natural disposition, temper, character 2) movement or agitation of the soul, impulse, desire, any violent emotion, but especially anger 3) anger, wrath, indignation 4) anger exhibited in punishment, hence used for punishment itself 4a) of punishments inflicted by magistrates” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **God will render to each one according to his deeds.**

Notice what we learn here about God’s judgment.

*Everyone will be judged.*

See also verses 9,10, where Paul shows this applies to Jew and Gentile. No one will escape (verse 3). Some people who disobey their parents or civil law may never be caught. But this will not happen when Jesus is the Judge. Many other passages also show that God will judge all people for their lives.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – We must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Matthew 25:32 – **All** nations will be present.

Romans 14:10-12 – We shall **all** stand before the judgment seat of Christ. **Every** knee shall bow and **every** tongue shall confess. **Every** one of us shall give account of himself to God.

All shall be judged: rich and poor, male and female, regardless of race or nationality or occupation. All your relatives and friends will be there – your spouse, your parents, and your children. I will be there. And *you* will be there. Are you ready?

*All will be judged individually.*

Each individual will be present, and each will be judged for what he/she has personally done in this life. No doubt, many would prefer to be judged for what some friend or relative has done. Not so.

Romans 2:6 – Each one will be judged for **his** deeds.

Romans 14:12 – Each will give account of **himself** to God.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – Each will receive according to what **he** has done in the body, good or bad. (Compare Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12; 20:13.)

You will not be able to claim eternal life because your husband or wife, parent or child, or friend or relative receives it. Nor will you be condemned just because some loved one is (Ezekiel 18:20). The question will be: what did you do?

*God will judge according to each person's "deeds."*

This is also emphasized in verses 2,3,7,8,9,10. So everyone, Jew or Gentile, will be judged on the same basis: our conduct. There is no partiality (verse 11). Some will not be judged on one basis and others on another basis. All will be judged for their conduct.

Again, many Scriptures show that judgment will be on the basis of our deeds.

Romans 2:6-10 – God renders to each man according to his **works** (verse 6). Those who continue patiently in **well-doing** receive eternal life (verse 7). Those who **obey** not truth but **obey** unrighteousness and **work evil** (verse 9), receive tribulation and anguish, etc. (verse 8). But glory, etc., to all who **work good** (verse 10).

2 Corinthians 5:10 – Before the judgment-seat of Christ, "each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath **done**, whether it be good or bad."

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 – Those who **obey not the gospel** receive vengeance in flaming fire. They are punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

Revelation 20:12,13; 22:12 – Every man will be judged according to his **works**.

Romans is Paul's treatise about salvation by faith according to the gospel (1:16). Many advocates of salvation by "faith alone" think Romans is their major source of proof. Yet, here we are at the outset of this treatise, and Paul affirms for all time that judgment will be on the basis of our "deeds": our works.



The word for “deeds” is the same word used for “works” in other passages that many use to teach that salvation is “not by works” – Ephesians 2:8-10; etc. But before Paul ever begins to make the point that salvation is by faith, not by works of the law, he has already thoroughly instructed us that judgment and eternal destinies will be determined on the basis of our deeds – works!

Challenge: Can you think of any passage discussing the **judgment** which says that we will be judged on the basis of our faith or love, or that says we will give an account for these? For every one you find (if any) there will be 2 or 3 others that say it will be on the basis of **works, deeds, actions, or things done**.

Why is this? Not because faith and love do not matter, but because “works” includes faith and love as well as other conditions of obedience (John 6:28,29; 1 John 3:23; Matthew 22:37-40), and because “obedience” proves whether or not we have love and faith (John 14:15; James 2:18). Judgment will include our faith, our love, and the other acts of obedience that faith and love must motivate. But Paul has forever disproved the doctrine of salvation by “faith alone” without obedience, before he even begins his discussion of salvation by faith!

(See also Matthew 25:31-46; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Matthew 12:36,37; Jeremiah 17:10; Revelation 2:23; Acts 17:30,31; John 5:28,29; 1 Peter 4:17,18; Matthew 16:27; 24:46-51; James 2:12; Matthew 25:21ff; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 2:23,26; 3:15.)

“Deeds” (εργον) – “1) business, employment, that which any one is occupied 1a) that which one undertakes to do, enterprise, undertaking 2) any product whatever, any thing accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind 3) an act, deed, thing done: the idea of working is emphasized in opp. to that which is less than work” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**2:7,8 – Eternal life is for those who patiently continue in well-doing seeking for glory and incorruption. But those who are factious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness receive wrath and indignation.**

**Eternal life to those who continue patiently doing good and seek for glory, honor, and immortality**

Paul continues his description of the destiny of men at the judgment. As he does, he continues to emphasize that we will be judged on the basis of what we do.

*The reward of the righteous will be eternal life.*

Matthew 25:41,46 – The wicked go to everlasting destruction, the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. Righteous people will receive eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9,10 – Saved ones will live forever with Jesus. (Compare Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 1:3,4.)



Romans 6:23 – The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Throughout the Bible, death is a curse as a consequence of sin, but life is a blessing from God. The ultimate curse, for those who are not forgiven, is eternal death. The ultimate blessing for the faithful is everlasting life.

John 17:3 – And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. Death is a separation (James 2:26). Those in sin are dead because separated spiritually from God. Those who are forgiven of sin are reunited with God, which is to be made alive again (Ephesians 2:1ff,11ff). Eternal life is eternal union with God in heaven.

(Galatians 6:8; Romans 2:7; Matthew 19:29; 1 Timothy 6:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; John 3:16; 20:31; 1 John 2:25; 5:11,12; Revelation 2:10; 22:1,2; 21:6,4)

*This is further described as “glory, honor” (compare verse 10).*

“Glory” refers to an exalted state or majesty. “Honor” refers to praise that shows one is highly valued or appreciated.

Colossians 3:4 – When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

1 Peter 1:7 – The genuineness of our faith will lead to praise, honor, and glory when Jesus is revealed.

In this life, Christians face many forms of dishonor and shame. We may be ridiculed, belittled, opposed, tempted, defamed, and persecuted. People think we are foolish or even dangerous. Someday we will receive the glory that God has for the faithful. The reward of the righteous will be a glorious goal, truly worth all the sacrifice required.

(1 Peter 5:1,4,10; 2 Peter 1:3; 4:12-14; Romans 8:17,18,30; 9:23; Philippians 3:20,21; John 17:22; 1 Corinthians 15:43; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:10)

“Glory” (δοξα) – “...II. opinion, estimate ... in the sacred writ. always, good opinion concerning one, and as resulting from that, praise, honor, glory ... III. ... splendor, brightness; 1. properly ... 2. magnificence, excellence, preeminence, dignity, grace ... 3. majesty ... 4. a most glorious condition, most exalted state; a. of that condition with God the Father in heaven to which Christ was raised after he had achieved his work on earth ... b. the glorious condition of blessedness in which it is appointed and promised that true Christians shall enter after their Saviour’s return from heaven ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Honor” (τιμη) – “...1. a valuing by which the price is fixed; hence the price itself ... 2. honor which belongs or is shown to one: the honor of one who outranks others, pre-eminence ... veneration ... deference, reverence ... praise of which one is judged worthy...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

*This reward is also described as “immortality” (NKJV, NASB, KJV, ESV), or “incorruption” (ASV).*

Matthew 6:19-21 – Lay up treasures in heaven, because there neither moth nor rust consumes, and thieves do not break through or steal. Here on earth we often lose treasured possessions. They may grow old, rust, corrode, or break. We may lose them, or someone may steal them. In heaven, we will have none of these problems.

1 Corinthians 15:42,50,53,54 – Our spirit is destined to exist forever. But the body we have now is corruptible. It will die and decay. But this corruptible must put on incorruption. In the resurrection the righteous will receive a spiritual body that can never die or grow old or feeble.

2 Timothy 1:10 – Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.

“Immortality” (αφθαρσιᾶ) – “1) incorruption, perpetuity 2) purity, sincerity, incorrupt” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

*To receive this reward we must continue patiently in doing good.*

Verse 6 stated that we will be judged according to our deeds. This point is repeatedly emphasized through verse 10.

Hebrews 12:1-4 – We should imitate Jesus’ example of suffering. He endured (was patient) despite the cross and the sinners who spoke against Him. We must do the same.

Endurance is illustrated by running a race. Spiritually, many of us are sprinters. We run hard for short distances. We serve faithfully for a few months or even years. But when the going gets hard, we give up. God wants cross-country runners. We must continue faithfully for a lifetime, like Jesus did, despite all hardships.

Luke 8:15 – In the parable of the sower, the good soil represents those who bear fruit with patience. Fruit represents good works. Some of the other soils began to grow crops, but they quit. The result was they brought no fruit to perfection. To please God, we must patiently continue resisting temptation. We must not be turned aside by the desire to gather wealth, or to pursue the pleasures of life, or to please self or friends and loved ones.

James 1:12 – Blessed is the man who endures (is patient in) temptation. He receives the crown of life, when he has been proved. Some people can endure one or two tragedies in life. But when a series of problems come, they fall away.

James 5:7,8 – How long must we be patient? Until Jesus comes! When is that? No one knows!

A farmer illustrates the patience we need. Some jobs provide a paycheck every week. Getting paid once a month requires more patience. But the farmer works for months plowing, planting, cultivating, and feeding livestock. Then finally he gets paid. So serving God requires

working patiently without quitting, no matter how long it takes or what problems we face.

(2 Corinthians 6:4,6; James 5:10,11; 1:3,4; Romans 5:3,4; Matthew 10:22; Luke 21:29; Galatians 6:9; 1 Timothy 6:11; Hebrews 6:15; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Colossians 1:10,11; Hebrews 6:12; Romans 8:25; Revelation 2:2,3)

The point is summarized in verse 11 that the judgment will not be based on respect of persons or partiality. It is based entirely on our conduct. So, those who live in sin will not escape judgment (verses 1-3). Even though they had all the advantages of being the people of God under the Old Testament, Jews will still be individually judged on the basis of their conduct. They will have no ultimate favoritism compared to Gentiles.

“Patience” (υπομονη) – “1. steadfastness, constancy, endurance ...; in the N.T. the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings ... 2. a patient, steadfast waiting for ... 3. a patient enduring, sustaining ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**Those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, will receive indignation and wrath.**

Verse 8 contrasts with verse 7, showing the punishment that comes on the wicked.

*Again, the reward is based on men's deeds.*

The punishment is for those who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 – Those who do not obey the gospel will receive vengeance in flaming fire. (Compare 2:12.)

Unrighteousness was defined in chapter 1 as referring to anything that is not right according to God's standard (see 1:17,18). Instead of continuing doing good (2:7), those who practice what is not right will be punished (verse 8).

They are also “self-seeking.” or “factious” (ASV), “selfishly ambitious” (NASB), “contentious” (KJV). Determination to have one's own way and please oneself often leads to strife and contention. But the underlying problem is too great a determination to serve one's own desires, seeking one's own earthly honor and glory. In this context, this attitude leads one to disobey God and practice unrighteousness.

See Philippians 1:16; 2:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20; James 3:14,16.

*This disobedience to truth will lead to indignation and wrath.*

See notes on 1:18, where Paul had warned that the Gentiles would receive God's wrath. Likewise, 2:5 says impenitence treasures up God's wrath. See notes on those verses.

The point here is that it makes no difference whether one is Gentile (1:18) or Jew (2:5). Those who do not obey God's word bring upon themselves God's wrath. No favoritism will be shown.

These thoughts continue in the next verses.

**2:9,10 – Tribulation and anguish to everyone who works evil, but glory, honor, and peace to all who work good, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.**

**Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek**

These verses continue from verses 7,8 the contrast between the reward of the righteous and the reward of the wicked at the judgment. Verse 9 continues the description of the punishment of every soul man who does evil. This judgment is based on deeds and is individual. And all will be judged, none will escape (see verse 6).

*The wicked will receive, not just indignation and wrath (verse 8), but also tribulation and anguish.*

That the wicked will suffer in anguish is taught in many passages. This torment is described as fire.

Revelation 20:10 – Those in the **lake of fire** are **tormented** day and night. This is the destiny of all not found in the Book of Life (20:14,15; 21:8; 14:9-11).

Luke 16:19-31 – The rich man was in **torment** (verse 23), seeking a drop of water because he was in **anguish** (tormented) in flame (verses 24,25) in a place of **torment** (verse 28). (This is Hades, between death and the judgment, but will the state after judgment be an improvement?)

Matthew 8:12 – In outer darkness there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:42,50 – In the furnace of fire there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 5:22 – Whoever says “thou fool” will be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 18:8,9 – Better to be physically harmed than to be cast into eternal fire, the hell of fire.

Matthew 13:39-42 – At the end of the world, those who do iniquity will be cast into a furnace of fire. (Compare 13:49,50.)

Matthew 25:41 – Those who do not serve others will depart into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

(See also Matthew 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 12:4,5; 13:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:6,7; Matthew 18:34,35; 5:29,30; 10:28; 23:15,33; 8:29; Mark 9:43-48. Compare Revelation 14:9-11; 19:20; Hebrews 10:26-31; Luke 16:24; 17:29; Matthew 3:10-12; 7:19; John 15:6.)

“Tribulation” (θλῖψις) – “1) a pressing, pressing together, pressure 2) metaph. oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Anguish” (στενοχωρία) – “1) narrowness of place, a narrow place  
2) metaphorically dire calamity, extreme affliction” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### *The Jew first and also the Greek*

The context necessarily shows that “Greek” here must refer to all Gentiles – all who are not Jews (see NKJV footnote). Note 1:16. The contrast in terms is intended to show that the standard of judgment Paul here describes will apply to all men. So, the Jews were the nation of Israel, and the Greek means everyone else.

For the first time in the chapter, Paul specifically names the Jews. He will continue referring to them throughout the chapter. This shows that the context is intended to contrast or compare Jews and Gentiles. Specifically, Jews will be judged without respect of person, even as the Gentiles will. As described on verses 1-6, the Jews thought they would receive special favors from God, even in final destinies, because of the blessings they received as a nation under the law. Paul is attempting at length in this chapter to show that such will not be the case.

In our notes on 1:16 we discussed the sense in which the gospel was the power of God to salvation to the Jew “first” and also to the Greek. But in what sense will tribulation and anguish come to the Jew “first,” as compared to the Greek, and rewards will come to the Jew first as compared to the Greek? I am unsure. Perhaps it is simply a matter of emphasis: the principle applies to the Jew, so it surely also applies to the Greek. Perhaps those who have the advantages the Jews had are the primary example of the principle that is being explained, but it will apply also to all others. (Compare 1 Peter 4:17.)

### **Glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek**

Verse 7 said the righteous would receive “glory and honor” (see our notes there). Here the point is repeated, but also added is “peace,” meaning security, safety, freedom from danger and fear. This contrasts to the indignation and wrath that the wicked will endure (verse 9). They will suffer anguish, but the righteous will have peace, free from the anguish the wicked suffer. But what is more, they will be free from all the suffering and heartaches of this life. None of the problems we suffer here will touch us in heaven (Revelation 21:4). We will have eternal peace and rest.

Again, this reward is given depending on our conduct: we must work what is good. And it applies to all people: “everyone” See verse 6.

And again, this applies to “the Jew first and also to the Greek.” See notes on verse 9.

The clear intent of verses 7-10 is to teach in greater detail the point of verse 6 and to lead up to the summary in verse 11. All will be judged, whether Jew or Gentile. And each will be rewarded on the basis of his works – what he does – and each will be judged on the basis of his own

personal life. None will escape and none will receive favoritism. This is approached repeatedly and in detail for the sake of emphasis. Let no Jew think he will escape (verse 3).

“Peace” (εἰρήνη) – “...peace, i.e. 1. a state of national tranquility; exemption from the rage and havoc of war ... 2. peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, concord ... 3. ... security, safety, prosperity, felicity ... 4. spec. the Messiah’s peace ... 5. acc. to a conception distinctly peculiar to Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is ... 6. of the blessed state of devout and upright men after death ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## ***2:11 – There is no respect of persons with God.***

### **No respect of persons or partiality with God**

This is the point to which Paul has been moving throughout this section. This is why he has emphasized that rewards and punishments will be dispensed on the basis of individual conduct, whether to Jew or Gentile.

The point is that the Jews believed they should always have a favored status before God. They anticipated that God would grant them all His blessings, including eternal rewards, simply because they were Jews. We will see in verses 17ff that they believed God would bless them simply because they were Jews, descendants of Abraham and Israel, born into God’s special nation, having circumcision and the law, granted the land of Canaan and the promise of the Messiah. So, their sins would somehow be overlooked. But the Gentiles, having none of these blessings, would be condemned.

Such an approach would make God a respecter of persons, guilty of partiality and favoritism. He had given Israel blessings in this life as a reward for the faithfulness of Abraham (not because the people themselves were so good) and because it suited His purpose to accomplish what was needed for man’s salvation. He gave them the land of Canaan also because of the wickedness of the people in those lands. But none of this ever meant He would save them eternally in heaven, even when they lived in sin. Eternal rewards have ever been determined on the basis of man’s conduct (see notes on verses 1-10).

Jewish Christians, misunderstanding this, had believed that the gospel blessings would be only for Jews, not for Gentiles. It took special revelations to convince Peter to teach and baptize the Gentile Cornelius. Peter had to learn that God does not show partiality, but in every nation He will accept whoever fears Him and works righteousness – Acts 10:34,35 (see the context of Acts 10:1-11:18).

But the issue continued within the church, with many Judaizing believers arguing that Gentiles could be saved under the gospel only if

they, in effect, first became Jews – i.e., they had to be circumcised and keep all aspects of the Old Testament given through Israel, as well as keeping the New Testament. Their view was that God, in effect, added the New Testament onto the Old Testament, but kept the Old Testament in effect and bound it on the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

This was a major conflict that Paul faced with these Judaizing teachers. We read about the issue in Acts 15 and the books of Galatians, Hebrews, Ephesians, and Colossians, as well as here in Romans. It is the main doctrinal theme Paul will deal with in this book, and here he begins to state his case.

And yet, even today there are some people who still believe the Old Testament law is still in effect. And others who claim that the Jews are still God's special favored people. They still claim that God will restore Israel to the status of special favored nation and will restore their dominance over Gentiles in the so-called millennial kingdom. Some even believe that the whole Mosaic system will be reestablished, including the temple, the animal sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and the Jewish dominance over the Gentiles. Paul's discussion here in the book of Romans, as repeatedly elsewhere in the New Testament, flatly denies all of this.

Compare Deuteronomy 10:16,17.

### **Applications to Calvinism and unconditional election**

The principle of God's impartiality is applied here specifically to the distinction between Jew and Gentile (verses 9,10,12ff). But is this the only application? What about other national or racial distinctions? Would the principle not apply likewise to black vs. white, Caucasian vs. Hispanic, etc.? Even though that is not Paul's application here, yet it is a valid application of the principle.

Likewise, the principle that each person will be individually judged on the basis of his conduct also has major applications to Calvinism. Calvinists attempt to base many of their major doctrines on Romans. This includes their doctrine of unconditional election and predestination, which we will discuss at length in later chapters.

This Calvinistic doctrine says God will save individuals on the basis of His own choice or election made before the world began, unconditionally – i.e., without regard to the conduct, will, or character of each individual. It teaches that, in fact, each man is born totally depraved and so is unable to choose to believe or obey God. So, God chooses unconditionally to save some, then sends the Holy Spirit to overwhelm those and compel them to believe and obey. The rest will be condemned eternally, regardless of their conduct, will, or choice, because God did not choose unconditionally to make them elect.

Such a view totally contradicts the principle Paul teaches here, as surely as does the Jews' view. The Jews believed God would save them simply on the grounds of their physical birth and ancestry. The

Calvinists believe the same on the basis of God's eternal, unconditional choice. Both views make God out to be partial – a respecter of persons – because both violate the principle that judgment is based entirely on man's conduct.

So, this section of Romans states a fundamental truth that forever disproves Calvinistic election and predestination. And it is stated long before we ever get to the passages Calvinists claim prove their doctrine. As with the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, Paul has disproved unconditional election at the very outset of the book. He has stated unequivocally that salvation and condemnation are both based on conditions man must meet by his own conduct. Nothing he will state after this can successfully be used to defend these Calvinistic doctrines, since he has already repudiated them.

“Partiality” (προσωποληψια) – “1) respect of persons 2) partiality 2a) the fault of one who when called on to give judgment has respect of the outward circumstances of man and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high born, or powerful, to another who does not have these qualities” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**For further discussion of unconditional election and predestination, see articles on those subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

**2:12,13 – Those who sinned without law will perish without law, and those who sinned under the law will be judged by the law. Doers of the law will be justified, not just hearers of the law.**

**Those who have sinned without law will perish without law, and those who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.**

“For” shows that these verses tie to the previous verses and continue the same discussion. Paul is enlarging on the principle that judgment is based on conduct, not respect of persons.

*The significance of the term “law”*

For the first time in Romans, Paul directly mentions “law.” This is a major theme of the book (see introductory comments on law).

The word “law” here does not have a definite article, so some doubt that it refers specifically to “the law of Moses,” the law given to Israel at Mt. Sinai, the Old Testament law. However, verses 13-20 further explain verse 12. In verse 13, both instances of “law” have the definite article. Verses 14,15 lack the definite article in some cases but include it in at least two instances. Verses 17,18,20 all have the definite article. All this indicates that “law” in the book of Romans, from the very first time that Paul introduces it, has the same significance regardless of whether or not



it has the definite article. As a result, translators sometimes insert “the” where there is no definite article in Greek, and sometimes they omit it.

More convincingly, Paul refers to “law” that some people (Gentiles) did not have, and yet they sinned without having that “law.” Yet, people cannot sin if they are not subject to God’s law at all. Sin is transgression of Divine law (1 John 3:4). Where there is no law, there can be no transgression (Romans 4:15). So there was a sense in which the Gentiles were without law, and yet at the same time there was a sense in which they did have law.

Further, the Gentiles were “without law” in contrast to those who did have “law.” Those who had law were the Jews (verses 12,17,18,20). So, what “law” did the Jews have that the Gentiles did not have? It can only refer to the Law of Moses, including the 10 Commands, given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. So, even where the definite article is missing, the context demonstrates that Paul is referring to one particular “law” that the Gentiles did not have and that the Jews did have: the Law given at Sinai.

I believe this demonstrates an important point: throughout the book of Romans, whenever Paul refers to “law” that does not or cannot save, he is always referring primarily to the law that the Jews had but the Gentiles did not have, regardless of whether or not the text has a definite article. That law was the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai and extended by the revelation of all the Old Testament Scriptures. This is demonstrated by context to be true.

Perhaps one may rightly argue that sometimes in Romans the “law” that does not save refers to a principle of standing justified before God entirely on the basis of obedience to commands, without forgiveness as part of that law. True, the principles Paul teaches might refer to any such “law.” But even so, in actual practice, the principles taught will always apply to the Old Testament law and primarily to that law. And in particular, to attempt to use the principles taught here to deny that obedience under the gospel is necessary to salvation, would be to totally pervert Paul’s point since he has already clearly said that obedience is necessary.

Another important practical application is that this confirms that the Law given at Sinai, including the 10 Commands, was given only to the nation of Israel. It was never given to the Gentiles and did not apply to them as such. This demonstrates its limited application. We will see that God never intended for it to apply to all people or for all time. It was limited in scope and duration. It served a limited purpose. When it fulfilled that purpose, God removed it.

**For further discussion of the application of the old law and the Sabbath today, see articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

*Those who sin without law will perish without law.*

As already stated, this must refer to the Gentiles, who did not have the Law of Moses. But though they did not have that specific law, they yet sinned. This proves they were subject to some Divine law (see notes above). There has never been people in the history of the world that were not subject to some Divine law. These people would then be judged for their sins, but they would not be judged by the Law of Moses, since it did not apply to them. They were “without law” with regard to that law, but not with regard to all Divine law.

Yet, these people (Gentiles) sinned (against the law they did have). All people are sinners. That is Paul’s ultimate point, as we will see in chapter 3. Though they did not have the Law from Sinai, they yet disobeyed God and so deserved punishment.

But what law did the Gentiles violate? They must have violated some law, else they could not commit sin. But it was not the law the Jews had. This will be discussed further under verses 14,15.

*Those who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.*

The Jews, in contrast to the Gentiles, did have the Law given at Sinai. When they sinned, they would be judged by that law. This was the part they did not like. The Jews would agree that the punishment of the Gentiles was just, because they were sinners. However, we will see as we proceed that the Jews did not want the same application made to them.

But Paul’s point is that the principle of judgment is based on conduct. So Jew and Gentile both had the same problem: both were sinners.

**Those who are justified are those who do the law, not just those who hear it.**

Here Paul states the principle of justification by works of law, such as the Law of Moses. In order to stand justified on the basis of the law, you must obey it: do what it says. You are not acceptable before God just because you hear the law and know it (compare James 1:22-25; Matthew 7:21-27). Paul has not yet introduced the concept of forgiveness by grace. He is discussing the principle of justification by law-keeping. Applied to sin under law like the Law of Moses, this means that you have to obey the law to be justified under it.

The Jews thought God should accept them, just because they were His chosen nation, having the law, knowing the law, and teaching the law to others (verses 17-20). But the problem was that they violated the law (verses 21ff). So, the mere fact they knew the law did not justify them.

They could understand that with regard to the Gentiles. Paul says the same is true of them. The bottom line is that they had a sin problem the same as the Gentiles, and both needed the gospel with its forgiveness. Paul is using these concepts to show the need for forgiveness, which the law did not really provide, but which the gospel does provide by the death of Christ. This will be enlarged upon as the book proceeds.

***2:14-16 – If Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things of the law, they show the work of the law on their hearts and are a law unto themselves.***

**When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things in the law, they are a law to themselves, showing the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.**

This verse clearly shows that Paul is here contrasting Gentiles to Jews (compare verses 9,10). The Gentiles did not have the law; the Jews did have it. This helps confirm that Paul is describing the circumstances of the Gentiles in chapter 1 and the circumstances of the Jews in chapter 2.

And two times this verse says the Gentiles do not have the law. What law is that? As we discussed on verse 12 above, it must refer to the Law given to the Jews at Mt. Sinai. This is the only law that the Gentiles did not have but the Jews did have (verses 17-20).

Yet though they did not have the law, Paul says Gentiles might do by nature the things that are in the law (i.e., “do what the law requires” – ESV). If so, they become a law to themselves. How might Gentiles do the things in the law by nature? Paul adds in verse 15 that they show the work of the law written in their hearts and their conscience bears them witness. Their thoughts either accuse or else excuse them. (See notes on verse 26.)

There might be several ways for Gentiles to know God’s will as implied by this verse. 1:18-21 shows that they knew God. If they knew God, then they might also know some about His will. In our notes on 1:18,19 we listed several ways the Gentiles had contact with God’s will. All were descended from Noah. They also knew about God’s plagues on the Egyptians and His dealings with Israel. They would have passed down from generation to generation some knowledge of right and wrong learned in these ways. They also had some contact with the nation of Israel or with those who did have contact with them. Several passages mention various men of God who taught among the Gentiles. In addition, some principles of right and wrong are simply obvious by common sense: do not kill or steal, treat others as you would want to be treated, etc. (Compare 1 Corinthians 5:1.)

Paul does not say that the Gentiles would know all of God’s will, but they might know much about it. And remember that many of the commands of the law at Sinai never were binding on the Gentiles: circumcision, the Sabbath, the holy days, the Levitical priesthood, etc. So, God would not hold the Gentiles accountable for obeying those laws that were given only to Israel.

The Gentiles were a law to themselves, not in the sense that they had the right to just choose for themselves whatever laws they wanted to

follow, but in that they had of themselves other ways, apart from the law of the Jews, to know what God wanted them to do. As Paul says, they showed the work of the law on their hearts and consciences. As a result, their consciences would accuse or excuse them, according as they did or did not do what they knew to be right.

Nothing Paul says here means that the Gentiles ever completely did God's word. He has already proved at length that they did not do what they knew to be right, and so were without excuse (chapter 1). But they did do some of what was right some of the time, and many may have done much of what was right. To the extent they did what was right according to God's will, to that extent their consciences would approve them and they would have God's approval. But to the extent they disobeyed God's will, to that extent their consciences would accuse them, and they would have God's disapproval. But the right they did would not justify the wrong they did, so they needed God's forgiveness under the gospel.

The ultimate point Paul is making is, not to show that the Gentiles were justified, but to show that both they and the Jews stood condemned for disobeying what they knew to be right. He is just giving further explanation of verse 12 – those who sinned under the law stand condemned, and those who sinned without the law stand condemned. But both stand condemned.

For a definition of "nature," see on 1:26.

"Conscience" (συνειδησις) – "...a. the consciousness of anything ... b. the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending the one, condemning the other; conscience..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel**

The NKJV demonstrates by parentheses that verses 13-15 are a parenthetical explanation of verse 12 (compare the ASV). Verse 16 then returns to the point of verse 12. All who sin will be judged (verse 12) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (verse 16). See notes on verses 2-6 regarding the day of judgment. Verses 13-15 explain the sense in which the Gentiles had a knowledge of right and wrong and so became sinners, though they did not have the law as given to the Jews.

Note that even the secrets of men will be judged. Every work will be judged.

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 – God will judge every work with every secret thing. Even the things we thought no one else knows, these too will be judged.

Matthew 12:36,37 – Men shall give account for every idle word. Even the words we thought were unimportant, spoken when no one was listening – all will be judged.

Jeremiah 17:10 – God searches the heart to reward us. He is concerned, not just with outward actions, but also with thoughts, attitudes, and motives. Evil in the heart can condemn us just as surely as evil deeds. There is nothing covered or hidden that shall not be made known (Luke 12:2). (Hebrews 4:13; John 16:30; 21:17)

We cannot escape or hide. The gospel, as Paul preached it, confirmed this to be true.

***2:17,18 – If you wear the name of a Jew, rest on the law, glory in God, know His will, and approve the things that are excellent being instructed from the law...***

**You are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God.**

This chapter had begun addressing someone in the second person as “you” in contrast to the “they” of chapter 1 (see verse 1). In Paul’s writing, he often uses different pronouns to distinguish Jews and Gentiles (sometimes he refers to the Jews as “we” and the Gentiles as “you”). Here Paul spells out his meaning clearly for the first time. “You” are called a “Jew.” This term originates from the descendants of the tribe of Judah. It apparently became more widely used during and after the Babylonian captivity. But by the time of the New Testament, it was the common term for all those who claimed ancestry from Abraham through Jacob. Here the term is contrasted to the Gentiles, people of all other nations.

The Jews prided themselves that they were Jews. And they rested on the law – they trusted that their possession of the law made them special and gave them special favor with God. This is implied in the context. Again note that “the law” in this context surely refers to the Old Testament law. And since that is true, these introductory chapters should show us that is the significance throughout the book. See our notes on verses 12-14.

They also boasted in God. That is, they were convinced they had a special relationship with God. They viewed themselves as God’s people. See Micah 3:11; Isaiah 48:1,2. Paul’s point, as we will see, is that they thought they had all these blessings simply because they were physical descendants of Abraham, even if they did not follow the law with devotion and commitment. They somehow thought God would accept and bless them regardless of how they lived.

**Know His will, approve things that are excellent, instructed out of the law**

They were instructed in the teachings of the law (again, surely the Old Testament law) and therefore knew His will (Deuteronomy 4:8). As

a result, they knew right from wrong according to the law, and could approve what was excellent or good in God's eyes (Philippians 1:10). In short, they knew right from wrong according to the law.

There was nothing wrong in being a Jew. And surely it was good to seek the favor of God, to know the law, and to recognize what is good. But the point is, as in verse 13, that none of these things was sufficient. To truly be blessed by God, one had to do the law – be obedient. This the Jews did not do. Paul continues to enlarge the point through the context, leading to the conclusion that the Jews would stand condemned in the judgment just as surely as the Gentiles would. They knew the law and so could easily condemn the Gentiles (verses 1-3). But they did not recognize that they were just as condemned by the law.

***2:19,20 – They were confident they were a guide of the blind, a corrector of the foolish and a teacher of babes, having the knowledge and truth in the law.***

**Confident that you guide the blind, a light to those who are in darkness**

These verses continue the point of verses 17,18. Paul is describing how the Jews viewed their relationship with God based on their national blessings. Since they knew and had been instructed by the law (verse 18), they were convinced they could give proper guidance to others. A man who can see is able to guide a blind man, so they thought they could guide others who did not know the law (Matthew 15:14). They viewed themselves as able to give the light of knowledge to those who were in the darkness of ignorance and sin.

Again, all these are good things to do. And probably many Jews could do these things. But the point is that they failed to apply their knowledge to live properly.

**Instruct the foolish, teach babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law**

Their knowledge of God's law enabled them to instruct those who were foolish. People who are spiritually foolish are described at length in the book of Proverbs. The foolish man does not know or respect God's law. As a result, he lacks true wisdom in his life. But the Jew knew God's law. So he thought he could instruct those who lacked Divine wisdom. He could teach little children (or those who were unlearned in God's law like little children) how to please and serve God.

They had the proper pattern of knowledge that was revealed in the true teachings of God's law. All this was good. Jews ought to have done these things. But again, the problem was that these things alone were insufficient. What was further required was to live by the law. This is where the Jews failed.

Paul knew all these things about how the Jews viewed themselves, because He was a Jew. Before his conversion, he viewed himself as a Jew

among Jews. He knew how they thought, and describes them at great length. He draws out the point so that, in the end, he makes obvious how inexcusable they were in their sins, and how much they needed the gospel.

***2:21,22 – You who teach others, do you not teach yourself? If you say others should not steal or commit adultery or idolatry, do you practice what you rebuke?***

***You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?***

Having made clear that he is discussing Jews who had the Law of Moses, and having described their view of their special favored status before God, Paul levels a series of accusations against them. The basic issue is that they taught people to obey the law, yet they themselves disobeyed the law. They expected other people to practice what they themselves would not. See verses 21-29.

The Jews roundly condemned the Gentiles as unworthy of God's favor. Yet, Paul's point is that the Jews themselves were just as guilty as the Gentiles, and there was even less excuse for them since they had God's law. They could make great demands laying heavy burdens on others, but they would not even begin to live up to these demands themselves. See notes on verses 1,3. See also Matthew 7:1-5; 23:1-4; Luke 18:10-14; 2 Samuel 12:5-7; Romans 14:22.

Some people loudly and repeatedly point out the errors of others. Yet when their own lives are examined, it becomes obvious they are no better than those whom they rebuke. The application is to the Jews, but we need to make sure the same does not apply to us. If we join Paul in condemning the Jews for not practicing what they would preach, then we too are without excuse if we don't practice what we preach.

***Do you steal?***

Paul then begins to give specific examples. The Jews knew it was wrong to steal. This was even one of the Ten Commands (Exodus 20:15). Yet, Paul asked if they themselves were guilty of stealing. He is implying that they were – at least some or many of them were. That is the point, as shown in the context (note verses 25-27).

Paul does not give specifics. But in Matthew 23:14 Jesus gives an example: They devoured widows' houses. That is, they took advantage of the poor and defenseless to take their property. They were covetous and sought wealth (Luke 16:14). Even the apostle Judas was a thief (John 12:6). In their business dealings, Jews have been known to be dishonest, use unjust measurements, etc. God had repeatedly rebuked them for these things in the Old Testament. Compare Malachi 3:8.

It does no good before God to know that stealing is wrong and teach others it is wrong, if we ourselves practice stealing. The Jews needed to realize that they were not acceptable before God just because they knew



and taught the law and were physical descendants of Moses. Obedience was needed.

(For other verses regarding stealing see Romans 13:6-10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Isaiah 6:18; 1 Peter 4:15,16; Titus 2:9,10; Matthew 15:19,20; Psalm 37:21; Ezekiel 33:15.)

“Steal” (κλεπτω) – “1) to steal, 1a) to commit a theft, 1b) take away by theft i.e take away by stealth” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Do you commit adultery?**

The same principle applied to committing adultery. This was also forbidden by the Ten Commands (Exodus 20:14), so the Jews knew it was wrong and taught against it. They condemned Gentiles for practicing it. Yet, many of them were themselves guilty. Again, Paul gives no specific examples, yet the readers must have known in their hearts it was true. McGarvey says that the Talmud charges some of the most celebrated rabbis with adultery.

(See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23.)

“Adultery” (μοιχευω) – “to commit adultery; a. ... (to be an adulterer) ... b. ... to commit adultery with, have unlawful intercourse with another’s wife ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?**

This is perhaps the most difficult of the examples to understand. The Jews professed to abhor idols. Of course, idolatry was also forbidden in the Ten Commands (Exodus 20:3-5). The Jews had struggled terribly with this sin throughout their Old Testament history, finally to be taken into captivity because of the failure to avoid it. But the New Testament Jews professed to have learned the lesson and to avoid the practice faithfully.

However, Paul accuses them of robbing temples. The KJV translates “commit sacrilege.” Apparently, the word can take either variation. So, Whiteside suggests that the meaning is that the Jews committed sacrilege against God by disrespecting His service. Like Old Testament Jews, they did not give proper respect, especially in their hearts, toward the worship God deserved (Ezekiel 22:26; Malachi 1:6-14; Matthew 15:1-9). Jesus had twice cleansed the temple, because the Jews had defiled it by operating businesses there. Perhaps the point is that such disrespect in worship to the true God constituted committing sacrilege against God, so where is that really any better than those who disrespect God by worshiping idols? Both were perversions of worship under the law.

Lard suggests that maybe the Jews would desecrate Gentile temples and take away their articles of worship, as though to disrespect the idols, but then privately keep those items of worship and use them themselves.



This was surely true in some Old Testament cases and might have been true in New Testament days, but I know of no evidence of it.

In any case, the point is that the Jews professed great devotion to true worship of the true God, yet they did not practice what they preached even in this.

(See also Deuteronomy 4:19; 5:7-9; 17:2-5; 2 Kings 21:1-6; 23:4,5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 10:7,14; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 5:21.)

***2:23,24 – They gloried in the law, but by transgressing the law they dishonored God. God’s name was blasphemed among Gentiles because of the Jews.***

**The Jews boasted in the law, but dishonored God by breaking the law.**

Most translations form this as a question, as with the other verses in context (but compare the ESV). Yet it is obviously a rhetorical question. The Jews openly expressed their pride in the fact God had given them the law at Sinai (verses 17-20; compare 9:4). But it did them no good to have the law if they did not keep it. The blessing of the law was for those who observed it, not just those who possessed it or knew it (verse 13).

In fact, by their failure to keep the law, the Jews brought dishonor on God. The Gentiles generally disrespected God by worshiping idols and practicing immorality (chapter 1). In contrast, the Jews had the law and claimed to be God’s people, yet their conduct brought shame on the God whom they claimed to honor.

God and His law are often judged on the basis of how His people act. This may not be completely fair, since it is not the fault of God or His law when His people violate the law. Yet other people see no point in serving God, if His people do not seem to be improved by their relationship to Him.

So the sins of the Jews not only meant they received no benefit from having the law, it meant they actually turned people away from God and from His law.

**The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.**

This verse “is written” in the Old Testament in Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:20-23. The same principle is taught in Ezekiel 16:27; 2 Samuel 12:14. To blaspheme means to speak against, especially referring to speaking against Deity. As in verse 23, people spoke against God in these Old Testament passages because God’s own people acted in ways that led people to see no reason to respect God.

As Christians, we can be guilty of a similar effect, when we disobey God’s will for us. Sometimes people outside the church often use the “hypocrites in the church” as their excuse why they see no reason to

become members. This, of course, is not valid reasoning. The fact that man is untrue does not make God untrue (3:3,4). Nevertheless, people often do so reason. See Titus 2:5; 1 Timothy 2:14; 1 Peter 2:11,12,15; 3:16; etc. Have we learned the lesson?

Note that Paul quotes the Old Testament and uses it to show the error of the Jews. The law in which they boasted and of which they claimed to be so proud (verse 23) – that law itself rebuked them when they failed to keep it. The law did not promise that God would bless them when they disobeyed it. Mere possession of the law and physical lineage from Abraham were not enough. Obedience was needed. Without it, not only was there no promise of a blessing, but instead harm was done.

***2:25-27 – Circumcision profited those who kept the law. But if one disobeyed, his circumcision became uncircumcision. If the uncircumcised kept the law they would be reckoned as circumcised and would judge those who had circumcision but transgressed the law.***

**Circumcision profits if you keep the law; but if you break the law, you are like one uncircumcised.**

Paul states that there was some value in being circumcised. It had some profit to the Jew. It had truly been instituted by God and served a useful purpose as a symbol of God's promise to Abraham and to his descendants (Genesis 17). But that did no good to one who did not keep the law.

In discussing circumcision, Paul focuses on a major issue to the Jew and to the Judaizing teachers. They believed the law was still in effect, so everyone who wanted to please God had to obey the law. And since circumcision was the special sign of the covenant, everyone had to be circumcised. This included converted Gentiles (Acts 15:1,5).

In this way, circumcision became the test case for whether or not Christians under the gospel had to keep the law (Galatians 2:1-9). So, Paul says that even circumcision is of no value, if one did not keep the law. What good does it do to keep the sign of the covenant, if you refuse to observe the covenant itself? (Compare Galatians 5:3, where he explains that one, who accepts the duty to be circumcised, has accepted the duty to keep the whole law.)

To call a Jew uncircumcised was the ultimate insult. It meant they were not in keeping with the covenant between God and Israel. Yet Paul says that is exactly the case of those who did not keep the law.

Note that Paul here uses the present tense to describe circumcision as being profitable. Yet, he knew and elsewhere stated that the law was already removed, so circumcision really did not matter, even when Paul wrote this (1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:6; 6:15). This illustrates the fact that, sometimes in this book and elsewhere in the New Testament, the law is spoken of with a historical present. It is described in the

present tense when discussing the principles it taught, but this should not be taken to mean those principles are still in effect. Paul knew that circumcision and the law had been removed, but he spoke in the present tense simply to explain what the law taught.

**If an uncircumcised man keeps the law, will he not be counted as one who is circumcised?**

Paul had taught that, if a Jew was circumcised but disobeyed the law, he would be like an uncircumcised man, regarding his relationship to God (verse 25). Now he reasons in reverse and states that, likewise, if a Gentile was not circumcised yet he kept the law, would he not be counted as one who was circumcised?

A Jew would think that no one could keep the law and remain uncircumcised, since circumcision was part of the law. But remember that circumcision (like the Sabbath) was a requirement only of Israelites. It was a sign for one who was a descendant of Abraham. But it was never required of Gentiles. Yet, Gentiles might keep other aspects of the law, and if they did God would accept them as He did Jews who kept the law (see notes on verses 12-16).

This, of course, was speaking in theoretical or academic terms, since no one really kept the law, Jew or Gentile – that is Paul's ultimate point. But the immediate point is that the Jews were equal to the Gentiles as regards their relationship with God in that neither could please God without obedience. The Jews saw the errors of the Gentiles and considered them condemned. Yet, they did not see that their own errors would likewise condemn them.

**One who is uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, would judge those who had the written code and circumcision but disobeyed the law.**

Paul then extends the point of verse 26 to explain that the uncircumcised Gentile, if he keeps the law, would judge the Jew who disobeyed the law. The state of uncircumcision is described in some translations as “physically uncircumcised” (NKJV, NASB, ESV) to contrast to the circumcision of the heart in verse 29. Others translate this as uncircumcised by nature (MLV), since the natural state is to be uncircumcised. Circumcision was a change of the natural course. This shows that not all that is unnatural is wrong, but it may be wrong if God so defines it. And some things (like homosexuality) are a perversion of nature.

This again shows without doubt that the contrast is between Jew and Gentile. The Jew not only had circumcision, but he also had the written law (verses 12,17-20). Yet, if he did not keep the law, he would stand condemned by comparison to a Gentile who was not circumcised but did keep the law. Again, no Gentile really did this, though some did it better than some Jews (Acts 10; Matthew 12:41). But the point is that

all are judged by obedience, without respect of persons (verses 6-11). God would show no favoritism, simply because one was a descendant of Abraham.

This passage illustrates the concept in which one person or group may judge another simply by their conduct. The good example of those who do right shows that those who do wrong without excuse.

***2:28,29 – One must not be a Jew outwardly, but inwardly, and not just circumcised outwardly but circumcised in the heart, in the spirit not in the letter, seeking praise from God, not men.***

**He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.**

Paul has gone to great lengths through this chapter to develop the principle that a mere fleshly ancestry from Abraham does not make one acceptable before God in the judgment. Nor is one accepted simply because he demonstrates an outward, physical sign of covenant relationship. True acceptance by God requires a life of committed service to God.

Here Paul directly states this conclusion using as an expression the term “Jew.” He spiritualizes the term, using it not as a mere physical nationality as he has used it in context till now. He must be using the term differently here, since the previous context has used the term “Jew” to simply contrast to Gentiles (verses 9,10) and to refer to those who simply have the law (verses 17ff). These previous references used the term “Jew” in the physical sense of the term. But here in verses 28,29, he plainly says he is using the term, not for a merely outward, fleshly circumstance, but for an inward, spiritual condition.

This is the opposite of what many Jews thought. As we have shown throughout the chapter, many Jews thought of themselves as receiving God’s favor, and even His acceptance in the judgment day, simply on the basis of their physical ancestry.

**He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart.**

The true Jew, however – the one who is truly accepted among God’s special people and destined to receive eternal life at the judgment (verses 6-10) – is a Jew inwardly. That is, his spiritual character is pleasing to God. He is not just born as a physical descendant of Abraham, but he shares the spiritual character of Abraham (see chapter 4).

His circumcision is not just an outward sign of a covenant relationship, but he actually keeps that covenant as Abraham did. This is described as circumcision of the heart. His covenant relationship with God is written on his heart and so shows itself in all areas of his life, inwardly and outwardly.

Some use this verse to try to deny the need for outward obedience. That misses the point entirely. On the contrary, Paul has taught the need for obedience throughout the chapter and many times elsewhere, as already shown in verses 6-13. Instead, the verse emphasizes the need for commitment to God to begin with attitudes and proper spiritual commitment. Those who have this true commitment will show it in their lives. But those who lack this proper inward attitude might show some outward signs of covenant relationship (such as circumcision), but will not really have proper attitudes or live a proper life.

(Romans 9:6-8; John 8:37-39; Galatians 6:15; Romans 4:10-12; Deuteronomy 30:6)

### **In the Spirit, not in the letter**

“In the Spirit, not in the letter” appears to me to be defined by the context. “In the spirit” means in “the heart” – Paul has just said so in the preceding phrase. Deuteronomy 30:6 says that circumcision of the heart means to love God with all one’s heart and soul (compare Deuteronomy 10:16; Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 6:27,28,31-33; 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13).

“In the letter” ties back to verse 27 – the Jews had a “written code” along with circumcision. “Written” is the word for “letter.” They had the law in the letter (in writing) and they had circumcision, but that was all outward. They did not mean it from the heart (the “spirit”) or live by it (see verses 17-24). (NKJV capitalizes “Spirit” to indicate the translators think it refers to the Holy Spirit, but there is no such capitalization in the original to make this distinction. I fail to see how the Holy Spirit fits the context).

So the point would be that a true Jew – one who will truly be accepted by God in the judgment day – is one whose service and covenant relationship to God truly comes from the heart, from the inner spirit (1 Peter 3:4). It is not just one who practices outward rituals of physical lineage or physical possession of Divine law. So, the contrast is between sincere obedience meant from the heart and outward rituals that lack proper attitudes and motives. Compare Philippians 3:3.

Another view, which is a minor variation of the above, is that Paul is emphasizing serving God in the “spirit” or true intent of the law, rather than in the “letter” or technicality of the law. Some people look for loopholes in God’s commands, seeking to base their arguments on what passages appear to say, without really seeking to understand what God really intended them to mean or apply.

Christians ought to obey God’s law in the real intended meaning (“spirit”), not just some technical twist that we can try to put on the words (“letter”) of the meaning. That is a true concern, but it does not seem to me to fit the context here as well as the previous view.

(Romans 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6)

## **Whose praise is not from men but from God**

This continues to explain what it means to be a Jew inwardly, circumcised in heart, in the spirit, not in the letter. This requires seeking the praise of God, rather than the praise of men (compare 1 Corinthians 4:5). If we seek to please God from the heart, we will emphasize serving Him from proper attitudes. We will not just pursue outward signs or symbols (like circumcision) that make us appear right in the sight of men.

Men tend to look on outward appearance, but God looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). It is easy to believe that, if people think we are righteous, then God will think so too. The end result emphasizes outward rituals, circumstances, and symbols (the letter) that may impress men, but this is done without proper attitudes (the spirit or heart). But God sees much in our lives, and especially our hearts, that men cannot see or do not care about.

One of the biggest problems Jews had was that they sought to receive praises from men more importantly than from God. Other Scriptures regarding this problem are: Matthew 6:1-18; 23:1-12; 2 Corinthians 10:12; John 5:44; 12:42,43; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Galatians 1:10.

NKJV footnote says this is a play on words on the meaning of “Jew.” “Jew” means “praise.” So a true Jew must seek their praise from the One who really matters: from God rather than from man.

Again, nothing here teaches that obedience is not essential under the gospel. The point is that our attitude of heart must be right. When that is the case, we will obey God from the heart, as throughout the chapter.

# Romans 3

## 3:1-31 - All Men Have Sinned and Need the Gospel.

***3:1,2 – What advantage does the Jew have or what benefit was there in circumcision? There was much, including possession of the oracles of God.***

Paul has demonstrated in chapter 1 that the Gentiles committed sin and in chapter 2 that the Jews violated the law, so both needed salvation through the gospel. He begins the present section by answering some objections that Jews, including Jewish Christians, were sure to ask about what he has taught.

The first question is: What advantage did the Jews have, if they were sinners condemned before God just like the Gentiles were? What good was it to have circumcision and be born into God's chosen nation? The implication is that Paul's teaching would effectively deny that God gave any special blessings at all to the Jews. If God would judge them for their sins just the same as He would judge the Gentiles, then what was the point in claiming the Jews as His special people?

Rather than denying that the Jews had advantages, Paul affirms there were many. There was much profit in being a circumcised member of the Jewish nation. This means he could cite many advantages. However, he begins with what he says is the main advantage: they had committed or entrusted into their care the oracles of God – the law and the prophets (Deuteronomy 4:5-8; Acts 7:53).

Paul does not explain the ways in which this was an advantage, but some should be obvious. Having a written law – in contrast to traditions handed down, as the Gentiles had – gave Jews a much better opportunity to know God's will. This should have made it easier for them to obey God. They could have a personal relationship with Him, because of His covenant with the nation. The law would also give them a record of the history of God's purpose and dealings with men, especially a history of the Jewish nation.

Another advantage of having the law, which Paul will show was its greatest advantage, was that the law would help prepare them for the gospel. It was a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ – Galatians 3:24,25. This will be discussed in detail as the book of Romans proceeds.

Having the law was the "chief" or biggest advantage the Jews had, but there were others Paul could have named and does name elsewhere. But those advantages did not include a promise from God to overlook



their sins and accept each individual at the judgment without their sins being forgiven. That forgiveness was the purpose of the gospel.

**3:3,4 – If some were without faith, would that nullify the faithfulness of God? No, but God is true even if every man is a liar. So God will be justified in His words and prevail in judgment.**

**If some did not believe, will that make God's faithfulness without effect?**

Having cited the "chief" advantage the Jew had, Paul cites no more advantages. Instead, he continues discussing other questions or objections some Jews might have with his claims that they had sinned and would be judged without partiality.

Some might think that, if God punished the Jews for their unbelief (and other sins), that would mean God was unfaithful to His promises. Paul has accused the Jews of being unfaithful to the covenant (compare Hebrews 4:2). If God punished them for their sins, did that mean God should also be counted as unfaithful – that He had somehow failed to keep His promises to Israel? No doubt, many Jews would so claim, since they were convinced that His promises required Him to accept them, despite their sins.

**Let God be true but every man a liar.**

Paul's response to this question is the strongest negative in the Greek language: "Certainly not" (translated by some as "God forbid" to emphasize the point, even though there is no word for "God" in the original text). If the Jews failed to keep the covenant and so brought God's wrath and punishment on themselves, that would not mean that God had broken any promise. God speaks truth and is faithful to His word, even if all men are untrue to God or to their commitment to Him. Unlike men, who often sin when other people sin against them, God never allows the sins of men to lead Him to do wrong (Job 40:8).

The objection some might raise is that Paul's argument implies that God has been untrue to His promises. Paul's response is that, anytime men oppose or speak against God, God is right and the men are wrong (John 3:33; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Whenever anyone accuses God of wrongdoing or implies God has been untrue, the man must be wrong, because God is always upright and truthful.

To confirm that nothing He has said would impugn God's faithfulness, Paul quotes Psalms 51:4: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged." When one reads this Psalm in our translations, it says that God will be blameless when He judges. This is an issue of translation, but both ideas are true. When men seek to find fault with God's judgments, they can find none. All His words and all His judgments are beyond being successfully contradicted by any man.



This includes His judgments of the Jews. The law itself had repeatedly shown that God would punish Israel for their sins (compare Deuteronomy 28 and other such Scriptures). He had never promised to overlook their sins and reward them eternally, even if they refused to correct those sins. So, Israel's sins did lead God to punish them, but this did not prove that God was untrue to any promise He ever gave. On the contrary, He would have been untrue to His promises if He had ignored their sins without requiring repentance and forgiveness.

Note that God here is "justified," but not in the sense that man must be justified before God. We discussed justification or righteousness in our discussion on 1:17, showing that one is "justified" or stands righteous when he is shown to be right or upright. When one has done nothing wrong, he can be "justified" by being acquitted of all accusations against him – he is right because he did nothing wrong. This is the sense in which God is justified or righteous. The other way to be justified is to be forgiven of the sins one has committed. This is the only way man can be justified, since he has been guilty of wrong. Such justification can come to man through the gospel, but not through the Old Testament.

***3:5,6 – If our unrighteousness shows that God is righteous, would this make it wrong for Him to punish the wicked? How then would He judge the world?***

***If our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, would that imply that God is unjust to punish our sins?***

Paul continues to state (in question form) the objections some might raise to his teaching about the sins of the Jews. If it was not obvious before that this is what he is doing, it is here made obvious by his expression "I speak as a man." That is, he here states a human viewpoint, not the inspired viewpoint of God (compare Galatians 3:15). In this case, the human viewpoint is incorrect, so he responds to it in the next verse.

So, what objection is Paul answering here? His main question is: Is God unjust to inflict wrath? That is, if he punishes the Jews for their sins, even as he punishes Gentiles for their sins (2:5-10), does that mean He is guilty of treating the Jews unjustly?

But I am not clear why the Jews would ask that question. He says that "our unrighteousness demonstrates God's righteousness." This would appear to refer back to verses 3,4, where he showed that God is faithful to His promises and covenants, even though He punished the Jews for their unfaithfulness. So, the argument of verse 5 appears to be that the Jews' sins gave God the opportunity to demonstrate His justice; His righteousness then is magnified by contrast to their unrighteousness. And if God ends up being justified, why punish the Jews for giving Him the opportunity to demonstrate His righteousness?

Such an argument seems silly to me, so I wonder if I fully understand it. Of course, all human arguments against God's word are ultimately silly. And it is not so important that we understand man's futile arguments as that we understand God's truth. That is revealed in the next verse.

### **Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?**

Paul's response to the argument of verse 5 is again a flat denial: "Certainly not" (or "God forbid," as in verse 4). If God is unjust to punish the Jews for their sins, then how could He punish anyone in the world for their sins? Everyone should know that God does intend to punish sinners. The Jews surely expected Him to punish the Gentiles for their sins. So, any argument must be false if it implies that God would be unjust to punish men for their sins.

If we grant that God will punish anyone for sin, then we must grant that punishing sinners is not unjust. In fact, the justice of God is what requires Him to punish sinners. But if we grant that to be true, then it must be true even of our own sins. No human logic can make God unjust for punishing sin. As God, He has every right to punish our sins, and He has promised that He will do so (see again 2:6-11). So, whatever the human argument in verse 5 means, any argument that implies God should not punish the Jews' sins must be a false argument, otherwise the same logic would imply that God cannot punish anyone's sins.

***3:7,8 – And if Paul's "falsehood" demonstrates God's truth, then why should Paul be considered sinful? Why not do evil that good may come? The condemnation of those who say such is just.***

**If man's sin is justified by the fact that it demonstrates the glory of God's truthfulness, why was Paul judged as a sinner?**

This appears to continue to answer the argument of verse 5. If the sins of the Jews should be overlooked on the grounds that they gave God an opportunity to demonstrate His faithfulness (or on any other such grounds), then why wouldn't the same argument apply to Paul, who was also a Jew? The Jews believed Paul had defected from the truth when he became a Christian, and even the Judaizing Christians thought he taught error regarding the salvation of the Gentiles. But if God would overlook the sins of the Jews, simply because they were Jews, then why wouldn't that same argument excuse and justify Paul? Why did the Jews continue to view him as a sinner?

This argument continues the point of verse 6. If our sins can be overlooked on the grounds that they magnify God's justice – or by any similar argument – then it should work for all people's sins, not just for the Jews' sins. In particular, it should work for the "sins" for which people accused Paul. So, why did they continue to treat him as a sinner?

This is an excellent example of arguing a case by showing the inconsistency of those in error. Paul used the arguments of Jews themselves to show the error of their own teaching. He had established the truth about the Jews' sins in chapter 2 and will continue to do so in 3:9ff. But here he shows the self-contradiction in the Jews' position. Thereby, he demonstrates the value of such an approach in reasoning with those in error.

**The conclusion would be: “Let us do evil that good may come”?**

If we are justified in sinning so God can be glorified, then that would mean we are justified in doing evil in order to produce good. “The end justifies the means.” Apparently, even the Jews knew such an approach was not proper, yet it would be the consequence of their argument.

And furthermore, some had affirmed that Paul taught we may do evil so good might come. He does not say who accused him of this or why they did so, but presumably his readers knew that he had been so accused. But to make clear that he did not believe that doctrine, Paul stated that those who so accused him were slandering him and deserved the condemnation they would receive.

Here Paul by inspiration absolutely disavows the doctrine that the end justifies the means. This rebukes the doctrine the Jews were advocating, but it also shows that any doctrine based on that concept must be false. That would include all Situation Ethics arguments.

It also includes many modern efforts to justify unauthorized church-supported projects, such as missionary societies, benevolent institutions, Social Gospel projects (entertainment, recreation, social meals), and carnal appeals to attract people to attend church functions. Despite the fact such practices have no authority in God's word, many people defend them on the grounds that they are supposed to benefit people. But unless God's word teaches a doctrine, then that doctrine is false and must not be justified by claims that people think some good might come from it.

Note also that Paul levels the charge of slander against those who falsely accused him of teaching this false doctrine. We don't know the circumstances of the accusation. Perhaps those who accused Paul knew he did not really teach it, or perhaps they did it with the intent to harm his influence and reputation. Or perhaps they just didn't really care whether or not the accusation was true, but they just enjoyed circulating juicy rumors that made people look bad. All such would constitute the sin of slander. It is possible to make a sincere mistake about what other people believe, but we should be careful to avoid falsely accusing others of sin. If we find we have falsely accused others, we should surely acknowledge our error and apologize for it.

See Proverbs 17:15; Isaiah 5:20; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16; 4:4; 1 Kings 18:17,18; Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22,23,26; 3 John 9,10; Luke 3:14;

John 7:24; 2 Timothy 3:3; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-11 (revilers); 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 2:1; Ephesians 4:31.

“Slander” (βλασφημεω) – “1) to speak reproachfully, rail at, revile, calumniate, blaspheme 2) to be evil spoken of, reviled, railed at” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***3:9-12 – Paul has charged both Jews and Greeks that all are under sin. None are righteous or understand or seek God or does good, but have all turned aside.***

### ***All are guilty of sin.***

Having responded to some potential objections Jews would raise to his claims that they were guilty of sin just as surely as Gentiles were, Paul next proceeds to document his charges against the Jews. First, he asks the question whether we (the Jews) are any better than they (Gentiles). This is the issue he has been discussing. He answers plainly that the Jews are not at all better and restates his charge that both Jews and Greeks are all guilty of sin.

This statement summarizes chapter 1-3 and makes clear, if it was not clear before, exactly what Paul’s point has been. Chapter 1 accused the Gentiles that all are guilty of sin. Chapter 2 accused the Jews that all are guilty of sin. So, in that sense, the Jews were no better than the Gentiles. Individual Jews might have been guilty of fewer sins than individual Gentiles, and vice-versa. But the charge is that all commit sins at various times.

### ***There is none righteous, no, not one.***

To this point Paul has simply made statements that honest Jews would recognize as being true. But some objectors might dispute his claim. So he gives proof that no Jew could dispute: he refers to their own Scriptures. “It is written.” The Old Testament itself states exactly what Paul has stated. If any Jew had objected up till now, Paul gives an indisputable answer. First, he refers to Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3 (see also Ecclesiastes 7:20).

No one is righteous, not even one. This statement is not an exact quote (at least not in the English), but it expresses the very point of the Psalms. It may have been an introductory statement by Paul summarizing the point of the passages he cites, rather than a quotation. Or it may have been a paraphrase of the Scripture. In any case, it surely gives the basic truth of the Scripture.

The point is not that all people do evil things all the time. In fact, there are times in everyone’s life when he is doing nothing evil at all. Everyone does some righteous things, but that does not make a person righteous. The problem is that everyone does some sinful things. The only way to be righteous, under the law, was to never do anything wrong. Just like under civil law, if you break a law, you are a lawbreaker. You

don't have to break every law or do wrong all the time to stand under the penalty of the law.

All sin, therefore none are righteous before God on the basis of their own conduct. The law itself so states, and no Jew could dispute the law.

### **None understands; none seeks after God.**

The Old Testament passage in English expresses this as though God is seeking to find out whether or not anyone understands or if any seeks God. But the result of the inquiry is that all have turned aside.

Again, this does not mean that people never understand anything about God or that no one ever seeks to know Him or do His will. Many people seek Him much of the time and many understand much about Him. But that is not the point. The point is that all at times fail to properly seek Him. All at times do what pleases themselves or other people, instead of what pleases God. And all at times fail to understand – or to demonstrate by their lives that they understand – God's will.

Even the best of us have sinned at times, because of a lack of commitment to studying and knowing God's will, or because of a lack of commitment to doing His will. And all of us continue to fail from time to time. With some, this is a pattern or way of life. With others, it happens only occasionally. But for all of us it has happened many times. And as Paul has earlier shown, Jew or Gentile, there is no excuse for our sins.

No sin is acceptable before God. On the principle of observance of law, we have all failed.

### **All have turned aside. All have become unprofitable. There is none who does good, no, not one."**

All at times turn aside. Transgression carries the idea of missing the mark of God's law (1 John 3:4). We turn aside from doing what is right. We go astray to the right hand or to the left (Joshua 1:7). This makes us unprofitable in God's service.

How many do good all the time? None. Not one. The Old Testament itself says this, so how could any Jew now dispute it?

(Exodus 32:8; Psalm 14:3; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Isaiah 53:6)

### **3:13,14 – Their throat is an open sepulcher, their tongues speak deceit, poison is under their lips, their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.**

### **All men speak evil.**

These verses are a series of quotations all of which show that all men at times commit sin with their speech. This is also what James says in James 3:2-10.

"Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit." This is quoted from Psalms 5:9. A tomb is a place wherein lies corruption and stench. Most people do not like to open a

tomb were a dead body is decaying, because the odor and corruption is so disgusting.

Some people's mouths are like that too. Where we ought to be able to expect wholesome, helpful edifying truth, we find speech that is corrupt. This includes deceit and lying: false statements spoken from false motives. All of us have done this at times, and many people do it much of the time.

"The poison of asps is under their lips" – Psalms 140:3. Some snakes are known for poisonous bites. We avoid them whenever we can. We should not find such poison coming from the lips of men, yet it is often the case. A snakebite can cause great suffering, pain, and even death. So can the speech of some people. All of us at times speak biting, poisonous things that ought not to be spoken.

"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" – Psalms 10:7. To curse is to say that we want evil or harm to befall someone: we want them to receive, not that which benefits them, but that which harms them. We speak bitterly from anger, hatred, or ill-will, not from a desire to see others be blessed.

See 1 Peter 2:1,22; 3:10; Matthew 15:18-20; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8,27; 22:14,15; Proverbs 6:16-19; 19:22; Psalm 24:3-5; 40:4; Exodus 20:16; John 8:44; Acts 5:1-9.

***3:15-18 – Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways. They do not know the way of peace, nor do they fear God.***

### **Further quotations showing the corruption of men**

Verses 15-17 are quoted as excerpts from Isaiah 59:7,8 (compare Proverbs 1:16).

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways" – This describes the violence men do to one another. Men often harm one another physically or otherwise cause misery and destruction to one another. God commands us to love and help one another. We should seek opportunities to do good (Galatians 6:10). Instead, at times we all hurt other people, and some do it regularly.

"The way of peace they have not known." People act as if they don't know how to be peaceable. In any case, they do not know the peace that can come when one serves God truly (Luke 19:41-44). They do not experience peace, because they do not know how to live peaceably. See Matthew 5:9; James 3:13-18; Romans 12:18; 14:19; Genesis 13:8; Proverbs 20:3; Psalm 133:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-6; Galatians 5:19-21.

"There is no fear of God before their eyes" – Psalms 36:1. The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commands – Ecclesiastes 12:13. Yet some look on the world with no fear whatever for God. Others, even

who claim to serve God, yet at times disrespect God's word or His will for their lives.

These statements here are generally applied to Jews – God's covenant people under the Old Testament. But the point is that they were true of the Jews just as they were true of the Gentiles. All were guilty of sin, so all need the gospel.

Specifically, since these statements are all quoted from the Old Testament law, no Jew could deny them. He could not claim that Paul was speaking from prejudice or error. Their own law, which they claimed to respect and obey (2:17-20), taught these things.

***3:19,20 – The law speaks to those who are under it, so all the world may be brought under God's judgment. By the works of the law no flesh will be justified before God, but through the law comes the knowledge of sin.***

**Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law.**

Paul reminds us that the law speaks to those who are subject to it. The contents of the law have little meaning to people who are not subject to it. But who was subject to the law that Paul has been quoting? The law was given to the Jews, the nation of Israel. So, the clear point is that, when these passages described the guilt of men, Jews were included. And they cannot deny this, since the law was specifically addressed to them.

**Every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.**

The necessary conclusion, which the Jews should have understood from their own law, was that all men are guilty of sin before God. There is no sense trying to deny it. No one should even attempt to do so, but should simply hush and acknowledge the truth that all are guilty. This summarizes the point for which Paul has been aiming throughout chapters 1 and 2.

**Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.**

The conclusion is that the law did not serve to justify men before God; rather, it served to prove men are sinners before God. "Justify" means to prove that one stands innocent or not guilty (see notes on 1:17). The only way the law could ever justify or prove one was not guilty would be if a person never broke the law. But Paul has now proved that this is not the case of anybody, since all have violated the law. The result is that what the law really accomplished was to make men aware of their sins: by the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Galatians makes the same point. 2:16 states that no flesh will be justified by works of the law. Rather, those who are under the law are



under a curse, because the only way to stand justified by the law is to never violate it. But everyone violated it (3:10). So no one can be justified by the law (3:11). The end result served by the law was to confine all men under sin, so they would appreciate their need for the forgiveness offered by Christ (3:19-25).

Acts 13:39 – The result is that men could not be justified by the law.

As explained on 1:17, there are only two ways to stand justified before God. One is to never violate the law. The other is to be forgiven or pardoned of the violations one has committed. No one will be justified in the first way, as Paul has just proved, since all do commit sin. The only way left to seek justification is on the grounds of forgiveness.

The reference to “law” here applies primarily to the Old Testament Law of Moses. There is no definite article before “law,” but as explained in our notes on 2:12, it still refers to the Law of Moses. That is why the translators generally insert an article in verse 20. Throughout the context, Paul has been quoting from that law and making applications to those who had been subject to it (that is surely the law referred to in verse 19).

However, the principle can be applied to justification on the basis of perfect law-keeping in general. The Old Testament law defined right and wrong but contained no provision for forgiveness of violations. The only way to be justified by any such law is to keep it without violation. But all people violate divine law. So, Paul is here describing two different principles of justification; he will specifically identify these as two kinds of law in verse 27. The principle of justification by works of law is that we stand innocent because we never sinned. The principle of justification by faith is that we stand innocent because we have been pardoned of our sins through one who has the power to pardon.

The Old Testament Law of Moses, of itself, had no means to pardon. It had animal sacrifices, but as explained in Hebrews 10, those could never be a satisfactory grounds for pardoning sin committed against God. So, the law proved people were guilty, but it could do nothing to solve the problem of guilt. But the same would be true of any other system of “law” which had no provision for forgiveness. That is why we need the gospel which offers forgiveness through the death of Christ, as Paul will explain as he continues.

This helps explain why God waited nearly 4000 years from the sin of Adam and Eve till He sent Christ to die for our sins. Had He sent Jesus soon after the first sin, people would wonder why He did so. Why not just tell them what He wanted them to do, and they would do it? But 4000 years of human history proved that no one would really keep God’s laws. By giving the Old Law, God gave man a chance to prove to everyone whether or not he could be saved on the grounds of perfect law-keeping. The result proved that no one will be saved that way, so we need the



sacrifice that can forgive. We need Jesus. Now we know that, and no one can deny it. Every mouth has been stopped.

God did not work by trial and error. He did not send the Law of Moses, mistakenly hoping men would be justified by it. He knew men would not keep it faithfully. But He gave it knowing that it would prove we will not be saved that way. After He had forever established that point, then it was time to send Jesus.

***3:21,22 – Apart from the law, righteousness of God through faith in Christ is made known to all without distinction witnessed by the law and the prophets.***

**The righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,**

Having proved that no one will be justified on the basis of the law – i.e., by keeping the law sinlessly – God has revealed a different way for men to be justified or declared righteous.

This way of salvation is not contrary to the Old Testament: the law and the prophets. Rather, it is witnessed by them. That is, the Old Testament prophesied and predicted the New Testament (compare Romans 1:2; 16:25,26). Here are some examples of these predictions:

Psalms 110:4; Zechariah 6:12,13 with Hebrews 7:11-14 – Christ would be a priest on His throne, after the order of Melchizedek (both a king and a priest at the same time). But as a descendant of David, the Christ would be of the tribe of Judah, whereas priests could only be of the tribe of Levi. In order for Christ to fulfill the prophecy of a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He would have to be a priest of a tribe other than Levi. Since the law did not allow this, the prediction necessarily implied the law would be changed.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 8:6-12 – God promised a new covenant not like the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. Hebrews 8:6-12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 and clearly shows it is fulfilled in the New Testament we have now. (Compare Hebrews 9:15-17; 10:1-4,9,10,14-18.)

Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1,6-10 with Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15,16 – When the Lord's house would be established on the top of the mountains, the law (the word of the Lord) would go forth from Jerusalem (Zion). When the church began, the gospel (the message of repentance and remission of sins) was preached to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

In addition, there are numerous Old Testament prophecies (like Isaiah 53) that predicted the coming and rejection of Jesus. So, when Paul taught salvation by the blood of Jesus under the gospel, the Jews should not reject that teaching as a violation or change in God's plan. On the contrary, God had planned and predicted this all along.

**The plan of righteousness was “apart from the law.”**

Many denominationalists attempt to use such statements as this to argue that obedience to Divine commands is not necessary to be saved

under the gospel – especially not baptism. However, these statements must be kept in context. We have already repeatedly proved, from statements Paul has already made, that obedience to Divine commands is required to be saved under the gospel. It is vain to use this book to argue we can be saved without obedience, when Paul himself has already said the opposite and will say so repeatedly. Furthermore, the necessity of obedience is taught in many other New Testament books as well. See our introductory notes on Romans for a list of many such passages in Romans and elsewhere.

Furthermore, the New Testament clearly shows that it is properly referred to as a law, and that it involves many commands that must be obeyed as necessary conditions to salvation. Again, it is folly to deny this, for Paul himself calls it a law of faith in this very chapter in verse 27. Here are just a few other verses that prove the New Testament involves law and commands:

### **The Gospel Is a Law**

Galatians 6:2 – We must *fulfill the law of Christ*.

1 Corinthians 9:20,21 – Paul was “*not without law to God, but under law to Christ*.”

Isaiah 2:2,3 – When God established His house (the church – 1 Timothy 3:15), *God’s law would go forth from Jerusalem*. (Acts 2; Luke 24:47)

James 2:8 – Love your neighbor is the *royal law*. So, *love itself is a law!* (Compare Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14.)

1 John 3:4 – *Sin is transgression of law*. If we are not subject to law, then there can be no such thing as sin. Yet, all people commit sin (1 John 1:8,10; Romans 3:23). And sin is what we need God’s grace to forgive (Ephesians 1:7). If obedience to law is not necessary, then sin is not a problem, and we would not need grace to forgive our sins. *To eliminate law is to eliminate our need for grace!*

(Hebrews 8:10; Romans 3:27; James 1:25; 2:8,12)

Here are other passages showing that commands must be obeyed to be saved under the gospel: Matthew 22:37-39; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; John 14:21-24; 2 John 6; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:23; Acts 17:30,31; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3,4.

So, the point of Paul’s statement is not to deny that we must obey commands under the gospel to be saved. Rather, as discussed in verse 20 (see notes there), he is referring to a system of justification: justification by works of law. Such a system would require a lifetime of sinless perfection without ever violating any law. If one ever violated a law, he could not be justified under that system. Such a system, of itself, makes no provision for forgiveness of sin. Here in verse 21, Paul simply continues the point of verse 20, saying we will not be justified by a

system that requires perfect law-keeping, since none of us keep the law perfectly. So we need salvation by another system: one that provides forgiveness.

**The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.**

The system of justification that can provide righteousness from God is here called righteousness through faith in Christ. It is based on faith and offered to all who believe (Jew or Gentile) in that one must put his faith in Jesus as our sacrifice for sins. One cannot trust himself to achieve salvation, since his sins make that impossible. Nor is there any sacrifice that makes forgiveness possible other than that of Jesus. So, the gospel is a system of righteousness based on faith in Jesus.

But nothing here denies that obedience to commands is necessary to receive that justification. Such a denial would be totally foreign to Paul's teaching. There are commands we must obey as conditions of faith to demonstrate that we believe in Jesus and are willing to trust Him to save us. These conditions are essential to salvation, as shown in the passages above. However, they do not earn salvation. So, this means of justification is based on faith in Jesus, not on what we have achieved by our own sinless life.

Paul will enlarge greatly on this theme as we proceed. But nothing stated here or elsewhere should be taken to imply that obedience is unnecessary to receive salvation under the gospel.

**For further discussion of the distinction between justification by grace through faith as compared to justification by law, see our article about grace and our article about salvation by faith alone vs. obedient faith on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

**What issue is Paul dealing with in this section of Romans?**

Contrary to what many people mistakenly believe, Paul is not here dealing with the issue of whether or not obedience is a necessary condition for receiving forgiveness and becoming a child of God under the gospel. That is not even the subject Paul is discussing. Rather, he is dealing with Jews who had been converted to Christ but who believed that obedience to the Old Testament Law of Moses, including especially circumcision, was essential to be acceptable to God under the gospel. This is expressly stated in Acts 15:1,5,24 to have been a point of conflict between Paul and some Jewish Christians (note that verse 5 there expressly says these were Jews "who believed," and verse 24 says they had come from the church in Jerusalem). Such people are often called Judaizers or Judaizing teachers.

This issue specifically applied to Gentiles who had been converted under the gospel but had not been circumcised and were not keeping other aspects of the Law. These Judaizing teachers required that such

people must be circumcised and keep the law to be saved. The effect was to make the gospel an addition onto the Old Law – further revelation that must be kept in addition to the Law – rather than a replacement for the Law. These teachers required that people keep both the Old Law and the gospel in order to please God and be saved.

It is clear that Paul is primarily dealing with such teaching here in Romans, since he is primarily addressing an issue with Jews. But 1:6,7 says they were called of Christ and were saints. If he was speaking to Jews who were not disciples of Jesus, the thrust of his argument would be to convince them to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Unconverted Jews did not believe that, so the first need for them would be to learn that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior of the world, raised from the dead, etc. That was always the thrust of the teaching when addressed to unbelieving Jews (see Acts 2,3, etc.). The fact that Paul makes no effort in Romans to convince these Jews to believe in Jesus proves that they were already believers.

In Acts 15, the apostles and elders at Jerusalem had decided, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in harmony with statements in the Law itself, that keeping the Old Law was not necessary to salvation and should not be required of the Gentiles. Yet, the issue continued to plague the church, such that Paul had to deal with it at length here in Romans, as well as in Galatians and Hebrews, and to a lesser extent in 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians.

It necessarily follows, when Paul teaches that we are not saved by works of law, that he is essentially talking about the Old Testament law, though the same principles would apply to any similar system of law that required someone to live a sinless lifetime in order to be justified. It would show that one was condemned if he sinned against the law, but the law itself then had no provision to completely cleanse the record of guilt before God. Those who sinned would stand condemned with no remedy under that system of law.

So, it follows that, when people try to use Paul's teaching to prove that obedience to the gospel is not necessary to salvation, such people have completely misused the book. It was never intended to teach such a thing. And as we have seen, such a view contradicts what we are taught, not just in Romans, but throughout the New Testament.

Whiteside adds the interesting observation that the discussion is not really even about the salvation of alien sinners, who have never been forgiven of sins and become Christians. According to Acts 15, the discussion was about Gentiles who had already been converted. The Judaizers never argued that the Gentiles did not need to be baptized. Rather, they argued that, after the people had been baptized, they then also needed to be circumcised and keep the Law to receive God's favor and be saved eternally. If that is so, then the issue is not even about being forgiven and becoming a Christian! Rather, it is about remaining faithful

and staying in God's favor after baptism. Nevertheless, it appears to me that the principles would be the same, whether applied to becoming a Christian or to being faithful after conversion.

### **For there is no difference**

This expression appears to actually belong with the next verse. It is the beginning of a point that Paul will make as he continues. So, in context, this must mean that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile as regards what things Paul is discussing. There is no difference in that both are guilty of sin; this is the point Paul will make in the next verse. Paul has established this at length in the first three chapters. And there is no difference in the remedy for sin: all can be saved only through the gospel of Christ. This is true for Jew and Gentile – Romans 1:16.

***3:23,24 – All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus.***

### **Grace**

These verses summarize the point Paul has made throughout chapters 1-3. All people, Jew and Gentile, commit sin. As we become mature enough to be accountable for our conduct, all of us choose to disobey God (compare Galatians 3:22). Sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Sooner or later we all give in to temptation and become sinners before God. This is here called falling short of God's glory. He is never guilty of sin, and He expects us to live apart from sin. When we sin, we fail to give Him the proper glory or honor that is due Him.

When that has happened, as discussed at length above on verses 20,21, we can no longer hope to stand justified before God on the basis of our own sinless keeping of the law. We can only hope now for grace – unmerited favor – by which we are redeemed by Christ from our sins.

By definition, grace refers to favor or kindness that is not merited or deserved. The only way we could deserve or merit to stand justified before God would be if we never violated God's laws. Having violated the law – as Paul has shown we all do – we must forever abandon hope of being justified on the basis of works of law (a sinless life). So now, we can only hope for pardon. That, by definition, requires grace: favor that we do not deserve. This favor is extended by God under the gospel through the sacrifice of Jesus.

For other New Testament passages on grace, see Acts 15:7-11; 20:24,32; Romans 4:4-7; 5:1,2; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Ephesians 1:5-11; 2:5-10; 1 Timothy 1:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7; Hebrews 2:9.

“Grace” (χάρις) – “...2. good-will, loving-kindness, favor ...  
χάρις contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved ... pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to

sinner the pardon of their offences, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ ... the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues ... 3. what is due to grace; a. the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace ... b. a token or proof of grace ...; a gift of grace; benefaction, bounty ... 4. thanks (for benefits, services, favors) ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Redemption

This forgiveness is here also called “redemption.” To redeem means to purchase or obtain the deliverance of something or someone by the payment of a ransom. In the present discussion, our sins place us under the power of Satan as his spiritual slaves or prisoners (see chapter 6). One who commits sin is the bondservant of sin (John 8:34). Being under the power of Satan, we are alienated from God. We can no longer be God’s servants, until the sin problem is removed (Isaiah 59:1,2). A ransom price must be paid to remove us from Satan’s service and make us again the servants of God. That price was the death of Jesus.

So, having violated God’s law, all men stand in need of grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This is a major theme of Romans stated concisely in these verses.

See Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:18,19; 2:24; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; Titus 2:14; Isaiah 53:5-9; Hebrews 9:11-15,24-28; 10:9-13; 13:20,21; Revelation 5:9.

The term “freely” is translated “as a gift” in the NASB and ESV (see NKJV footnote). Ephesians 2:8,9 likewise emphasizes that salvation is a gift. However, a gift may be conditional. The fact a thing is “free” does not mean there is nothing to do to receive it. A store or business may offer to give a “free gift” to all who visit them on a certain day. The item given is undoubtedly a gift and is free, yet there is something we must do to receive it: we must be at the required place at the required time. We may then be required to fill out a form giving our name and address, etc. To say a thing is a free gift is not to deny that conditions must be met to receive it.

So salvation is a free gift of God’s grace, yet we have seen repeatedly that obedience to Divine commands is necessary as a condition in order for God to grant that forgiveness. In fact, Paul has just plainly stated a condition: we must have faith (verse 22). Faith here is comprehensive and stands for all that is required in order to accept the gift of salvation (including repentance, confession, and baptism). To deny that salvation by grace is conditional would be to deny that faith, repentance, and confession are necessary to salvation.

But if we admit that salvation may be accepted by grace on the basis of conditions, then we must simply determine what those conditions are.

When we do so, we find that baptism is included among the conditions (Romans 6:3,4). Yet, the gift is still a free gift in that the conditions we meet do not earn or merit the gift that is given. Once again, please see the passages in the articles cited previously for a greater discussion of these gospel principles.

“Redemption” (απολυτροσις) – “...a releasing effected by payment of ransom; redemption, deliverance, liberation procured by the payment of a ransom; 1. prop. ... 2. everywhere in the N.T. metaph. vis. deliverance effected through the death of Christ from the retributive wrath of a holy God and the merited penalty of sin ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**3:25,26 – God demonstrated His righteousness by setting Jesus to be a propitiation through faith in his blood because of the passing over of past sins, that He might be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus.**

Continuing to discuss redemption through faith in Jesus, Paul states that God set Jesus forth as the propitiation for our sins, provided we have faith in His blood. We discussed on verse 24 that Jesus’ sacrifice was the ransom that obtained our redemption from sin.

This is here called a “propitiation.” A propitiation is an appeasement: a gift or sacrifice that appeases judicial wrath. The idea is that God was justifiably angry at our sins. He could not simply overlook or ignore sin. Much as He might love us, His righteous character would not allow Him to pardon our sin without some atonement to pay the penalty for our guilt. That propitiation or atonement was the blood – the sacrificial death – of Jesus (see passages listed on verse 24 above).

This demonstrates that God is a righteous God. He is not a God who ignores sin or tolerates it. His righteous nature demands that sin be punished. But His gracious, loving nature makes Him willing to accept as payment or propitiation the death of His Son, instead of punishing us for our sins. The end result is that God can justify us, and at the same time He can demonstrate that He Himself is righteous or just.

Once again, we are told that this justification is ours on the condition of faith. It is not unconditional. Nor does this verse, or any verse, say we are saved by “faith only” or faith without obedience. Rather, as discussed in our notes on verse 24, this faith includes obedience (repentance, confession, and baptism).

The blood of Jesus also allowed God to be righteous and forbearing in passing over the sins that were previously committed. This can only refer to the sins committed under the Old Testament. One may wonder how anyone could be saved who lived under the Old Testament, if it had no sacrifice available that could permanently remove guilt (Hebrews 10:1-18). The answer is that Jesus’ death provides the propitiation for people of all ages, both before He died and after He died. His sacrifice offers redemption for those under the law as well those under the gospel.

But in doing so, we will see, it also removed the law and brought in the gospel. Compare Hebrews 9:13-15.

So, God is just and is able to justify men, because Jesus shed His blood as our propitiatory sacrifice.

“Propitiation” (ἱλαστήριον) “1) relating to an appeasing or expiating, having placating or expiating force, expiatory; a means of appeasing or expiating, a propitiation 1a) used of the cover of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies, which was sprinkled with the blood of the expiatory victim on the annual day of atonement (this rite signifying that the life of the people, the loss of which they had merited by their sins, was offered to God in the blood as the life of the victim, and that God by this ceremony was appeased and their sins expiated); hence the lid of expiation, the propitiatory 1b) an expiatory sacrifice 1c) a expiatory victim” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***3:27,28 – Glorifying is excluded, not by a law of works, but by a law of faith. So man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.***

**Justification by faith excludes boasting.**

In describing the pride of the Jews in chapter two, Paul had described how they boasted in their relationship with God and in the law – 2:17,23. As we have seen, the only way anyone could be justified by that law would be if he never violated the law. This would give him reason for boasting. But Paul has proved beyond doubt that all Jews violated the law, just like all Gentiles sinned. So, no one could be justified by the law, and the Jews had no grounds for boasting.

The only way Jews or Gentiles could be saved would be through faith in Christ’s sacrifice under the gospel. But this requires admitting that we will never save ourselves by our own sinless lives. We must trust in God to forgive us through the sacrifice of Jesus. The gospel, therefore, inherently excludes boasting. We cannot claim we have earned our salvation or have done anything to merit it. We deserve to be punished, but we can be justified by grace through Jesus’ death. No one can boast in that (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Paul’s conclusion then is that the only way for man to be justified before God is on the grounds of faith in Christ under the gospel. No one will be saved by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16). This is specifically true of the Old Testament law, but it is also true of any such law that has no means within it to truly forgive sin.

**Does this prove works and law are not essential under the gospel?**

We have agreed that there is a sense in which we are not justified by works of law. But does this mean that no works of any kind are in any way necessary for us to be saved under the gospel? Notice:



### **Works Are Essential under the Gospel**

Galatians 5:6 – In Christ Jesus what avails is faith **working** through love.

Acts 10:34,35 – In every nation, he who fears God and **works** righteousness is accepted.

James 1:22,25 – Be **doers** of the word, not just hearers. If one is a **doer** of the **work**, he is blessed in what he **does**.

James 2:14-26 – Can one be **saved** by a faith that does not **work** (verse 14)? Such a faith is dead. Works and faith go together, so by **works** a man is justified and not by faith only.

Romans 2:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10 – We will be judged and rewarded in eternity for our **works**. We receive eternal life for **well-doing, working** what is good.

(John 6:28,29; Philippians 2:12; John 5:28,29; 1 John 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; Acts 9:6)

So there is a sense in which works are essential to salvation under the gospel. Note that, in saying we are justified by faith, Paul does not say “faith alone” or faith without obedience. He specifies the kind of works that are contrasted to faith: faith is contrasted to deeds of the **law**, not to obedience under the **gospel**.

Indeed, the gospel can properly be viewed as a law. In this very passage Paul calls it “the law of faith” (verse 27). Verse 27 shows explicitly that two kinds of law are under consideration. One kind can justify and the other cannot. But both are laws, both involve commands, and both require obedience. See also the other references we cited under verses 21,22 above that show the gospel is a law and we must obey the law to be saved.

Both the gospel and the old law involved commands men must obey to please God. This is undeniable by all who study carefully. The difference, as we have now seen, is that the old law had no means of itself to forgive those who failed to keep the commands perfectly. The only way to be justified under such a law was to live that law without any violation, and no one but Jesus ever did so. The gospel, however, provides true forgiveness through Jesus. We must trust Him to give us that forgiveness. Therefore, we have no grounds to boast. To receive that forgiveness, we must repent of our sins, commit ourselves to obeying God’s word, and meet the conditions of forgiveness. But when we have done so, we have no grounds for boasting, for we are saved only by forgiveness, not by a sinless life.

**3:29-31 – Since there is one God, He is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. He will justify both through faith. This does not make the law of no effect, but establishes the law.**

Paul has shown that both Jew and Gentile are guilty of sin, and neither can be saved without forgiveness. In particular, the Jews cannot be saved by the Old Law (verses 20,28). So, everyone needs a system of justification based on faith. That system is the gospel, and is available to both Jew and Gentile (1:16).

The Jewish Christians originally thought that the gospel was only for Jews, not for Gentiles. Then they agreed, based on Divine revelation, that the Gentiles could be saved under the gospel (Acts 10,11). But they still did not see the Gentiles as being on an equal footing with Jews under the gospel. They, in effect, insisted that the Gentiles, in order to be saved, had to become identical to Jews. They had to be circumcised and keep the law, just like the Jews did. Paul is laboring to show that Jew and Gentile are the same under the gospel. Then he will ultimately show that this means that neither of them should keep the law, for it has been removed. But first he shows that the Gentiles are blessed equally with the Jews under the gospel.

He asks if God is the God of only the Jews, or is He not also the God of the Gentiles? The obvious answer must be that He is also the God of the Gentiles. Since there is only one true God, even the Jews must admit that God rules over Gentiles as well as He does Jews. He is Lord of the whole Universe. But the point is that, not only does He rule the Gentiles, He also loves the Gentiles and wants to bless them. He wants all men to be saved. This was the lesson He taught in the book of Jonah. The gospel is for all (for other verses on this, see notes on 1:16).

Since God wants all to be saved, and since the basis of salvation must be by faith, not by sinless keeping of the law, then it follows that God will justify both Jew and Gentile by faith. Not only is there no difference in the fact the both are guilty of sin (verses 22,23), but also there can be no difference in what it takes to save them: both must trust in the sacrificial death of Jesus. What Paul does not yet state, but will eventually show, is that all can be saved by following the gospel, therefore no one needs to keep the law. But he has so far showed that the basis of justification for both Jew and Gentile must be faith in Jesus' death and therefore faith in the gospel (compare 1:16).

He then asks whether or not his teaching makes the law void. He answers that it does not, but rather it establishes the law. This may seem confusing, in light of the fact that he will soon show that the law is no longer in effect. Some use this and other verses to try to prove that the Old Law is still binding and effective as law today. But that would contradict whole hosts of Scriptures.

What is more, those who make the claim do not really believe it. They generally want to keep only parts of the law, usually the Ten Commands and a few other carefully selected practices. But if the law is binding, then it is all binding – Galatians 5:3. Those who seek to bind the law today almost never seek to bind it all. In fact, it has been removed from force as law today: Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

“Make void” (NKJV) is otherwise translated “nullify” (NASB), “make of none effect” (ASV), or “overthrow” (ESV). This would imply that the law had no power, as if it was untrue or meaningless. Paul does not intend to teach that the Old Law is binding as law today, but neither does he mean to say that it was untrue, worthless, or of no value.

To “establish” means to uphold the authority of something. In this case, this would not mean that the law was still in effect. Rather, it would mean that the teaching of the law would be demonstrated to be valid and true. The point is that Paul’s teaching here does not violate the teaching of the law, but rather conforms with and confirms that teaching. What the law taught was from God and was absolutely true. It had its intended purpose and fulfilled that purpose. That purpose included preparing people for the gospel. Paul has already said that what he taught was witnessed by the Scriptures (verse 21). It agreed with the provisions of the law, which was intended all along to be temporary and anticipated the fact that the gospel would replace it (see notes on verse 21).

“Make void” (καταργεω) – “1) to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative 1a) to cause a person or thing to have no further efficiency 1b) to deprive of force, influence, power 2) to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish 2a) to cease, to pass away, be done away 2b) to be severed from, separated from, discharged from, loosed from any one 2c) to terminate all intercourse with one” Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Establish” (ιστημι) – “1) to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set 1a) to bid to stand by, (set up) ... 1b) to make firm, fix establish 1b1) to cause a person or a thing to keep his or its place 1b2) to stand, be kept intact (of family, a kingdom), to escape in safety 1b3) to establish a thing, cause it to stand 1b3a) to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything ... 2) to stand 2a) to stand by or near 2a1) to stop, stand still, to stand immovable, stand firm 2a1a) of the foundation of a building 2b) to stand 2b1) continue safe and sound, stand unharmed, to stand ready or prepared 2b2) to be of a steadfast mind 2b3) of quality, one who does not hesitate, does not waiver” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Note: Whiteside takes a different approach. He points out that “law” has no definite article, so he argues that Paul is here not referring to the Old Law. Rather, he is simply saying that nothing he has said denies the

value or validity of law in general. Indeed, law is needed and we are still subject to law. This may fit the fact that verse 27 says we are under the law of faith. And what Whiteside says definitely speaks the truth as regards the fact that we are yet subject to law. Nevertheless, in light of the fact that “law” throughout the context refers primarily to the Old Law (or any other similar concept of a law that requires perfect obedience to justify), it seems to me that this is the sense in which Paul still refers to “law” in verse 31.

# Romans 4

## Chapters 4,5 – Man's Need Is Met by Faith in Christ under the Gospel.

### Chapter 4 - Abraham Demonstrates Justification by Faith Apart from the Law.

***4:1-3 – In Abraham's case, if he was justified by works he had reason to boast. But the Scripture says he believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.***

***Abraham was justified by faith, not by works.***

Paul has established that both Jew and Gentile were guilty of sin, and therefore they cannot be justified by means of perfect law-keeping such as the Old Testament would require. Their only hope is to receive forgiveness from God in spite of their sins. But that forgiveness could be provided, not by the law, but only through the sacrifice of Jesus under the gospel. See notes on 3:20-31.

Paul now proceeds to discuss the case of Abraham to further illustrate and prove his case. Jews, of course, counted Abraham as the greatest of the patriarchs because he was the one to whom God first granted the promises that made the nation of Israel God's chosen people. They could not gainsay his case.

So, Paul asks what Abraham gained or obtained according to the flesh. The Jews depended on their physical relationship to Abraham and on the physical act of circumcision for all the great blessings they hoped to receive from God (see 2:17-24). This was entirely a matter of physical, fleshly ancestry. One was either born a Jew or he was not. So, Paul introduces Abraham himself as a test case and asks whether or not Abraham had any of these fleshly advantages that the Jews held so dear.

To begin with, was Abraham justified by works? "Works" must here be understood in the context as being the works of the law, which required perfect, sinless law-keeping, without ever committing any sin (see notes on 3:20,21,28). If he was justified by a lifetime of sinless law-keeping, then he would surely have grounds to boast. Again, as in 3:27, one who lived without sin could boast that he could not be condemned

but stood justified before the law, since he had never violated it. But that won't work even with Abraham, since we know that everyone sinned. Even Abraham sinned, so he could not boast before God on the grounds of justification by works of sinless law-keeping.

Yet, we know that he was justified before God, so how did this happen? Paul quotes Genesis 15:6: Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (compare Romans 4:9,22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). So Abraham was justified on the basis of faith, just as Paul has been teaching. He was not justified by the Law of Moses, for it had not yet been given. We will see that he was not justified by circumcision, because that too had not yet been given. Nor was he justified by living a life without sin, because he too sinned. So his only hope was to be justified on the grounds of trusting God to forgive the sins he committed.

Note that the word “accounted” (NKJV) is the word “imputed,” meaning “credited” (NASB), “reckoned” (ASV), or “counted” (KJV, ESV). The word has many shades of meaning, but basically means simply to compute, calculate, or determine what a thing means or amounts to. It nowhere means that the sinless life of Jesus is credited to the sinner's account. Here, the passage says that Abraham's *faith* was counted for righteousness. We will see that this happens when one trusts in God to forgive Him. Having been *forgiven*, he is then counted to be righteous, simply because he no longer has sin on his record. See verses 6-8.

“Impute” (λογιζομαι) – “...1. ... to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over; hence a. to take into account, to make account of ... metaph. to pass to one's account, to impute ... a thing is reckoned as or to be something, i.e. as availing for an equivalent to something, as having the like force and weight ... b. i.q. to number among, reckon with ... c. to reckon or account, and treat accordingly ... 2. ... to reckon inwardly, count up or weigh the reasons, to deliberate ... 3. by reckoning up all the reasons to gather or infer; i.e. a. to consider, take account weigh, meditate on ... b. to suppose, deem, judge ... c. to determine, purpose, decide ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### Different kinds of works

We have already established at length that salvation by faith under the gospel requires obedience. It does not exclude obedience (see introductory notes). Yet, other verses say we are not saved by “works.” In fact, verses that say we are *not* saved by works are often found quite close to other verses that show we *must obey*. Note some examples:

Galatians 2:16; 3:11 say we are not saved by works. But then Galatians 3:27 shows that we must be baptized to put on Christ, and 5:6 says what avails in Christ is faith *working*.

Titus 3:5; 2 Timothy 1:9 say we are not saved by works. But then we are saved by the “washing of regeneration” (baptism and new birth) in Titus 3:5. See also Acts 22:16; Hebrews 10:22; Romans 6:4; John 3:5; Colossians 2:12,13.

Ephesians 2:8,9 says we are not saved by works. But then 5:25,26 says we are cleansed by the washing of water. And compare Ephesians 2:4-9 to Colossians 2:12,13; Romans 6:4ff; 1 Peter 1:22,23; John 3:5.

So, Romans 3:20,28; 4:2-16; 11:6 say we are not saved by works. But then Romans 6:3,4 shows we are baptized into Christ’s death. 6:17,18 says we must obey to be made free from sin. 10:9,10 says we must confess unto salvation. See also 2:6-11; 1:5; 16:26.

So, obedience is essential, yet there are also works that do not save. And often both truths are taught in close proximity. Since there are no contradictions, we can only conclude that the Bible discusses **different kind of works**, just as it discusses different kinds of faith. Faith saves, but there are kinds of faith that do not save (James 2:19). So, obedience is essential, but there are kinds of works that do not save.

Consider different kinds of works discussed in the gospel:

### **Different Kinds of Works**

#### *1. Works of the flesh or of darkness*

These are sins which do not save, but condemn. (See Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 13:12-14.)

#### *2. Works of the Old Testament law or of human righteousness by which one earns salvation*

The Old Testament is not binding today (Galatians 3:23-25; Hebrews 10:9,10; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14-17; Romans 7:1-7). However, even when it was in effect it could not save, because it provided no lasting forgiveness (Hebrews 10:3,4).

The only way to be justified by that law would be to live one’s whole life without ever sinning (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10; Romans 3:20,23). Then one could boast that he had saved himself without needing forgiveness. He would earn his righteousness as a matter of debt, not grace.

But such works will save no one, because we all sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8,10; 3:4). Therefore, we all need a system of grace, whereby we can be forgiven, though we do not deserve it. This is the point of Romans 4:4; 3:27; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; 2 Timothy 1:9; etc.

(See also Galatians 2:16; 3:11 – compare 4:21-25; 5:3; Acts 13:39.)

#### *3. Works of obedience to meet conditions of forgiveness.*

These works of obedience are essential to salvation, as we have studied. But they are not works of human righteousness, whereby we **earn** eternal life by a sinless life. Instead, we admit we are **sinners** and come to God for forgiveness by His mercy and **grace**.

Yet, we must believe in Christ enough to meet whatever conditions He requires. We know these conditions include faith, repentance, and confession. In fact, the gospel says that faith itself is a work and a command we must obey (John 6:28,29; 1 John 3:23). But baptism is not a work of human righteousness whereby we earn eternal life, any more than are these other conditions. All these are simply conditions whereby we appeal to God's grace to forgive unworthy sinners by Jesus' blood.

So, when verses say we are not saved by "works," they are not excluding faith, repentance, confession, or baptism. These works are all included in the obedience that is essential to receive forgiveness.

In order to understand the teaching about Abraham's righteousness, let us consider Abraham's history.

### **A History of Abraham's Service to God**

Genesis 12:1-7 – God commanded Abram to leave his father's house and go to a land that God would show Him. God here first stated the blessings He would give Abram if he would obey: He would make Abram a great nation, all families of the earth would be blessed in him, and He would give Abram's descendants the land of Canaan. Abram did obey, so from that point on God continued to repeat these blessings.

Hebrews 11:8-10 cites this event as an example of the kind of faith we need to save our souls (10:39). It expressly says that "by faith" Abraham "**obeyed**." So, Abram was righteous in God's eyes at least this early in the record (if not earlier). And that righteousness is expressly stated in Hebrews 11 to be the result of faith that led him to **obey**. His faith included obedience, it did not exclude it. And he received the blessing of God when his faith led to obedience, not before.

Genesis 12:6,7 – God appeared to Abram and promised him the land. So, Abram built an altar to God. Note that Abram was clearly in God's fellowship at this point. (See 12:8.)

Genesis 13:3,4 – He again built an altar to the Lord and called upon His name.

Genesis 14:18-20 – Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, pronounced a blessing on Abram saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High."

Genesis 15:1 – God said to Abram, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." So Abram was still in God's fellowship and receiving His blessings.

Genesis 15:4-6 – God promised that one from Abram's own loins would be his heir, and Abram would have descendants as numberless as the stars. At this point we are told that Abram believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (verse 6). God then repeated the promises to Abram and made a covenant with him (verse 18).



Genesis 22:15-18 – Abraham’s pattern of obedient faith continued. After Abraham demonstrated that he was willing to offer his only son Isaac to God, God repeated His promises to Abraham. This is cited in James 2:21-23 as fulfilling the statement that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. James says this proves that we are justified before God by works, not by faith only.

From the Divine record we learn: (1) Abraham stood righteous before God long before the statement in Genesis 15:6. So the statement of Genesis 15:6, cited here in Romans 4:3, is describing one who was already a faithful servant of God. (2) Abraham demonstrates that the alien sinner and the faithful servant of God must both have faith and obedience in order to stand justified before God. (3) The faith by which Abraham was justified before God was an obedient faith, not faith alone without obedience.

### Romans 4 compared to James 2

Note that Romans 4 uses the case of Abraham to show that we are not saved by perfect law-keeping, but we must have faith in God to forgive us. James 2 also cites the case of Abraham, but uses it to show we are not saved by faith alone without works. How do these passages fit together?

Remember that some kinds of faith do not save, and some kinds of works do save. James 2 asks: Can we be **saved** by the kind of faith that does not have **works** (verse 14)? The answer is that faith that does not work is **dead**, like a body without a spirit (verses 17,20,26). We are **justified by works, not by “faith only”** (verse 24).

So, James uses the case of Abraham to show that faith without works will not save. And Paul uses the case of Abraham to show that works of sinless law-keeping will not save without faith. So, the point is that **both** faith and works must operate **together** (James 2:21-23). Only then do we have faith that saves!

Some say that Abraham was already faithful to God before he did the work mentioned in James 2 (offering Isaac). So, they claim that James 2 is talking about what God requires of a child of God, not what is required in order to **become** a child of God. But the same is true of Romans 4. Abraham was already faithful to God before the event cited in Genesis 15:6 as quoted in Romans 4:3! So, if James 2 cannot be used to show what an alien sinner must do to be saved, then neither can Romans 4! The fact is that the kind of faith the alien needs to **become** saved and the kind that a Christian needs to **remain** in God’s favor are the same kind of faith, and both require obedience!

Hebrews 11:8-10,17-19 and James 2:21-23 make the same point: Abraham illustrates the kind of faith that God rewards. It is faith that **obeys**, and God rewards us only **when we have obeyed**. This is true both in order to come into God’s favor and then also in order to stay in

His favor. But remember that James 2 uses Abraham to illustrate the need for both faith and works in order to be **saved** (verse 14) and **justified** (verse 24).

**4:4,5 – To the one who works, reward is not a matter of grace but of debt. But to the one who fails to work yet believes on God who justifies the ungodly, faith is reckoned for righteousness.**

These verses directly state the conclusion that necessarily follows from verses 1-3 (see our comments there). Verse 5 says faith is “accounted” to believers for righteousness. The NKJV translates this word “accounted” in verses 3,5, but uses “imputed” in verse 6. See our notes on verse 3. This means that faith is computed, calculated, or credited to the sinner. As a result, God considers him to be righteous.

But **how** is this man counted to be righteous? Verses 6-8 quote Psalms 32:1-5 to show how. God imputes righteousness (verse 6) when our iniquities are forgiven and our sins covered, so that sin is not imputed. This forgiveness is granted through Jesus’ **death** – see 4:20-25.

The passage says a man’s **faith** is imputed to him for righteousness (verses 3,5). A man is counted or reckoned to be righteous before God **conditionally** when he believes (meaning saving faith, which is obedient faith). (See 4:3,5,9,21-22.) Sin is what keeps us from being righteous. Jesus’ blood cleanses man from his sins, so his record before God shows that his sins are not imputed or counted against him any longer. He is therefore counted to be righteous. So, righteousness is imputed by means of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the condition of obedient faith. Nothing says Jesus’ sinless life was imputed for righteousness.

In what sense is a person saved by faith apart from works (verses 4,5)? As explained in our notes on verses 1-3, “works” can mean different things in different contexts. Here it means “works of the law” (3:20) including circumcision (4:9-12) – so it refers to works of the Old Testament law (or any similar law).

Romans 4:4 is the key: under such a law, one could only be justified by working so that he **earned** righteousness as a wage or a matter of **debt**, not grace. The law could not forgive (offer grace) because it had only animal sacrifices, in which sins were remembered every year (Hebrews 10:3,4). To be counted righteous by that law, one had to live a lifetime without sin (Galatians 3:10). This is the meaning of “him who works.” But if one did “not work” – i.e., did not keep the law perfectly – he would stand condemned before God.

But everyone except Jesus did sin (Romans 3:23,9-18). The law proved everyone was a sinner in need of forgiveness. It made them aware of their guilt, but then it could not really remove the guilt (Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:11,12,21-25). So, justification by “works” here means earning a right standing before God by a sinless life, not by forgiveness.

The gospel is a system of grace in that it provides forgiveness, which man does not deserve. So grace is offered to all (Titus 2:11,12), whereby one can be forgiven even though he “does not work” – i.e., he does not keep the law sinlessly – so, he is “ungodly.” But to receive this grace to forgive sins, an individual still must meet the conditions. The basic condition is a saving faith, not a dead faith (Romans 4:5,21-25; Galatians 3:24,25; John 3:16; etc.). But saving faith includes obedience and, in particular, baptism (Galatians 5:6; Hebrews 10:39 & chapter 11; James 2:14-26; Galatians 3:24-27; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). The example of Abraham shows that faith must obey in order to receive God’s blessing – compare 4:3,9; Genesis 15:6; 12:1-4,8; Hebrews 11:8-10; James 2:21-24.

So, righteousness is imputed on the basis of faith apart from works in the sense that one does not earn salvation by living a life of sinless perfection. Instead, one trusts God to provide forgiveness; but trust requires obeying all Divine conditions. The means by which this forgiveness is provided is Jesus’ death.

***4:6-8 – David also pronounced a blessing upon one to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works when he said one is blessed when his iniquities are forgiven and his sins covered so God does not reckon sin to him.***

Paul quotes David’s statement in Psalm 32:1,2 to further explain the blessing of righteousness imputed to a man apart from works. **Note: Here is a Divine explanation of verses 1-5.** What is the point? Man’s lawless deeds are **forgiven**, so his sins are covered. This is the blessing granted to one to whom God does not impute sin.

Note it carefully: What does Paul mean when he says that a man “did not work” (verse 5)? It means the man has committed sins and lawless deeds (verse 7). So, what does Paul mean when he says the man must be justified “apart from works” (verses 5,6)? It means he must be **forgiven** for his sins because he has not lived the sinless life that the law requires (verses 6-8). Justification “apart from works” simply means that a man is forgiven even though he has committed sins! That’s it!

Note that ***it does not say he is justified without obeying conditions of forgiveness.*** On the contrary, the condition of faith is repeatedly stated, and other passages in Romans and elsewhere show that this faith must include other conditions too, including repentance, confession, and baptism. “Apart from works” does **not** mean apart from baptism, any more than it means apart from confession or apart from repentance or apart from faith. Justification “apart from works” means “apart from having lived a sinless life.” One has sinned and so needs forgiveness. That is all that is meant by justification “apart from works.” To read anything more into it would contradict, not just myriads of other passages, but also Paul’s inspired explanation of what he means in the very context of Romans 4.

To say, as some do, that Paul is here teaching justification without obedience to any conditions or Divine commands whereby he asks God to grant him forgiveness, would make the passage teach the very opposite of Paul's intent. To refuse to obey God's conditions of forgiveness would be to sin and disobey God. It constitutes rebellion against God! This is the kind of thing from which we need salvation and forgiveness! Paul is not here advocating refusal to submit to God's Divine commands whereby we seek His forgiveness. He is saying we can be forgiven despite the fact our past lives have not been sinlessly perfect. But this forgiveness requires a willingness to submit and turn to God in faith that leads to obedience.

Also, note that David's statement confirms that Paul is not here specifically discussing forgiveness of the alien sinner who has never become a servant of God. The context of David's statement in Psalms 32 shows that he is referring to his own forgiveness of sins: forgiveness for one who was already a servant of God but then departed from the way of truth. As we have already stated, for both the alien sinner and the erring servant of God, forgiveness is conditioned on obedient faith, though the specific conditions by which faith expresses itself are different. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Paul is not here emphasizing forgiveness for aliens.

***4:9,10 – Upon whom is this blessing of forgiveness pronounced: only those who are circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? Abraham was reckoned to be righteous when he was uncircumcised, before his circumcision.***

***Is justification by forgiveness available only to those who are circumcised or also to those who are uncircumcised?***

Paul has shown that all people, Jew and Gentile, commit sin. So, they cannot be justified before God on the basis of a sinless life. They can be justified only by having their sins forgiven (verses 6-8). But since Jew and Gentile both need this forgiveness, Paul next asks whether or not this blessing of forgiveness (verses 6-8) is available only to the circumcised (Jews) or also to the uncircumcised (Gentiles).

Note that this question shows indisputably that "the law" to which Paul refers is primarily the Old Testament Law of Moses. That is the law under which circumcision was bound. Granted, God gave the command of circumcision to Abraham and his descendants before the law. But the Jews bound circumcision as the symbol and key element of the law. It was the test issue regarding whether or not people needed to submit to the law. That is what this discussion is all about. See carefully Acts 15:1,5; Galatians 2:1-3; 5:1-6.

So, while the principles Paul is discussing may apply to justification by any law like the Law of Moses, the fact remains that the main issue is

the Law of Moses as symbolized by circumcision. We are not fundamentally discussing other law systems. Paul is fundamentally dealing with a specific law and a specific set of claims about that law. And that law is the Law of Moses.

So the question fundamentally is: Must one be circumcised to receive the blessing of forgiveness from God by faith, or may those who are uncircumcised also receive that forgiveness? Is forgiveness available only to those who submit to the Law of Moses and circumcision? The Judaizers claimed this to be the case. Paul here directly confronts that issue.

**Abraham was declared to be righteous while he was uncircumcised.**

Paul answers by returning to the case of Abraham (see verses 1-3). All agree Abraham was justified because of his faith. But did he have to be circumcised to receive this justification? Was circumcision a necessary condition in order for him to be justified by faith? The answer is a resounding, "No!" The proof is that Genesis 15:6, as quoted in Romans 4:3, states that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. But this was said *before* he was circumcised! Circumcision was never commanded of Abraham or anyone till Genesis 17!

Of course, the same principle applies to the whole Old Testament law. Was keeping the Old Testament required in order for one to be forgiven on the condition of faith? No! For Abraham was forgiven and declared righteous because of his faith long before the Law of Moses was given.

Here is the eternal proof that the Judaizers were wrong. They claimed one can be saved under the gospel only if he also was circumcised and kept the law; this is what they required of converted Gentiles. But the greatest hero of their own ancestry, Abraham himself, was declared to be justified by God without circumcision and without the Law of Moses. It necessarily follows that circumcision and keeping that law are not essential to standing justified before God. What is needed is forgiveness on the grounds of obedient faith.

Eventually Paul will show that the law has been removed and is no longer in effect. But first he has shown that the law, with its circumcision, was never essential in order for men to be justified before God. We can be justified under the gospel without the law and circumcision, just as surely as Abraham was justified before the law and circumcision were ever given. And the Gentiles were never subject to the law, so circumcision and the law were never required for their justification any more than they were required of Abraham at the time he was declared to be righteous.

***4:11,12 – Abraham received the sign of circumcision later as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith even while he was uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who receive righteousness, whether circumcised or not, if they walk in the steps of Abraham’s faith.***

**Abraham is a spiritual father to all believers, whether or not they are physically circumcised.**

Paul enlarges on the point of verses 9,10 that Abraham was justified by faith even before he was circumcised. The Jews viewed Abraham as their own father or patriarch, because they were his physical descendants. But Paul states that Abraham is a father to all true believers who have righteousness imputed to them, even if they are uncircumcised. After all, righteousness was imputed to him on the grounds of his faith even while he was still uncircumcised. So spiritually, he is the father of all who are justified by obedient faith, whether or not they are circumcised.

To the Jews, this must surely have put a different twist on the concept of Abraham as a father. In fact many of them would object even violently to the very idea. Which is exactly why many of them were violent in their persecution against Paul! But, just as Paul emphasized in 2:28,29 that the circumcision that matters is spiritual circumcision, not physical circumcision, so he states that Abraham’s fatherhood is primarily spiritual, not physical. The important ancestry is to be a descendant of Abraham spiritually. See also verse 16; Galatians 3:26-29;

Paul adds that physical circumcision is not what makes one pleasing to God. After all, Abraham was pleasing to God by faith before he was circumcised. Rather, circumcision was the seal or sign given to Abraham because he was already justified before God. The justification came first then the circumcision, not the other way around.

### **Walking in the steps of faith**

So, Abraham was the spiritual father of those who walk in the steps of faith that Abraham had. This is true not just of those who are physically circumcised, since Abraham was justified while he was uncircumcised.

The expression “walk in the steps of faith” is extremely important and helpful to our understanding. “Walking” and “steps” refer, throughout the New Testament to conduct or way of living. Abraham’s faith was not just something that resided in his heart. He acted or **walked** according to that faith. That conduct was essential to his justification by faith, as demonstrated in Hebrews 11:8-10 and James 2:14-26. So, our justification by faith requires also a way of living based on faith, as it did with Abraham. He is our spiritual father only if we have obedient faith. Faith that does not obey is not saving faith and, as in Abraham’s case, faith does not justify until we obey.

Note examples where “walking” is an expression for conduct or manner of life:

### **Walking in the Steps of Faith**

Romans 6:4 – Baptism must lead to walking in newness of life. This is explained throughout the chapter to refer to living in righteousness rather than sin.

Romans 8:1,4 – We must not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Romans 13:13 – Walk properly, not in revelry and drunkenness.

2 Corinthians 5:7 – We walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 10:2 – Paul did not walk according to the flesh.

2 Corinthians 12:18 – Titus and Paul walked in the same steps and the same spirit.

Galatians 5:16,25 – Walk according to the spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (6:16)

Ephesians 2:2,10 – Those who once walked according to the course of the world, when they become saved, should walk in good works ordained by God.

Ephesians 4:1,17 – Walk worthily of your calling, not as Gentiles walk.

Ephesians 5:2,8 – Walk in love as children of light.

Philippians 3:16-18 – Follow Paul’s example and note those who walk according to the pattern.

1 Peter 2:21,22 – Jesus suffered leaving an example that we should follow His steps, who did not sin.

Many other examples can be cited. Right here, in the very midst of Paul’s deep discussion of justification by faith apart from works of the law, we have clear proof that the faith Paul is describing requires and includes conduct – acts of obedience. It does not exclude them. See also the many other passages in Romans and elsewhere as listed in our introductory notes.

***4:13-15 – The promise to Abraham came, not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. If those of the law are heirs, faith is void and the promise of no effect, since the law works wrath. Where there is no law there is no transgression.***

**The blessing God promised Abraham comes through faith, not the law.**

Paul now enlarges on his conclusions about Abraham’s justification by discussing the promises God made to Abraham. He will show that these promises also, when viewed from their spiritual application, lead to the same conclusions he has already presented.



God had made great promises to Abraham regarding his seed. He had said that in Abraham's seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18). This blessing was justification from sin through Jesus (Acts 3:25,26; Galatians 3:16). But verses 17,18 show that this refers to, or at least includes, the promise that God would make Abraham a father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-6).

Abraham was a father of many nations physically, in that a number of nations physically descended from him. Great nations came from the descendants of Ishmael, Esau, Jacob (Judah and Israel), and Midian (Genesis 25:1-4). But Paul in this context appears to be especially referring to Abraham's spiritual descendants. In that sense, as explained in verses 11,12, he is the spiritual father of all who are justified by faith, whether circumcised or not. That makes him the spiritual father of people of many nations, and the blessing God promised comes upon people of all nations. See verses 16-18 below.

Paul here says this promise with its blessing did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. It was given to Abraham because of his faith but not through the law, since the law did not then exist.

**If inheritance of the blessing of the promise came through the law, then it would not be of faith, and the promise would be of no effect.**

Furthermore, the blessing that God promised to all nations also came through faith, not through the law. It could not come through the law, because the law brings wrath. This reminds us of his point in 3:19-31 and Galatians 3:10,18 (see the context of Galatians 3). The law could not ultimately forgive sin; all it could do was define sin and thereby prove to men that they are sinners. Those who violated it were under a curse, but the law could not give lasting forgiveness to remove that curse. So, the law could not make people heirs according to the promise.

If the blessing was fulfilled in people who kept the Law of Moses, as the Jews thought, then the whole promise would have been made void. In fact, no one would have received the blessing, because to be justified by the law one had to keep it perfectly, which no one did. Instead, the law simply brought wrath on those who disobeyed it. So, to attempt to obtain the promised blessing this way would result in no benefit at all. The promise God made had to be fulfilled through Christ on the basis of obedient faith, not on the basis of the law.

**“Where there is no law, there is no transgression.”**

This is a general principle of truth. No one can be held accountable for violating a law that does not exist. Each man is subject only to whatever laws God has placed upon him at the time (3:19). But was there ever a time in the history of mankind when there was no law at all? I know of none. Even Adam and Eve had a command in the garden. So,



Paul cannot be saying that such a condition ever has or ever will exist on earth.

Instead, he seems to be simply illustrating the point that the law (without forgiveness) has the effect of condemning mankind or bringing wrath. If man had no law, then he could not sin and could not stand condemned under God's wrath. The only way any man could ever stand free from sin would be if he never had any law to follow. But every man, who does have law, violates that law and does stand condemned. And that is all of us.

This illustrates that the law itself leads to wrath and punishment, not to blessings. This is true of the Law of Moses or any such law that defines right and wrong but cannot forgive violations. This also does not mean that law is bad. Law is necessary to govern and guide mankind's conduct. But law of itself, without forgiveness, cannot give the kind of blessing God promised the world through Abraham, nor can it give man a true relationship with God. Since we all violate the law, it only results in wrath.

***4:16-18 – So the inheritance is of faith according to grace to all, so Abraham is the father of us all by faith. This fulfills the promise that he would be a father of many nations because he believed against hope.***

**The blessing comes on the basis of faith to all people, not just Jews.**

Paul has showed that the blessing, promised through Abraham, could not come to anyone on the basis of keeping the law, since that would require a sinless life. The conclusion must be that the blessing was intended from the beginning to be granted on some other basis. That basis is faith in the sacrificial death of Christ according to the gospel.

But if the promise comes through faith, then it is a matter of grace: we receive it even though, because of our sins, we do not deserve it. This is exactly what he has said in 4:1-8 (compare Galatians 3:22). As explained in our notes on those verses, this does not eliminate conditions or the need for obedience. What it means is that we can have forgiveness, even though we have sinned (verses 6-8). This forgiveness is granted by God's grace to those who demonstrate obedient faith.

But this means the blessing is obtainable by all. The benefit of the promise is granted, not just to those who were subject to the Law of Moses. It is granted to all who exercise faith in Jesus. This means we can all claim Abraham as our father, if we have that faith, regardless of our physical genealogy. Note how clearly Paul here shows that he is discussing spiritual heirs of Abraham, not physical lineage. He then explains, in verse 17, that this is the spiritual meaning of the sense in which Abraham is the father of many nations (see verse 13).

## **So Abraham is a father of many nations in fulfillment of the promise.**

Following the parenthetical expression, we are told that Abraham is the father of us all in the presence of God (i.e., before Him, or in His eyes). That is, we stand before Him as Abraham's spiritual descendants. God is the One who can give life to the dead and call things that don't exist as though they do exist. He has given physical life to the dead and will do so for us all at the judgment. So, He can speak of the dead as though they still live (Matthew 22:31-33).

In this way, He could see that Abraham would be the physical father of a multitude of people, though none of them were yet born. But the greater application here seems to be that He can give spiritual life to those dead in sin. In this way, He could see that Abraham would be the spiritual father of many nations, long before it had occurred. (Note that He said, "I have made you a father," even though Abraham was not yet a father physically or spiritually.)

Abraham believed that God could bring about that which had not yet happened and which was even contrary to hope – that is, it was contrary to what one might reasonably hope for. Yet, by faith he persisted in hope. The result was that he became the father of many nations, just as God had promised: "So shall your descendants be." This quotes the promise of Genesis 15:5, which Abraham believed and so was declared to be righteous (15:5-7). Abraham believed God could fulfill the promise physically, despite the fact it was unreasonable physically. But God also blessed him and made him the father of many nations spiritually.

***4:19-22 – Abraham realized he was about 100 years old and Sarah had passed the time of childbearing, yet through faith he was assured that God was able to perform what He promised. So it was reckoned to him for righteousness.***

Abraham's faith demonstrated itself when he believed God's promise despite the fact it was physically impossible. God had promised that Abraham and Sarah together would have a son, despite the fact that Abraham's body was dead (as regards ability to reproduce), since he was 100 years old. And Sarah's womb was dead, for she had never been able to have children and was then past the time of childbearing. Yet, when God promised that they would have a son, Abraham's faith was strong. He did not waver in unbelief, but gave glory to God, convinced that God could keep the promise He had made. So, Paul quotes again, as in verse 3, the statement that God accounted Abraham's faith unto righteousness.

The event discussed here occurred many years after the statement in 15:6 that Abraham's faith was accounted to him for righteousness. After Genesis 15, Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years old

(Genesis 16:16). The statement that Abraham would be a father of many nations, which Paul discusses here, is recorded in Genesis 17:3. At this time Abraham was 99 and Ishmael was 13 (Genesis 17:24,25).

God specifically promised that a son would be born to Abraham and Sarah the next year (Genesis 17:21), when Abraham would be 100 and Sarah would be 90 (compare Genesis 21:5). Abraham knew he was so old that it would be impossible for him to have a child by any normal expectations, and Sarah had never been able to have children (Hebrews 11:11). So, the promise required an event that appeared physically impossible. Yet, Abraham believed and so proceeded to keep the covenant of circumcision. But note that, at the time God made the promise, Abraham was not yet circumcised.

Paul says Abraham did not waver and was fully convinced, yet at the time he laughed and apparently expressed doubts (Genesis 17:17). Some claim that Abraham's statements do not express doubt. But it seems more likely to me that Abraham's faith was strengthened after God more plainly stated that the promise would come true, not through Ishmael, but through a son born through Sarah (Genesis 17:18-22). Abraham responded by obeying the command to be circumcised, demonstrating his faith in the covenant God had made with him. So, perhaps he had doubts at first, but when God reaffirmed His specific intent, then Abraham's faith was strong as Paul describes.

Note that Paul, in verse 22, repeats the promise to Abraham that he had quoted in verse 3. But he is now discussing an event that occurred more than 13 years after the statement that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. This shows that Paul is discussing Abraham's faith over a period of time, not just on one specific occasion. James 2 and Hebrews 11 also cite, as an example of Abraham's faith, the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22. So the faith of Abraham, which caused him to be accounted as righteous, was actually a pattern of faith that characterized Abraham throughout many years.

So, Paul does not refer to a point in time when Abraham was "converted" and first became a believer. Rather, Paul describes how Abraham walked in the steps of faith (Romans 4:12), and this way of life demonstrated itself often in his conduct. We must likewise have faith to obey the conditions of becoming a child of God, but we must also maintain faith and obedience throughout our lives as Christians.

As Whiteside points out, Paul is confronting the views of the Judaizing teachers. They did not dispute the conversion of the Gentiles. They granted that the Gentiles had become Christians or disciples. But they demanded that, in their lives as Christians, they had to follow the Old Testament law, including circumcision. This is what Paul disputes. The application is not primarily to the conditions of conversion, as Calvinists want to make it. Though I grant the principle of obedient faith applies both to conversion and the Christian's life.

***4:23-25 – These things were written, not just for Abraham’s sake, but for our sake who believe on God who raised Jesus from the dead when He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.***

Paul concludes his discussion of Abraham’s faith by reminding us that the record of his life and his justification by faith was written, not simply because of its application to him, but because of the lessons it teaches us. Of course, it was not written for his sake at all, except to honor him, since he never did read it. It was written by Moses hundreds of years after Abraham had died. So, the lessons were obviously written primarily to benefit others.

The application is that if, like Abraham, we have faith in God’s plan for us, our faith too will be reckoned or imputed for righteousness. Specifically, we must believe in God who raised up Jesus from the dead. Jesus was delivered up (died) for our sins and arose for our justification.

Some translations say Jesus died “for” our sins and was raised “for” our justification (ASV, KJV, ESV). Others say “because of” (NKJV, NASB). The original word is  $\delta\iota\alpha$ . It seems to me that the idea is that Jesus died for the purpose of (overcoming or solving) our sins and was raised for the purpose of our justification.

Note that faith in the resurrection is necessary in order for us to please God – compare Romans 10:9,10. It is not enough to believe He died for our salvation. We must also believe He rose from the dead. His resurrection was essential to our salvation as surely as was His death. Those who do not so believe, cannot be saved.

Paul has already discussed Jesus as the source of our redemption to some extent in 3:24,25. But these verses introduce a much more detailed discussion of it beginning in chapter 5.

# Romans 5

## Chapter 5 - Jesus' Death Justifies Man from Sin.

***5:1,2 – Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Christ, having access by faith into the grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope.***

Paul has carefully established that both Gentile and Jew are guilty of sin and have hope for eternal life only by receiving forgiveness of their sins. In chapter 4 he used the case of Abraham to demonstrate that this forgiveness could not come by the Old Law and circumcision, but comes by a completely different concept or method of justification. It comes by faith in Christ for those who have not perfectly kept God's commands. In this section Paul greatly enlarges on the sacrifice of Christ, what it does for man, and how it meets our need for forgiveness.

**Justified by faith, we have peace with God and access by faith into grace.**

The result of justification by faith is that Jesus Christ gives us peace with God. Our sins bring upon us God's wrath (see verse 9 and 2:5,8) and make us enemies of God (see verse 10; Colossians 1:21). Since our sins caused this alienation, the problem can be removed only if the sins are forgiven (Ephesians 2:8; 3:12). This is what Christ can accomplish, if we have obedient faith.

Not only does faith in Christ grant us peace with God, it also gives access to grace. As discussed in our introductory notes and on 3:23,24; 4:4,5, grace is undeserved favor by which God offers forgiveness to those who have violated His commands and therefore do not deserve His reward. See also 6:14,15; 11:6.

**We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**

God's grace also gives us joy in the hope of the glory of God. Since the old law could never justify from sins, everybody who violated it would stand condemned. They had neither hope nor joy. But the gospel provides the sacrifice of Jesus that can forgive sins. So we now have grace – favor with God that we do not deserve. This gives us hope, which in turn gives joy (Hebrews 3:6).

What we hope for is the glory of God – i.e., that glory that God will grant in eternal life to those who have been saved through the gospel of Christ. This is hope enough for anyone and ought to be a constant source

of joy. In the last part of chapter 5, Paul will describe in greater length the benefits that the grace of God brings through the sacrifice of Jesus.

### **All this is ours “by faith.”**

We are justified “by faith” and have access to grace “by faith.” As discussed at length in chapter 4, this must be obedient faith. Hebrews 11 includes a list of many Old Testament characters who received God’s blessings “by faith.” Every case required obedience, and none were pleasing till their faith led them to obey. Saving faith does not exclude obedience. It includes it.

Galatians 3:26,27 shows specifically that becoming children of God “by faith” includes and requires water baptism. We will see this also in Romans 6. Nothing here supports the concept of salvation by faith alone without obedience. On the contrary, Paul of all people knew that obedience is necessary to salvation, since he himself was not cleansed of sins till he was baptized – Acts 22:16.

For other Scriptures on the hope we have as Christians, see: Acts 24:15; Ephesians 2:12; 4:4; Romans 5:1-5; 8:24,25; 12:12; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 15:19; Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:2; 2:11-14; 3:7; Hebrews 6:18,19; 10:23; 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3,4,13,21.

Other Scriptures on the joy we have as Christians are: Matthew 13:44; 25:21,23; Luke 6:23; 10:20; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 13:52; 16:34; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 2:17; 3:1; 4:4; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:6,8; 4:13.

### ***5:3-5 – We can have joy in tribulation, because it works steadfastness, then experience, and then hope which does not put to shame because God’s love is poured out upon us through the Holy Spirit.***

Verses 1,2 stated that our hope for glory is based on justification by faith in Jesus. Surprisingly, the tribulations and hardships we face in this life can also contribute to that hope. We usually consider tribulations to be bad, and in many ways they are. Yet, Paul shows that we may also glory in them, because they can actually strengthen us and make us better people, provided we endure them faithfully and do not allow them to lead us astray. See also James 1:3,4,12; Compare Matthew 5:10-12.

One benefit of trials is that they test our faith (1 Peter 1:6,7) and thereby produce perseverance, endurance, patience, or steadfastness. This patience, in turn helps perfect us so we lack nothing of the qualities God desires in us, but become complete before God.

Patience or steadfastness is essential to pleasing to God (2 Peter 1:6; Hebrews 12:1ff). We must learn to continue to serve God despite problems. God will not accept service that is not committed for life. We must determine to live for Him throughout life no matter what problems we face. But this patience is developed, in actual practice, only by

exercise. That is, we must actually face problems in order to develop our patience, just like our muscles must work in order to become strong.

As we learn perseverance, we then develop character (“approvedness” – ASV; “experience” – KJV; “approved character” – NKJV footnote). That is, we develop by experience those qualities of character that God approves. We grow to become the kind of people that are spiritually acceptable.

As we mature in character as a result of tribulation, we then have hope (see verse 2). So our hope is based both on the forgiveness of our sins (verses 1,2) and on the development of character. We need our past sins cleansed, and we need to live a faithful life that pleases God.

This gives us hope, that does not disappoint. Some people have hopes that will ultimately disappoint them and make them ashamed. But the true hope in God, that Paul here describes, will never disappoint, because God’s love is shed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given us. God loves all people, but has a special love for those who are His true servants. This love is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures that He inspired and confirmed by miracles. The fellowship we have with the Spirit, as well as with the Father and Son, also is the evidence of God’s love. All these blessings are from God’s love and give us hope for an even greater relationship with God in eternity.

So, though trials are a hardship and even a spiritual danger to us, yet they have advantages. They can help us become better people. The same sunshine that hardens bricks also melts ice. Likewise, the trials of life can either lead to our spiritual downfall, or else make us stronger and more useful Christians. It all depends on our attitude and our reaction.

“Patience” (υπομονη) – “1. steadfastness, constancy, endurance ...; in the N.T. the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings ... 2. a patient, steadfast waiting for ... 3. a patient enduring, sustaining ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***5:6-8 – One would rarely die for a righteous man or a good man, but God’s love is demonstrated in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.***

***Christ died for the ungodly.***

Next Paul describes more specifically what Jesus had to do in order to make salvation available. Jesus had to die for us. Death in the Bible is often described as the shedding of blood; since blood is the symbol of life, the shedding of blood becomes the symbol of death. Jesus shed His blood on the cross. So, His death, the shedding of His blood (verse 9), is what He did to offer us salvation.

The wages of sin is death – Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20. Because we sinned, someone had to die. Either we will die eternally as the penalty

for our sins, or someone else had to die as a sacrifice for our sins. But no one except Jesus could be an acceptable sacrifice, since all others would be required to suffer for their own sins. Only Jesus, the sinless Son of God, could die as our sacrifice.

Not only was He sinless, so He did not deserve to die for His sins, but He was God in the flesh. Jesus was God from eternity, but came to earth to live as a man so He could die to pay the penalty for our sins. This is taught in many Scriptures, and here we have this described briefly but beautifully.

### **Passages about the Death or Blood of Jesus**

Matthew 26:28 – For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Matthew 20:28 – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Ephesians 1:7 – In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

1 Peter 1:18,19 – knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1 Peter 2:24 – who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed.

Hebrews 2:9 – But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Revelation 1:5 – and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood

Revelation 5:9 – And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation

1 Timothy 2:5,6 – For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time

See also - Isaiah 53:5-9; 1 Corinthians 15:3; John 1:29; Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:9-13; 13:20,21; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15.

Note some specifics we learn here:

### **Jesus died for sinners who were without strength.**

The verses say, in several ways, that the people Jesus died for were sinners. They are called “ungodly” (without proper respect for God –



verse 6) and sinners (verse 8). They are contrasted to those who are good or righteous (verse 7).

The point is that Jesus died as the sacrifice for our sins (as described above). He was not dying for His own sins, since He had none. Nor was He dying for good people who deserved eternal life. He was dying for people who, without His sacrifice, would have no hope of salvation. But this includes everyone. As discussed in chapter 1-3, all have sinned.

So the verses say Christ died for “us,” while “we” were still sinners – Paul and all of us have been sinners. This means we cannot stand justified on the grounds of a sinless life. Our only hope is to stand justified on the basis of receiving the forgiveness of our sins. This is what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

We were without strength (verse 6) in the sense that, without Jesus’ death, we could do nothing about the consequences of our sins. The verse says we were without strength at the time “when” Christ died. It does not say we are still powerless in the face of sin now that He has died. In particular, it does not mean that, now that Jesus has died for us, we are so totally depraved that we cannot even meet the conditions to receive forgiveness (faith, repentance, confession, and baptism). The book, as we have repeatedly shown, demonstrates that we are now able to respond to the gospel by obedient faith, but none of this would have done any good had Jesus not died for us.

### **Jesus died at the right time.**

Verse 6 says Jesus died “in due time.” The NASB, ESV, and NKJV footnote say “at the right time.” This shows that the death of Jesus was not an unexpected change in God’s plan for man’s salvation. Not only had God planned this sacrifice and repeatedly predicted it, yet it happened at the point in history that would accomplish God’s purposes. Jesus was born in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), was delivered up by the foreknowledge of God, (Acts 2:23), and died at the right time (Romans 5:6). He died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28), which was part of God’s eternal plan (Ephesians 3:10,11).

God’s dealings with man throughout history have never been a matter of trial and error. He did not give the Old Testament hoping it would save men from sin, but then He found out that would not work, so He tried the gospel. Nor did He send Jesus to earth thinking He would establish an earthly kingdom, only to find that the people unexpectedly rejected and killed Him, so He established the church instead. Rather, God knew all along that Jesus’ death was necessary. But it was also necessary to wait till the best time in history to send Jesus. Meanwhile, God gave the Old Testament to prepare people for Christ (Galatians 3:23-25). Whether or not we fully understand all God’s reasons, God in His wisdom says that it was the right time.

### **Jesus' death is the ultimate demonstration of God's love.**

The Bible repeatedly assures us that the death of Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us. See John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 4:9,10. Jesus said that the greatest love a man can show is to give his life for his friends (John 15:13). This is what Jesus did for us. He came to earth and went to the cross, knowing He had the power to stop it at any moment. Yet, He willingly laid down His life. And the Father willingly sent Him, knowing this would be the end result.

But this is even more amazing, because Jesus did not die for loving people who were faithfully serving Him. He did not die for people who were good and righteous. None of us, of ourselves, have been good and righteous. We have all been sinners, as described at length in chapter 3. So, Jesus died for sinners, including the worst of sinners who have ever lived, and even including the very people who were crucifying Him. Even His closest disciples forsook Him and fled as He faced the cross. He died alone, but He died for all of us. The love this demonstrates is beyond human description.

***5:9-11 – Being justified by His blood, we are saved from God's wrath. Being enemies, we were reconciled to God through Jesus' death, so we are saved by His life and rejoice through Christ through whom we received reconciliation.***

### **Jesus' death justifies us and saves us from wrath.**

As discussed under verse 6, Jesus' blood is an expression for His death. See the notes on verse 6 for a list of many other passages about Jesus' death and blood. Since Jesus died for all of us who are sinners (verses 6-8), we can now be justified. That is, as we have discussed throughout the book, we can be counted as righteous before God. This is not righteousness based on our own sinless life whereby we earned our right standing before God. It is righteousness based on having our sins forgiven by Jesus' death.

Further, we can be saved from wrath through Him. Without forgiveness, our sins bring upon us God's eternal wrath. Romans 1:18; 2:5,8 say that wrath comes on those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus. See notes there and compare 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10; Colossians 3:6. The wrath comes on us because of our sins. But if our sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, then we are saved (delivered or rescued) from the wrath. So, these verses describe the solution to the problem of sin that Paul has been discussing through the first four chapters.

“Justify” (δικαιωω) – “...to make δικαιος, to render righteous or such as he ought to be ... 2. ...to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered ... 3. ...to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he

ought to be ... a. ... to declare guiltless one accused or who may be accused, acquit of a charge or reproach ... b. ...to judge, declare, pronounce, righteous and therefore acceptable ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Enemies reconciled to God through Christ**

Our sins also make us enemies of God. We are alienated or separated from Him, not because He wants alienation, but because we are guilty of sin and He cannot associate with those in sin. See Colossians 1:21; Ephesians 2:12; Isaiah 59:1,2.

By forgiving our sins, the death of Jesus not only justifies us and saves us from wrath, it also reconciles us to God. To reconcile is to restore to favor or friendship those who have been alienated. By removing the sin that is the cause of the alienation, Jesus makes it possible for us to be friends again with God. See 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Colossians 1:19-23; Ephesians 2:11-18. This required that Jesus suffer as a penalty or sacrifice so our sins could be forgiven.

And furthermore, being reconciled by His death, we are saved by His life. His life here refers to His resurrection: the life He received after His death. This resurrection was essential to our salvation just as surely as was His death, and we must believe it to be so. See John 14:19; Romans 10:9,10; 1 Peter 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. Had Jesus merely died on the cross, Satan would have triumphed. But by coming back to life, Jesus proved His power over Satan. Jesus' death was essential to our salvation from sin and is also the demonstration that we too will be raised from the dead and enter eternal salvation.

All this gives us great cause for rejoicing, since Jesus' death and resurrection have solved the consequences brought on by our sins. We now have reconciliation with God through Him. What greater cause of joy could anyone have?

In many ways, these verses can be viewed as a summary or theme statement of the book of Romans, especially of the first five chapters.

"Reconcile" (καταλλάσσω) – "1) to change, exchange, as coins for others of equivalent value 1a) to reconcile (those who are at variance) 1b) return to favour with, be reconciled to one 1c) to receive one into favour" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### ***5:12 – As through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, so death passed to all men since all sinned.***

These verses begin an extended explanation of Jesus' death, comparing the consequences of that death to the consequences of Adam's sin. This continues the explanation of Jesus' death that Paul has been discussing in verses 6-11 (note the "therefore"). The point is that Jesus' death has solved the problems that were brought into the world by Adam's sin. What the one man Adam did in bringing tragedy upon

the human race, the one man Jesus was able to solve by bringing forgiveness to the race.

Verse 12 says that, through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and through that sin death entered the world and spread to all men, because all sinned.

**Does this refer to inherited guilt: do all inherit guilt as a result of Adam’s “original sin.”**

This passage is often used by Calvinists and others as a fundamental proof text that all are born guilty of sin, because we inherit the guilt of Adam’s sin. But note:

1. Many passages show that we do not inherit sin from anyone: Ezekiel 18:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10; etc. Instead, we become guilty of sin when we ourselves commit acts of disobedience to God (1 John 3:4; James 1:14,15; Romans 1:32; 2:6-11; 3:9-23; 6:16,19; etc.).

2. Even if Romans 5:12-19 is (as I believe) discussing spiritual death, it still does not teach the key points of original sin and total depravity. It does not say people receive the guilt of Adam’s sin by **unconditional inheritance at birth**, nor does it say people become **totally** depraved, unable to do good, etc. Where are these key points stated in the passage? It says death spread to all men, but it does not say this happens by inheritance or unconditionally or at birth.

3. Adam is compared and contrasted to Christ (verse 14). They are alike in some ways, different in other ways. The key point is this: **Whatever people lost through Adam, the same people gain through Christ!**

Note the chart:

Verse	<b>By Adam</b> One man’s offense	<b>By Jesus</b> The gift by grace
V15	many died	much more the grace... abounded to many
V16	resulted in condemnation	resulted in justification
V17	death reigned	much more ... righteousness will reign in life
V18	<b>as</b> through one man’s offense judgment came to <b>all</b> men resulting in condemnation	<b>even so</b> through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to <b>all</b> men resulting in justification of life
V19	For <b>as</b> by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners	<b>so also</b> by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous

4. If this means through Adam's sin **all** men **unconditionally** received guilt and condemnation imputed to them, then it must likewise mean that through Jesus' death **all** those same men **unconditionally** received justification of life! Whatever problem Adam caused and for whatever people he caused it, Jesus solved the problem for those same people. ***If everybody was unconditionally lost through Adam, then everybody is unconditionally saved through Jesus!***

So, consistency would require advocates of original sin to believe in universal salvation. But this contradicts many Scriptures; therefore, it cannot be true that people unconditionally inherit the guilt of Adam's sin.

### **What the passage really teaches is conditional condemnation and conditional salvation.**

Both Adam's act and Christ's act made consequences available to all men, but each person receives those consequences individually into his own life **conditionally** on the basis of his own conduct. Whether or not we actually receive the consequences of Adam's deed or of Christ's deed depends on what we do.

How can people receive condemnation **conditionally** through what Adam did? ***Even as*** people receive justification conditionally through what Jesus did! Romans and many other passages state repeatedly that Jesus' death brought salvation into the world, making it available to all men and encouraging us to accept it. But whether or not we actually receive that justification depends on our conduct based on the choices we make.

Likewise, Adam's sin **brought sin into the world** (verse 12), setting an example and creating an environment that tempts and influences us all toward sin. His act made sin easily available and encourages us all to engage in it. But we individually and personally become sinners and are held guilty for sin only when we choose to participate in conduct that is sinful. We become sinners by our own conduct, as is stated in the many passages already cited above.

But this same truth is clearly stated right here in verse 12: "death spread to all men, ***because all sinned***." We become guilty of sin when we commit sin, not before. Adam brought sin into the world, and we all sooner or later follow his example. All the consequences of sin listed in verses 15-19 come upon us conditionally when we practice sin, and all the blessings of forgiveness come upon us conditionally when we obey Jesus.

Illustrations: "Through the knowledge of the math teacher, all the class became good mathematicians." "Through the talents of the music teacher, all her students became good musicians." Are these consequences inherited unconditionally? No, but the teachers made the knowledge or skill available; so when the students responded properly, they received what the teacher had to offer.

Note that some argue that “all sinned” (verse 12) is aorist tense, and so must mean that all sinned **when** Adam sinned (compare Lard). But how could we sin when we did not exist? That makes us sinners **before** we were even born, not that we became sinners when we were born. Does the aorist tense have to mean that we all sinned at the same point of time in the past?

Romans 3:23 uses the exact same Greek phrase, but verses 10-18 shows that it refers to the **conduct** of the people, which happened throughout history at the time when each individual sinned. 5:12 builds on the foundation of 3:23 and means the same thing. The phrase means just the opposite of inherited depravity. It means that we become sinners when we commit sin, but Adam started it all. (If some argue that we **were** Adam, in some sense as our “federal head,” so “all sinned” when Adam sinned, then this makes the “one man” the same as “all men.” As already discussed, the idea that we become guilty of sin because Adam committed sin is completely contrary to Scripture.)

**For further discussion of original sin and total inherited depravity, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

**Could Romans 5:12ff refer to physical death and physical resurrection?**

Some claim this to be the case, drawing a parallel to 1 Corinthians 15:22. This would answer all the arguments that use this passage to defend inherited guilt. However, while that approach fits the context of 1 Corinthians 15:22, it repeatedly contradicts the context here in Romans 5.

\* The context of 1 Corinthians 15:22 is discussing physical resurrection from physical death. But the whole theme of Romans pertains to spiritual life and justification. In particular, the immediate context of Romans 5:12-19 refers to sin and spiritual death vs. righteousness and spiritual life (5:1-11; 6:1-23). Note how verse 12 begins with “therefore.” It continues the discussion of verses 6-11, showing how Jesus’ death overcame the spiritual consequences of sin.

\* Romans 5 shows that Jesus’ one righteous act overcomes the death being discussed. That righteous act must be, based on 5:6-11, the death of Jesus. I see how Jesus’ death saves us from spiritual death, and I see how His resurrection assures us of physical resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). But I fail to see how Jesus’ death overcomes physical death.

\* The passage says that through Adam we not only “die,” but we were “made sinners” (verse 19) and receive “condemnation” (verses 16,18). As already discussed, this is conditional, but makes no sense if the reference is to physical death only. People die physically, even when they are not in sin: little babies, and even saved adults.

\* Likewise, the passage says that through Jesus we not only receive “life,” but also justification (verses 16,18) and righteousness (verses 17,19) based on grace (verses 15,17,20,21). Surely, this means more than just physical life and death.

\* Finally, and conclusively, verse 21 says the life we receive through Jesus is “eternal life.” This is contrasted to the death, so it must be spiritual death in contrast to eternal life, just as in 6:23.

***5:13 – Until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.***

This begins a parenthetical section which apparently continues through verse 17.

Paul has said that sin entered the world through one man, then death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. Now he adds that sin was in the world until the coming of the law, but sin is not imputed where no law exists. So how could there have been sin before the law, if law must be in force for sin to be imputed?

“Law” has no definite article, so some claim it cannot refer to the Law of Moses. Yet, throughout the context, the Law of Moses is unquestionably the law that Paul primarily refers to. And here he must refer to some specific law, since there never was a time that man was not subject to some law. The translators acknowledge this by inserting a definite article. It is implied by context.

Even Adam and Eve in the garden were subject to the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Verse 14 then settles the matter: Paul is talking about people “from Adam to Moses.” So, the first term “law” must refer to the law given by Moses, but the second term “law” refers to law in general. The only reasonable meaning of the verse is that sin was in the world as a result of the sin of Adam and those following him, even before the Law of Moses was given.

Everyone acknowledges that law existed before the Law of Moses was given, so people must have been subject to some law before the Law of Moses came. That law is often called the Patriarchal Law, because in that age God spoke directly to the heads of families to reveal His will to them. Like Adam, those people sinned, even though they did not yet have the Law of Moses.

So, people have been sinners ever since Adam, even before the Law of Moses. This is why all men need the forgiveness that only Jesus can offer. See the next verse for further explanation.



***5:14,15 – Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin as did Adam, who is a symbol of the One to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. By the trespass of one, many died, but by Jesus Christ the grace of God much more abounded to many.***

**All people since Adam have been guilty of sin.**

So as in verse 13, from the time of Adam on (until Moses) everyone was subject to death as a consequence of sin. These people did not sin after the likeness of Adam's transgression: they sinned (verse 12), but not the same sin he committed. They had different laws to follow, but they still violated the law they had. It was not the law Adam had nor the Law of Moses, but all violated Divine law. So all were subject to death.

Here Adam is specifically stated to be a type or figure of "Him" who was to come. The context shows clearly that "Him" refers to Jesus (verses 15ff). The similarities between the two are described as the comparison proceeds, but in many cases the comparison lies in dissimilarities. Adam is in many ways a type of Christ by contrast or because of differences between them.

**Adam's sin brought about death for many, but Jesus gives a gift by grace.**

We are told first that the free gift is not like the offense (sin). So, the comparison between Adam and Jesus involves differences.

One difference is that the offense (sin) led many into death, but God's grace brought "the gift" to many through Jesus. The "gift" must refer to salvation or forgiveness or perhaps eternal life as a consequence of forgiveness. But the gift was granted to the same "many" who suffered the death. So all who suffer the death may also receive the gift.

As explained under verse 12, the death came to many "by" Adam in that Adam's sin brought sin into the world. Now all people are born into a world surrounded by sin and temptation. Eventually all succumb to temptation and so become separated from God by spiritual death. But this is conditional, based on their own conduct, just as receiving the gift through Christ is also conditional. Otherwise, all would be lost and then all would be saved unconditionally, hence universal salvation.

***5:16,17 – The judgment of one sin led to condemnation, but the free gift leads to justification. So by the trespass of one, death reigned; much more through Jesus the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life.***

Again, the comparison is really a contrast: the gift through Christ is "not like" the consequence of Adam's sin. Adam's offense brought a judgment that resulted in condemnation. Because people sinned, they brought upon themselves guilt with all the associated penalties. However, through Christ came the free gift that resulted in justification.



This removed the guilt and allowed men to stand righteous before God despite their sin. Further, since the offense brought condemnation, it also brought death. But those who receive grace through Christ also receive righteousness and life.

Surely the references to condemnation, justification, and righteousness show that the “death” and “life” that Paul refers to are spiritual death and life, not just physical death and life. But all these consequences come on men conditionally. The justification and life come on the man only when he himself chooses to meet the conditions of forgiveness. Likewise, the condemnation and death come only when the man himself sins. Neither guilt nor righteousness are unconditional.

***5:18,19 – Through one trespass judgment came unto all men and many were made sinners. So through one righteous act the free gift came to all men and many were made righteous.***

These verses essentially repeat verses 16,17. See notes on those verses. Some additional points to note are:

Verse 18 says that judgment resulting in condemnation came to ***all*** men, as in verse 12 (compare verse 15, which says “many”). So, through Jesus’ act the free gift came to ***all*** men, resulting in justification. The consequences we are discussing are universal. They affect all men.

And again, if these consequences come on people unconditionally, then all people must necessarily be saved, since the free gift of justification came to ***all*** men. But we know each individual must accept the gift by meeting conditions, so the condemnation also comes on each individual only when he meets certain conditions (he commits sin). The translators expressed this by saying the judgment “came to” all men, and the free gift “came to” all men (others say it “led to” the consequences). The corresponding acts of Adam and Jesus made these consequences available to people, but each individual personally receives the consequences when he meets the conditions.

Verse 18 also adds that the free gift, etc., came through one man’s righteous act (some translations say “one act of righteousness”). Surely, this one man is Jesus, as in verses 15,17,21 (compare Philippians 2:8). And the righteous act must be His crucifixion on the cross, as is discussed in context in verses 6-11. And that death was to save us from the spiritual consequences of sin, not just from physical death.

Verse 19, as in verse 17, shows that the consequences come “by” the sin of Adam and “by” the obedience of Jesus. As in the notes on verse 12, this expresses conditional consequences, not unconditional. As in our illustrations, “By the knowledge of the teacher, all the students became educated.” “By the skill of the doctor, all his patients were cured.” The statements imply that the students or patients must actively meet conditions to receive the benefit. But the emphasis is on what the teacher or doctor did to make this possible. So, the point here is not to deny that

we must meet conditions to become sinners or to become righteous. The point is to emphasize what Adam did – and especially what Jesus did – to make these consequences available to us.

Finally, note again, as on verses 16,17, that the consequences brought on men are condemnation, justification, and people made sinners or made righteous. Surely this refers to spiritual consequences, not just physical death.

***5:20,21 – The law came that the trespass might abound, but grace abounded more than sin. So as sin reigned in death, grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Christ.***

### **Grace overcomes the consequences of sin.**

The effect of the law was that sin abounded. This does not mean God gave the law for the intent of accomplishing this result. The purpose for the law was to reveal right and wrong and guide men to do right. But in practice all people eventually do wrong (Romans 3:23). So, the effect of the law was to demonstrate that sin abounds – see notes on Romans 3:20.

But the blessing Paul is describing is that grace abounds much more than sin abounds. That is, grace is more than adequate to solve the problems caused by sin. As abundant as are sin and its consequences, grace and its benefits are much more abundant (1 Timothy 1:14).

### **Sin leads to spiritual death.**

Specifically, grace can overcome the problem of death that comes from sin (verse 12). Sin reigns in death – see chapter 6, especially 6:23. That is, sin leads to spiritual death in this life and eternal death – the second death, the lake of fire – when this life is over (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). This death “reigned” in that it controlled the destiny of sinners. They were slaves to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6). Once we are guilty, we face those consequences; but we are powerless, without Christ, to escape.

The gospel refers to different kinds of life and death. Physical life refers to the existence of man’s spirit in a human body as created by God at the beginning (Genesis 2:7; Acts 17:25,28). This is the opposite of death, which involves the separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 8:55; 1 Kings 17:22).

Romans 5:12-21 refers to a different kind of life and death. But it is called “death” and “life” because it is similar in many ways to physical death and life. Note Ephesians 2:1-5. People in sin were dead in trespasses and sins, because they walked according to the course of this world, conducting themselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh. But God, because of His great love and grace, made them alive by saving them from sin. Notice that the life and death here are not physical. The people were walking and acting even while they

were dead. They were dead in sins and trespasses: death in a spiritual sense. Yet, God made them alive by saving them from sin: life in a spiritual sense.

Ephesians 2:12,13,18,19 explains further, showing that, when they were dead in sin, they were without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world. They were “afar off.” But by the blood of Christ they were “made near.” They gained access to the Father and became members of God’s household. Note again that death is a separation, but life is a union.

Luke 15:24,32 – The father of the prodigal son said, “This my son was dead and is alive again.” When the son was living in sin, he was “dead.” After the son repented and returned, he was “alive again.” As a result, the son again had harmony, union, and fellowship with his father.

Death in sin is the separation or alienation from God we experience because God cannot fellowship those who are guilty of sin. He is displeased with us and cannot give us His spiritual blessings. When we are saved from sin, we are friends with God again and have harmony, union, or fellowship with Him. We are spiritually alive. (See also Matthew 8:22; 1 Timothy 5:6; Colossians 2:12,13)

### **Christ is the solution to the problem of sin.**

Sin leads to death: alienation and separation from God. When sins are forgiven by the grace of God through the death of Jesus, we are reunited in fellowship and reconciliation with God. This is spiritual life. If we continue to be faithful, the result will be eternal life in heaven. See Matthew 5:10-12; 25:46; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9,10; 1 Peter 1:3,4; Philippians 3:20; Revelation 21:3-5; 22:3,4; Romans 2:5-11; Luke 16:19-31; 1 John 5:11,12.

There can be no doubt that the life Paul discusses here is spiritual life, and it is the opposite of death; so the death he discusses here is spiritual death. Even Lard, who labors endlessly page after page to prove that “death” in this context is physical death, when he gets to verse 21 acknowledges that Paul is talking about spiritual death and life. If so, then why not accept the simple truth that he has been talking about spiritual death all along, but the consequences are received conditionally?

Despite our sins, we can be forgiven by Jesus through the grace of God and can live forever in Divine fellowship. This is the great purpose of Paul’s description in this chapter of the death of Jesus. Paul did not write for the purpose of teaching the false man-made doctrine of Calvinistic total inherited depravity. It is a tragedy that his beautiful description here has become a battleground over such human perversions.

Paul wrote to assure us that, by the grace of God, Jesus’ crucifixion according to the gospel can totally solve our sin problem. Chapters 1-3 prove that all men – Jew and Gentile – are all guilty of sin. Chapter four

shows that this sin problem could only be solved by trusting God to forgive us, not by the Law of Moses or by any system demanding a whole life without sin. Now chapter five shows how the problem of sin is solved in the death of Jesus Christ. Let no one destroy the beauty of this teaching or diminish our appreciation of it.

# Romans 6

## Chapters 6-8 – Jesus Frees from the Law, but Requires Obedience and Spiritual Mindedness.

### Chapter 6 - Grace Forbids Continuing in Sin.

*6:1,2 – Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not. Since we died to sin, how shall we continue to live in it?*

#### *Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*

Paul has shown that, under a system such as the Old Testament, one could be justified before God only on the basis of **earning** or **meriting** salvation by living a sinless life. The law itself provided no real lasting forgiveness. The gospel, however, is a system that has commands, but also has grace – Romans 5:1,2. We have a perfect sacrifice that can forgive sins, so they are never again held against us (Hebrews 10:10). To receive this forgiveness, we must **believe** enough to obey. We do not **earn** salvation by our own **merit**.

In this context, chapter 6 discusses the importance of faithful service under the gospel. Paul anticipates a question some might naturally ask: If we now have salvation by grace so sins can be forgiven, why should we try to avoid sin? In fact, since grace abounds much more where sin abounds (as Paul has just stated at the end of chapter 5), then why can't we just deliberately sin and let grace abound even more? If I sincerely believe Jesus is the Savior, can I continue sinning and just expect God's grace to excuse me?

This is the doctrine some people outwardly teach, and some members of the church practice! Many people seem convinced that God's mercy will save them, despite the fact they continue living in sin. They may commit practices that violate God's word, or they may neglect to practice what God requires. They may even know they are sinning, but somehow they have convinced themselves that God's grace will save them.

## Since we have died to sin, how can we continue in it?

May we continue sinning and simply trust God's grace to save us anyway? Paul introduces the issue and immediately responds: "Certainly not!" ("God forbid" – ASV, KJV). This is the strongest negative in the Greek language. ***Absolutely, positively not!***

Chapter 6 explains why such a conclusion would be false. It shows that the purpose of grace is to **free** us from sin and its consequences. If we return to a life of sin after being forgiven, we defeat the purpose of grace and bring upon ourselves the same consequences we faced before forgiveness.

In particular, verses 3-14 discuss the significance of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, showing how our baptism is a likeness to His death, burial, and resurrection. If we go back to sin after baptism, we defeat the purpose of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and we defeat the purpose of baptism!

### ***6:3 – All who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death.***

Chapter 5 explained at length that Jesus' death is the sacrifice for our sins under the gospel. It is the act by which God's grace extends forgiveness. So, in baptism, we come into spiritual contact with the saving power of Jesus' blood.

### **A basic principle: God has often placed His blessings for man in a specified location (or relationship).**

Those who believed and trusted God enough to be in the appointed place, received the blessing. Those not in the appointed place did not receive the blessing. Some examples are: Noah's ark (Genesis 6:17-20; 7:23); houses marked by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:7,12,13,22,23); cities of refuge (Numbers 35:9-11,26-28); Rahab's house (Joshua 2:18,19; 6:17)

In a similar way, God has placed spiritual blessings for us in a specified "location" (relationship): "in Christ." To receive these blessings we must come into Christ and remain in Him. Those who refuse to come into Christ (or who try to come in but not according to God's way) will not receive the blessings God offers.

### **What does it mean to be "in Christ"?**

The phrase is used in Scripture to describe a close, intimate, personal relationship. One person is in another when they have a harmonious spiritual union or fellowship with one another. (See Grimm-Wilke-Thayer on *εν*.)

For example:

The Father and Son are "in" one another (John 14:10,11; 10:38; 17:20-23; 14:19-23).

Christians are in the Father and the Son, and the Father and Son are in us (John 14:20-23; 17:20-23; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; John 15:4-6;

Ephesians 3:17; Galatians 2:20; Revelation 3:20; 21:3; 1 John 2:6,24; 3:24; 4:12-16; John 6:56; Philippians 1:1; Romans 8:10; Colossians 1:27; 1 John 1:3-7).

The Holy Spirit is in Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19; 3:16; Acts 5:32; Romans 8:9-11; Titus 3:5,6; James 4:5; 2 Timothy 1:14; Galatians 4:6; John 14:16,17; 1 John 4:13; Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 6:4; John 7:37-39; Ephesians 2:22; Acts 2:38; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13,14; 4:30; 5:18)

So for us to be “in Christ” means to be in a close, harmonious spiritual relation with Him, so we receive the blessings He offers.

### **What blessings are found in Christ?**

Reconciliation, redemption, and forgiveness of sins are in Christ – Ephesians 2:12-17; 1:7 (Philippians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 5:18,19; 1 Peter 5:14; Romans 3:22-24; Colossians 1:14).

We are new creatures in Christ – Romans 6:6,11; 2 Corinthians 5:17. Other passages refer to this as being “born again” (John 3:3,5).

Freedom from condemnation is in Christ – Romans 8:1; John 15:6.

Grace of God is in Christ – 2 Timothy 2:1; Galatians 5:4.

Salvation from sin is in Christ – 2 Timothy 2:10; Acts 4:12.

The love of God is in Christ – Romans 8:39; John 15:9,10; John 14:23.

Eternal life is in Christ – 1 John 5:11-12 (Romans 6:23; John 1:4; 14:6; 2 Timothy 1:1).

All spiritual blessings are in Christ – Ephesians 1:3.

### **How do we obtain these blessings in Christ?**

To have these blessings we must **be** “in Christ” – i.e., we must be “found in Him” (Philippians 3:8,9). We must have this relationship of fellowship and oneness with Him. In order for one to **be** in a place (or relationship) there must be some point in his life in which he **comes into** that place (or relationship). Prior to that time, he was **not** there and afterwards he **is** there. At what point in one’s life does he come into Christ?

Romans 6:3 – ... as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death

Galatians 3:27 – For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

You cannot **be** in Christ until you **come into** Him, and you come into Him at the point of baptism. Baptism must be preceded by hearing the gospel and believing in Jesus, repenting of sins, and confessing Jesus (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9,10). But when one has done these things and then is baptized, then he comes into Christ.

A person may take several steps toward a building, but there is one step that puts him into the building. All the steps are essential for him to be in the building, but there is one that completes the procedure and puts

him in. Without that step and prior to that step he is not in the building. So there are several steps that precede baptism and are all essential in order for one to receive the blessings in Christ. But baptism is the completion of the procedure and puts one into Christ.

If all the blessings we have studied are **in Christ**, and one comes into Christ by being Scripturally baptized, what is the condition of one who has never been baptized or did not do it Scripturally?

Other passages confirm that the purpose of baptism is that one might have his sins washed away by the blood of Jesus. See Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21.

**For further discussion of the purpose and importance of baptism, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct).**

***6:4 – We are buried with Christ in baptism then raised in likeness to His resurrection.***

### **Buried with Christ**

Many denominations teach that one can be baptized by sprinkling or pouring. Yet, Paul here states that baptism is a burial.

According to modern English dictionaries, the **origin** of the word “baptize” was a **Greek** word meaning “to immerse” (*Random House College Dictionary*). Dictionaries of Bible words confirm that “baptize” means to immerse. Thayer’s lexicon on βαπτίζω says: “to dip, immerge, submerge.” Many other dictionaries show the basic, root meaning of the Bible word is to immerse. (See Vine, Arndt and Gingrich, etc.)

There are other Greek words for “sprinkle” (ραντίζω) or “pour” (χεω). Had God wanted to authorize these, the words were available; but instead He chose a word that never means sprinkle or pour.

But the best way to understand the significance of the action of baptism is to consider the context of Bible passages that describe it. When we do, we learn that baptism requires the following:

#### *Water*

Acts 10:47,48 – “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized...” The element or substance used is not inherent in the word “baptize.” But water is the element used in the baptism that Jesus commanded everyone to receive. (Other verses listed below also show the element in baptism should be water).

#### *Much water*

John 3:23 – John baptized near Salim because there was much water there. So, Bible baptism requires “much water.” Immersion fits, because it requires much water. Sprinkling and pouring do not fit, because they do not require much water.

#### *Coming to the water*

Acts 8:36-39 – They came to some water (verse 36). Other Bible examples also confirm that people who were baptized went to the water



(John 3:23; Mark 1:9; etc.). Again, sprinkling and pouring do not fit, since the water can easily be brought to the person. But immersion fits the Bible description of baptism, since to be immersed one must go to the water.

*Going down into the water*

Acts 8:38 – Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him. This shows why baptism involves “much water”: it must be enough for the people to go down into!

Why don’t denominational preachers take the candidate down into the water? Because it does not make sense to go to all that trouble just to sprinkle or pour. And it would not have made sense in Bible times either. The fact is that denominations that sprinkle or pour do not do what the Bible says baptism involves. Only immersion fits the description.

*Coming up out of the water*

Acts 8:39 – After the eunuch had been baptized, he came up out of the water. In order to come up out of the water, he first had to be down in the water.

Mark 1:9,10 – Jesus was baptized “in” the Jordan River, then came up from (“out of” – footnote) the water.

Bible baptism requires coming to the water, going down into it, and coming up out of it. None of these are required by sprinkling or pouring, but immersion requires all of them.

*A burial and a resurrection*

Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4 – In baptism we are buried with Jesus and raised with Him. As He was buried in the earth, we are buried in baptism.

When Jesus was buried, did they sprinkle a little dirt on Him, like folks do when they sprinkle or pour water? Matthew 12:40 – He was buried in the heart of the earth. Matthew 27:60,66 – He was laid in a tomb hewn out of rock and a great stone covered the opening. He was completely enclosed in the element. In baptism we are buried (completely enclosed and surrounded) in water, as Jesus was buried in the earth.

*A washing of the body*

Hebrews 10:22 – We have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Note the contrast between the sprinkling of the heart and the washing of the body. In the New Testament, the blood of Jesus is sprinkled on our heart to cleanse us from sin. This must be spiritual, since it cannot be physical. (Hebrews 9:14)

But what is washed with water? The **body**! Clearly, this refers to baptism. Denominations sprinkle or pour water on the head. But Bible baptism involves washing the body as is done in immersion. Immersion fits the Bible descriptions of baptism. Sprinkling and pouring do not fit.

**For further discussion of the action involved in baptism, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

### **Walking in newness of life**

The result of baptism should be walking in newness of life. This is just another term for being born again. The conclusion must be that we are born again only when we have been baptized by immersion for the purpose of having our sins washed away by the blood of Jesus. Only then are our sins cleansed and only then do we become children of God. This conclusion is specifically confirmed in Galatians 3:26,27. See also John 1:12,13; 3:1-7; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Romans 6:3,5; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

We will see, as the chapter progresses, that this newness of life is really the main point of the chapter. As Paul stated in verse 2, we died to sin when we were converted or born again. If we died to sin and were born to live a new life, why should we go back to our old life of sin? This is the main point Paul is making here about baptism.

All that we have said about the purpose and action of baptism is true; it is all taught here and elsewhere. But the main thrust of Paul's discussion here is that conversion itself, including the purpose of baptism, teaches us we must not continue in sin. To return to sin after baptism is to deny the very purpose of conversion.

***6:5-7 – If we are united with Christ in the likeness of His death, we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection. Since our old man was crucified with Him so the body of sin may be done away, we should no longer serve sin but have been justified from it.***

Having introduced the fact that baptism symbolizes Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, Paul gives further explanation. In baptism, we **die**. We are united together in the likeness of Jesus' death. In what sense? Death is separation (compare James 2:26). In baptism, the blood of Jesus (verse 3) separates us from the body of **sin**. Our old sinful man is crucified with Him. The body of sin is done away, so we are justified from it. It is **dead**, just as Jesus was **dead**. We are freed from sin, separated from it.

Paul here, incidentally, destroys the argument that salvation by "grace through faith" means that obedience – and especially baptism – is not essential. Right in the middle of his major discussion of salvation by grace through faith, Paul shows that baptism is an essential condition in order to receive the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Specifically, we die with Christ in baptism. This is a death to sin. He who has died is freed from sin (verse 7). So, at the point of baptism we are freed from sin. Verses 17,18 will also show that obedience is essential to be made free from sin.

While this is true, it is not the **main** point of the context. The main point is to answer the question of whether people under grace may continue to live in sin. Paul here begins his answer by showing that, if we died with Christ, then the old man of sin is done away with. Therefore, we should no longer serve sin.

So, the first reason we should not return to sin is the fact that we are dead to it. We were converted, culminating in baptism, to get rid of sin. If we saw the need to get rid of it, why then go back to it? It is dead. Why return to that which was slain? See Galatians 2:20; 5:24; 6:14; Colossians 2:11; 2 Timothy 2:11.

Verses 5,6 also introduce the points that Paul will enlarge in the following verses: We not only died with Christ, but we were raised with Him. This too will show that we must not return to sin. Both our death to sin and our resurrection with Christ prove that we should not return to sin. Further, we should no longer be slaves of sin. We are slaves of that which we serve. If we do not want to be slaves of sin, then we must not practice it. Note how Paul enlarges on these points in the following verses.

***6:8,9 – If we died with Christ, we shall also live with Him. But He was raised from the dead in order to die no more, since death no longer had power over Him.***

The main point Paul makes here relates to the **resurrection** aspect of baptism.

Note the parallels:

<b>Jesus</b>	<b>Christians</b>
Jesus died on the cross (vv 3-7)	We are baptized into His death and die to sin.
Jesus was buried (v4)	In baptism, we are buried with Him.
Jesus rose again (verses 4-7)	In baptism, we rise to walk in newness of life.
Jesus rose never to die again. Death has no more dominion over Him (verses 8-10)	We should never go back to that to which we died: <b>sin</b> .

So, the point regarding resurrection is that we must continue a new life. When Christ arose from the dead, He did not return to His old life. He had a new life: a life that does not lead to death again. Death has no power over Him in His new life. Likewise, now that we walk in a new life, we must not participate again in that which leads to death. The wages of sin is death (verse 23). We had to die to sin (in baptism), because we were guilty of sin. If Jesus did not die again, we must not return to that which made it necessary for us to die.

**6:10,11 – Jesus died to sin once but then lives to God. Likewise, we should be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ.**

Jesus died for our sins just one time. He will never die for sin again (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-28; 10:12; Revelation 1:18). So, we are separated from sin for the purpose of **staying** separated. Sin should have no **dominion** over us, just as death has none over Jesus. Since He will not die again, then we must not go back to that for which the wages is death! The old man of sin is dead, so we must now live a new life for God in Christ. Compare 1 Peter 2:24.

To view baptism as simply a step to receive forgiveness of past sins, is to miss one of its major values. Baptism must be preceded by **repentance**: a determination to live for God. Baptism therefore serves as a pledge that we will live for God. The symbolism of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection does not end when we leave the water. It goes on and on throughout life. As we continue to live for God we continue to symbolize that Jesus is alive.

The whole point of baptism and forgiveness by Jesus' blood is to **get rid of sins**. If we really want to be free from sin, does it make sense to go back to it after baptism?

This does not mean that we **will** never sin again, or that if we do our baptism was not valid, or that we are hopeless to receive eternal life. But the pattern of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection proves we have no **right** to return to sin, so we must commit ourselves to striving to not let sin have dominion in our lives. If we do sin, we must not let sin take control of our lives, but must repent, pray for forgiveness, and recommit our lives to obedience.

**6:12-14 – Do not let sin reign in your body to obey its lusts, nor present your members as instruments of unrighteousness. But present your members as instruments of righteousness and do not let sin have dominion over you.**

These verses state the conclusion of the argument in the previous verses. Jesus died physically and rose again one time. Death has no dominion over Him: He will never die again. So we died and rose again with Him in baptism. Therefore, we should not let sin reign in our bodies, since we are now living a new life. Just as Jesus arose never to die again, so we should rise to walk in newness of life and never return to sin again. Sin should not have dominion over us, even as death would not have dominion over Jesus.

This means we must present our bodies, and the members of it, as instruments to serve God righteously, not as instruments of sin. Our bodies now live in newness of life, which means they must be used to serve God, not sin. God has a purpose for our bodies. They should be

used, not for sin, but in His service. We are tools to be used in His hand to do His work. Compare Romans 12:1,2.

The result would be that sin has no dominion over us, as death has no dominion over Jesus. We were forgiven to walk in a new life. Now we must not return to that to which we died. And all this follows from the fact we are under grace, not law. Grace does not excuse or permit sin; it teaches us to avoid it.

Notice that how we use our lives is a matter of our choice. We can present our members as instruments of righteousness or as instruments of unrighteousness. We are not unconditionally predestined to be either wicked or righteous without choice. God has granted each person the power of free will to choose how he will live his life. What choice do you make with your life?

Someone has said that members of Jesus' church are strong on baptism for **remission** of sins, but weak on baptism into **newness of life**. Our conduct proves we want to escape the guilt and consequences of sin, but we sometimes don't want the **commitment and dedication to living the kind of life** that Jesus requires. Could this be why we have problems with members who don't attend, don't study, don't teach, etc.?

**6:15,16 – Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Absolutely not! You become a slave to the one whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness.**

**Shall we sin since we are under a system of grace, not a system of law?**

Paul repeats the question of verses 1,2: Shall we sin since we are under a system of grace, not under the principle of the Old Testament law (as previously described)? “God forbid” – same answer! Grace provides a way to be forgiven of guilt, but grace does not grant us permission to continue to sin.

But note the wording of the expression: we are not under law but under grace. Some claim such expressions in Romans mean that we are not subject to any commands under the gospel. But we have shown repeatedly that “not under law” does not contradict the concept that we must obey commands. Paul clearly states in 1 Corinthians 9:21 that we are under law to Christ. We are not free to be saved regardless of how we live. For further discussion, see our introductory notes and notes on chapter 4.

But the question itself teaches this same truth. It says, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” But how can we sin if we are not subject to law? Sin is transgression of divine law – 1 John 3:4. So the very fact that sin is possible proves of itself that Paul does not mean to say we are not subject to law. He means, rather, that we are no

longer under that Old Testament arrangement whereby we stand condemned unless we keep the law sinlessly. We are under a system that includes commands but yet provides a means of forgiveness when we sin.

### **We are slaves to whomever we obey.**

Paul proceeds to give another reason why grace does not grant us freedom to sin. He states the principle of service: we are servants of whomever we obey. By definition, a servant is one who does the will of someone else. Whomever we obey, that one is our master and we are his servants.

Spiritually there are two choices: We can serve **sin**. That leads to death (this must be spiritual death, since we all die physically). Or we can serve **God**. That results in righteousness. Compare 2 Peter 2:19; John 8:34; 2 Timothy 2:25,26.

Note again that, contrary to Calvinism, we have a choice regarding whom we serve. Calvinism says we are born totally depraved and so have no power to choose to serve sin or to obey righteousness. But if God unconditionally chooses us to be one of His elect, then the Holy Spirit compels us to believe and obey, so once we are saved we cannot be lost. Inspiration, however, here denies all this by saying that we “present ourselves” to obey sin or righteousness. We do have the power to choose.

Our choice leads to slavery, either to sin or to righteousness. When we choose sin, we become enslaved to sin in that we are unable, by ourselves, to escape its consequences. Continued practice of sin often leads to sinful habits that are extremely difficult to escape. But any sin leads to slavery in that we could not escape the guilt by our own power alone. The blessing of the gospel is that it can give us the power to escape.

“Slave” (δουλος) – “1. a slave, bondman, man of servile condition; ... b. metaphorically, [α.] one who gives himself up wholly to another's will... 2. a servant, attendant, (of a king)...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***6:17,18 – Though we were servants of sin, we became obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which we were delivered, and being made free from sin we became servants of righteousness.***

**Conversion sets us free from sin and makes us slaves of righteousness.**

Paul describes the process of conversion. First, a person was a slave of sin, because he committed sin and had not been forgiven. Having received the doctrine delivered to us, he then **obeyed** (submitted to) that teaching. As a result, he was made free from sin. This, in turn, made him a slave of righteousness. Note the parallel to baptism in verses 3-7.

Once again Paul here clearly states that, under the gospel, **obedience** is an essential condition to forgiveness. This is taught plainly right here in the very heart of this epistle about salvation by

grace, which is so often misused to teach that obedience is not required. The real point is that, under the Old Testament, once a person sinned, the Old Testament had no means or conditions anyone could meet that would give lasting forgiveness. The New Testament offers true forgiveness, but there are conditions.

### **Obedience must come from the heart.**

And note that this obedience is not just going through outward motions. It must come “from the heart.” When we present the gospel truth about the need for obedience, sometimes people accuse us of teaching that mere outward motions will save. On the contrary, no one will be saved by going through the motions without meaning what is done from the heart.

Specifically, this is why it is so important for people to understand the purpose of baptism and sincerely mean what is done. When people teach baptism of babies or that the purpose of baptism does not matter, they are the ones who justify going through mere outward motions. Proper gospel teaching requires people to understand and mean what they do in God’s service.

The passage requires proper motives of heart. But it also makes clear that we are not saved just by a good attitude of heart. We must “**obey**” from “the **heart**.” Both the action and the attitude are essential to salvation. Failure to practice this is not true obedience. And failure to teach it is not true teaching.

Further, note that the teaching we must obey is here called “doctrine.” Some tell us that “gospel” refers to what we obey to become Christians, but “doctrine” is what we must do after conversion. They usually proceed to defend the view that “doctrine” is not essential to salvation. But here the obedience needed to be freed from sin is plainly called “doctrine.” The gospel/doctrine distinction is without Scriptural warrant.

### **6:19 – As you presented your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity, now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification.**

Here Paul restates the contrast in terms of that for which we use our **members** (see verse 13). He says he was speaking in human terms, because of the weakness of their flesh. They lacked the spiritual training required to understand his points, so he chose to use human concepts to help them understand.

We are slaves to whomever we obey (see verse 16). But we have now been transferred to a new master (verses 17,18). Just as a human slave obeys its master, so we obey our spiritual master. If a slave changes masters, he must obey the new master, not the old one. So before conversion we used our members to serve **uncleanness and**

***lawlessness (iniquity).*** Now we should use our members to serve ***righteousness unto holiness (sanctification).***

If we understand in human terms that a slave does not continue serving its old master after it has a new one, so we should be able to understand that we should not continue to serve lawlessness after we have become slaves of righteousness.

Uncleanness refers to moral laxity, especially in sexual morals. This is how people in sin often live, especially among the Gentiles (Romans chapter 1; 13:12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Lawlessness refers to iniquity or disregard for divine law. Presenting our members to lawlessness tends to lead to greater lawlessness. Such people tend to drift further and further from truth and further and further into sin. Sin is progressive. Many Bible examples illustrate this. Consider Cain, David with Bathsheeba, King Saul, etc.

But if we present our members to righteousness, the result will be holiness. Holiness refers to consecration in which one is sanctified or set apart to God's service. Being set free from sin dedicates us to God's service. We must follow this with a life that uses our bodies to do what is right, so we increasingly set ourselves to serve Him.

"Holiness" (αγιασμος) – "1) consecration, purification 2) the effect of consecration 2a) sanctification of heart and life" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***6:20,21 – When we were slaves to sin, we were free from righteousness. What fruit did this lead to? The end of those things is death.***

The bottom line of our service is the ***reward*** we receive from our master. When we were slaves of sin (verse 17), we were free from righteousness. Note that we were free from God's standard of conduct, but that did not mean we had no master at all. On the contrary, we still served sin. Everyone has a spiritual master. The question is not whether we will have a master, but who the master will be. See notes on verse 22 below.

What fruit did serving sin produce? No good resulted – only that for which we should be ashamed. The end is ***death*** (see on 1:32; 7:5; Galatians 6:8). This is spiritual death (see verse 23). Serving a master produces results of some kind. This is true spiritually as well as in everyday life. Before we serve a master, we should consider what payment he gives his servants.

The point is simply this: If serving sin led to death when we walked in it before conversion, what will sin lead to if we serve it now? The answer is obvious. It will still lead to the same consequence to which it led before: death.

If this is so, then why would anyone go back to sin after being converted? We were converted to escape sin and its consequences. If we go back to sin, grace will not justify us as we continue in sin. Rather, we



will return to the consequences of sin. If we wish to receive the benefits of grace, we must walk in the path of righteousness.

**6:22,23 – When we are freed from sin and become servants to God, we have fruit unto sanctification and eternal life. So the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.**

**By grace we have been made free from sin and become servants of God. This leads to eternal life.**

Just as serving sin led to wages, so does serving God. But the two masters pay completely different wages! When we are set free from sin (verses 17,18), we become slaves of God. This leads to the fruit of a holy life (verse 19), which in turn leads in the end to eternal life. So, **the wages of sin is death, but the gift of god is eternal life (verse 23).**

For further comments on the death that results from sin, see notes on Romans 1:32. This is spiritual death, as opposed to eternal life. Physical death involves separation of body from spirit (James 2:26). So, sin separates us from God, causing us to be spiritually dead. (Once again, Paul's use of "death" in this book shows the error of thinking the death in 5:12ff is physical death.) Since only Jesus can forgive our sins, He can restore us to spiritual life by reuniting us to God. See Ephesians 2:1ff,12ff. If we continue in God's fellowship, the end result at judgment will be eternal life (see Romans 2:6-10).

Death is a wage. We deserve to be punished for sin. We earned it. But eternal life is a gift in the sense that we cannot earn it. It must be granted by God's grace through Christ (see notes on chapter 4). However, as also discussed in chapter 4, the Bible repeatedly speaks of conditional gifts. Whether or not we receive the gift depends on how we respond to the gospel. But when we respond, we have not earned the reward. Therefore, it is an undeserved gift.

Note that Paul is saying that the wages of sin is death for sins committed **after** baptism as well as before! The idea that grace makes us "once saved always saved" is simply false! So also is the hope that God's mercy will excuse and overlook our disobedience while we continue in it. Grace offers forgiveness, but only to those who are **willing to turn from sin and live in faithful service to God.** Grace offers no hope to those who excuse sin and continue to practice it!

Note some other conclusions of Paul's teaching:

**Everyone is a servant to someone (or something).**

We live in an age of rebellion and self-sufficiency. "I want to do my own thing and make my own decisions. I don't want anyone telling me what to do." People think if they do what they want to do, they are **free** from God's restrictions and are not serving anyone. Paul says such people are still slaves. They just have a different master: sin.

The fact is that everyone is a **servant**, and everyone is **free**. The question is **who or what** are you serving, and **who or what** are you free from? You are a servant to whomever you obey: **sin or God!** You may be free from God; but if so, you are a servant of **sin**. To be free from sin, you must serve God.

(Romans 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:22,23; Galatians 4:8; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:16; 2 Peter 2:19; Acts 20:19; 27:23; Romans 1:9; 12:11; 14:18; Ezekiel 6:6; Hebrews 9:14; 12:28; John 8:32-34)

**You can serve only one master at a time, and (in religion) there are only two masters to choose from.**

Some want to straddle the fence: serve God some and sin some. They do God's will part of the time, but don't turn their lives completely over to Him. They may not openly rebel against God, but they also don't completely dedicate themselves to His service.

But you must serve either God or sin. There are only two masters to choose from, and you can only serve one at a time. You serve God only when you are completely dedicated and determined to do **all** He tells you to do.

Matthew 6:24 – You cannot serve two masters. God won't take second place. Either He's first in your life (verse 33), or else He simply does not consider you to be His servant.

Matthew 12:30 – "He that is not with me is against me."

**Our reward depends on whom we serve; and there are only two rewards, just as there are only two masters.**

The wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is **eternal life**. That is true whether or not we have been baptized. Of all the reasons that led us to want to be baptized and be forgiven of sins, those same reasons should motivate us to **serve obediently after baptism**.

(1) Did you become a Christian because you wanted to be free from the guilt of sin? Then don't go back and practice sin again, or you will become guilty again!

(2) Did you become a Christians because you wanted to be a servant of God? Then do His will or you will become a servant of sin again.

(3) Did you become a Christian because you wanted eternal life? Then serve God faithfully or you will again earn the wages of death.

Returning to a life a sin defeats the whole purpose of grace, the whole purpose of Jesus' death, and the whole purpose of baptism. Whom have you been serving? Have you continued in sin thinking somehow God's grace would excuse you? If so, return today to truly dedicated service to God.

# Romans 7

## 7:1-6 - Jesus Freed Us from the Law.

*7:1-3 – The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives, like a woman is bound to her husband while he lives. If the husband dies, she is discharged from his law. If she marries another man while her husband lives, she is an adulteress, but if the husband is dead she is free to remarry.*

### Marriage illustrates our relationship to the law.

Paul has spent six chapters showing that all men need the gospel of Jesus Christ and that the Old Law cannot save men from sin. Now he reaches some conclusions about the law. If the law cannot save us, and if God has now given us the gospel that will save us, what is our relationship to the law? The Jews had lived under that law for nearly 1500 years. So, Paul has carefully laid the foundation for the conclusion that no one is subject to the law any longer. For other passages on this subject, see Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

He begins by saying that he speaks to those who know the law. That is, he assumes they understand the basic principles of law. Specifically, they would know that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives. It follows that the law has no more dominion over him after he dies. He states this fact, then moves on to discuss an illustration before he returns to this principle.

Marriage illustrates the principle that one is subject to law until death, but is freed from that law by death. A married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives. This means that if she is married to another man while her first husband is alive, she is guilty of adultery. She is free to remarry without guilt only if her husband is dead, because she is released from the law of her husband when he dies.

Some ask what “law” this is that joins the man and woman: God’s law or man’s law? It is the law which, when violated, makes the woman an **adulteress**. Surely, this must be God’s law, and this conforms to what is taught elsewhere.

### Applications to marriage, divorce, and remarriage

Although Paul is using marriage to illustrate our relationship to the law, yet his teaching constitutes a basic and important statement of

God's marriage law. Marriage is fundamentally a lifetime commitment between one man and one woman. This principle is based on marriage as ordained by God at creation in Genesis 2:18-24. It is discussed in more detail elsewhere. See Matthew 19:3-9; 5:31,32; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11; Malachi 2:14-16. In particular, Matthew 19:9 shows there is an exception so that one may divorce a spouse who has committed fornication. That exception is not discussed by Paul here, since it has nothing to do with the point he is illustrating.

In this marriage covenant, the woman is **“bound”** to her husband as long as he **lives** (compare 1 Corinthians 7:39). Matthew 19:6 refers to this as being “joined.” “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” God holds people to the commitment they made, even if later they try to break it.

Note that a woman may be “bound” to one man, but “married” to another man! The “bond” refers to the marriage covenant/law that God holds her to. “Marriage” refers to the relationship she is living in as recognized by civil law and society. The two may be the same, but not necessarily. In this case, the woman was “bound” to one man but “married” to a completely different man!

That is why a woman is guilty of **adultery** if she is married to another man. Adultery, by definition, refers to sexual intercourse between two people, one of whom is bound by a marriage covenant to somebody else (see definitions below). This woman is an “adulteress” because she has been joined in a marriage covenant with one man, and God holds her to that covenant for life. But she is having sexual relations with another man, and that, by definition, is adultery. This passage defines adultery for us!

Note that anytime she has sexual relations with a man other than her scriptural mate it is adultery: **as long as her first companion is living**. Whether she has just a single act of intercourse, or has an “affair” involving a number of adulterous acts over a period of time, or whether it is a second marriage to another man – every time she has sexual union with another man the passage says she is guilty of adultery. This is why it is proper to refer to the second marriage as “adulterous” or “living in adultery,” just as it would be if she were living with him but not married to him (Colossians 3:5-7).

The main point Paul is making here, however, as regards his illustration, is the fact that she is free to remarry someone else if her husband is dead.

“Adultery” (μοιχευω) – “to commit adultery; a. ... (to be an adulterer) ... b. ... to commit adultery with, have unlawful intercourse with another’s wife ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Vine on μοιχος: “denotes one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another...”

“Bound” (δεω) – “1) to bind tie, fasten 1a) to bind, fasten with chains, to throw into chains 1b) metaphorically 1b1) Satan is said to bind a woman bent together by means of a demon, as his messenger, taking possession of the woman and preventing her from standing upright 1b2) to bind, put under obligation, of the law, duty etc. 1b2a) to be bound to one, a wife, a husband 1b3) to forbid, prohibit, declare to be illicit.” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***7:4-6 – So we are dead to the law by the body of Christ so we may be joined to Him who was raised from the dead. Sinful passions, which were through the law, worked in us to bring forth fruit unto death, but now we are discharged from the law having died to that wherein we were held. We now serve in newness of the spirit, not in oldness of the letter.***

***We are discharged or delivered from the law.***

The woman whose husband had died was freed from subjection to her husband; likewise, we are *dead to the law and delivered from it* (verses 4,6). Note that we are not just free from the condemnation of the law or traditions about it, but we are free from the law itself. We are “delivered” from it (NKJV, KJV), “discharged” from it (ASV), or “released” from it (NASB, ESV). (Compare 6:14.)

And just as the woman could then be joined to a different man, we are now joined to Christ. That is, we now are subject to the gospel, the New Testament, which was revealed by Christ. We leave the old covenant and enter the new covenant relationship, based on the death and teachings of Christ. See other passages listed previously. This is like being spiritually married to Christ (compare Ephesians 5:22-33).

We became dead to the law “through the body of Christ.” This is explained elsewhere to mean that the law was removed when Jesus died on the cross. See Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:14-16; Hebrews 9:16,17; 10:9,10.

### **The Old Law Removed**

Hebrews 10:9,10 – then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 7:11,12 – Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.

Hebrews 8:8,9 – Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.

Galatians 3:24,25 – Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Galatians 5:3-6 – And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Ephesians 2:13-15 – But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace...

Colossians 2:14,16,17 – 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 ... So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

### **Note that we should not follow both the Old Testament and the law of Christ.**

We now have a different law, just like the woman has “another man.” To try to follow both laws at once would be like the woman having two husbands or trying to subject herself to two husbands at once. It would be spiritual adultery! So, Paul is not teaching that we are subject to both the Old Testament and the gospel. The gospel is not an addition to the Law of Moses. Rather, we are no longer subject to the Old Testament at all, just like the woman whose husband had died.

Note that Paul’s illustration makes it difficult to determine exactly what died, so that we could be set free from the law. Verse 1 says a man is free from the law if the man himself dies. But in the illustration of the woman, she is free, not because she died, but because her husband died. So in the application to the law, who died: the person who was subject to the law or the law itself? Verse 4 says we are dead to the law and verse 6 says we died to that which we were held by, which makes it sound like we are dead. Compare Galatians 2:19. But then we are married to Jesus, so how can a dead person remarry?

No illustration is a perfect parallel. Probably, Paul does not distinguish carefully because it does not matter to his point. A woman is free from her husband's authority whether he dies or she dies. And we are free from a law whether it dies or we die. So, the law died in the sense that Jesus nailed it to His cross – Colossians 2:14. He took it out of the way that He might establish the New Testament – Hebrews 10:9,10. In any case, the point is that man's commitment or duty to the Old Testament has ended. We have no more responsibility to follow it than a woman must obey a dead husband or that we must obey the law after we die. As a result of this new relationship to Christ, we are free to be fruitful in God's service (Galatians 5:22).

But from what are we set free? Note that "the law" in verses 4,5,6 has the definite article in each case. There should be no dispute that this is talking about a specific law: the Old Testament law given through Moses at Mt. Sinai. We will see this confirmed in verse 7.

**When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.**

Paul here describes the condition of people under the law. The expression "in the flesh" is repeatedly mentioned in verses 13-25; 8:1-17. Whatever it refers to, it is discussing the problem faced by people who were subject to "the law." Remember this when we get to verses 14-25.

"In the flesh" appears to refer to the mindset of people who are more concerned about their own material, earthly, personal desires than about spiritual concerns. It is contrasted to the spirit (and "carnal" or "fleshly" is contrasted to "spiritual"). The physical body and its desires are not inherently good or bad (despite the theories of Calvinism). But the tendencies of the body must be controlled by the spiritual nature of man to abide by God's word. Without this guidance, the flesh will surely do wrong, since it has no sense of right or wrong. So a carnal, fleshly ("in the flesh") person is one who simply follows his own natural tendencies and desires, without being guided by spiritual concerns or properly submitting to spiritual principles according to God's word. See 7:14,18; 8:1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,12,13. Compare Galatians 5:16-26.

Such a person will eventually be led by his "passions" or desires to allow sin to work in his members or body. The result will be sin, which leads to death. This is exactly what has been discussed in chapter 6 describing the condition of people before they are converted by the gospel. They present their members as instruments of sin, rather than as instruments of righteousness. The end result is spiritual death 6:21,23; James 1:15; Ephesians 2:1-13. But the point of chapter 6 was that the gospel can deliver us from this, and conversion must lead us to refuse to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies (flesh). See 6:11-23.

And note again that being "in the flesh" here refers to their past condition, when they were under "the law" – not their condition now



that they have been “delivered from the law” and married to Christ. Understanding this should help explain the proper application of 7:14-25.

For a discussion of how these passions are “aroused by the law” (NKJV), see verses 14ff. Note, however, that “aroused by the law” is an uncertain translation. The NASB and ESV say the same. But the KJV says simply “by” the law (without “aroused”) and the ASV says “through” the law. There appears to be no word for “aroused” in the original, so the translators apparently translated διὰ (“through”) as “aroused by.” But would it not be just as reasonable to conclude that Paul meant our sinful passions were revealed or made known to be sin by means of the law?

“Flesh” (σὰρξ) – “...1. prop. flesh (the soft substance of the living body...) of men and beasts ... 2. i.q. the body ... a. univ. ... b. used of natural or physical origin, generation, relationship ... c. the sensuous nature of man, ‘the animal nature’ ... 3. a living creature (possessed of a body of flesh), whether man or beast .. 4. ... opp. to (spirit), has an ethical sense and denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Having been freed from the law, we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.**

Regarding “spirit” and “letter,” see notes on Romans 2:28,29. The expression is there defined by the context. “In the spirit” means in “the heart” – Paul says so in 2:28,29. Deuteronomy 30:6 says that circumcision of the heart means to love God with all one’s heart and soul (compare Deuteronomy 10:16; Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 6:27,28,31-33; 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13).

This is “new” in that most Jews under the law did not emphasize proper spiritual attitudes as they should have. The law did teach good attitudes, but chapter 2 shows that the Jews did not generally emphasize them. They thought they were pleasing to God because of their physical lineage through Abraham and their physical circumcision, etc. But when they sinned, the law could not forgive their sins. Proper attitude is much more emphasized in the gospel, and so is “new” in contrast to the old emphasis on outward ritual under the law. It results from being born again into “newness of life” after baptism – Romans 6:4.

“In the letter” ties back to Romans 2:27 – the Jews had a “written code” along with circumcision. “Written” is the word for “letter.” They had the law in the letter (in writing) and they had circumcision, but that was all outward. The people generally did not mean it from the heart (the “spirit”) or live by it (see verses 17-24). Compare 2 Corinthians 3:6. (The NKJV capitalizes “Spirit” to indicate the translators think it refers to the Holy Spirit, but there is no such capitalization in the original to make this distinction. I fail to see how the Holy Spirit fits the context).



So, the point would be that, to be truly accepted by God in the judgment day, our service and covenant relationship to God must truly come from the heart, from the inner spirit (1 Peter 3:4) according to the teaching of the gospel. It is not just the practicing of outward rituals of physical lineage or physical possession of Divine law. It is a contrast between sincere obedience meant from the heart and outward rituals that lack proper attitudes and motives. Compare Philippians 3:3.

**For further discussion of our relationship to the Old Law, including the Sabbath and the Ten Commands, see our article on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

### **7:7-25 - The Sinner Struggled to Keep the Law.**

***7:7,8 – So, is the law sin? Certainly not. But the law brought the knowledge of sin, such as telling us that coveting is forbidden. But through the law sin finds occasion resulting in guilt for coveting. But apart from the law, sin is dead.***

#### **Sin is made known by the law.**

Having shown that we were delivered from the law, Paul proceeds to ask whether or not the law is sin. Does the fact that the law was removed somehow prove God did wrong in giving it or that the law itself was evil or that the law encourages sin? Again, he answers with the strong negative, “Certainly not!” God gave the law, and God never does evil nor does He create evil. Further, God never makes mistakes. The giving of the law was not a matter of trial and error. It served its purpose perfectly, but that purpose was not to grant lasting forgiveness of sin. Since it could not do that, God removed it and gave us the gospel that can remove sin.

What then was the purpose of the law? It was not given to forgive sin but to make known sin (see 3:20). As Paul says here, he would not have known sin except through the law. That is, he would not have known that certain acts were sinful had the law not revealed this.

Paul illustrates this with a specific command: “Thou shalt not covet” (verse 7). The only way he knew such desires to be sinful was that the law said so. But note that this command was one of the Ten Commands (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). It necessarily follows that the law Paul is referring to included the Ten Commands, and this was the law that we died to and were delivered from (verses 4,6). So, we are no longer subject to the Old Testament law, including the Ten Commands.

Many people today believe the Ten Commands are still in effect. This is the very kind of Judaistic error that Paul is refuting. Does this mean we are free to steal, covet, lie, and commit other sins condemned in the Ten Commands? No, those things are still wrong because the gospel forbids them, but not because the Ten Commands forbid them.

As command for us today, the Ten Commands no longer apply, as Paul here shows. See also the other passages listed under verse 1 above.

Note that Paul speaks here of his experience when he was under the law. This introduces a long discussion in which he describes his experiences under the law. He describes this because the Judaizers in Rome – and all Jews who tried to keep the law – would have the same experience he had. We will see this unfold in verses 9-25.

### **Sin took opportunity by the commandment and produced all manner of evil desire.**

Paul explains further the connection between law and sin. Note that law is not to blame for our sins. Some people assume verses 5,8 are somehow saying that the law stirred up our desire to sin. Some think that the fact an act is forbidden somehow encourages people to want to do it. But this is not what Paul says. It is “sin,” not the law, that produces all manner of evil desires in us. But sin “takes opportunity” by the commandment (other translations say “finding occasion” – ASV, “taking occasion” – KJV, or “seizing an opportunity” – ESV).

James 1:13 says that God does not tempt anyone to sin, so He surely would not make a law that prompted or tempted people to sin. But verses 14,15 show that each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when he gives in to the temptation, it becomes sin that leads to death. This is plainly illustrated in the temptation of Eve, which appealed to her desires, led her to sin, and thereby produced death. Note that “sin” took this occasion in the form of the serpent, an agent of Satan. So, “sin” here is personified and, in effect, is a symbol for Satan and the whole process he uses to tempt us to sin.

This is what Paul means when he says sin finds occasion through the command and produces evil desire. The desire of the flesh is already present. But while there are legitimate ways to fulfill our natural desires, the law reveals that there are also unacceptable ways of fulfilling the desire. Temptation, brought to us by Satan (here described as “sin”), urges us to go ahead and commit the act anyway. When we give in, sin has used the opportunity to lead us to violate the command and thereby produce sin.

### **Apart from the law sin was dead.**

That is, if the law had not forbidden the act, it would not have been sinful to do it. This does not make the law bad; it makes sin bad. As our Creator and Ruler, God has every right to make whatever rules He chooses. It is then our duty to obey God and resist the sin. But, as in the case of Eve, Satan (“sin”) takes the occasion to encourage us to go ahead and do what is sinful. When we give in, we sin, leading to death.

Note that, since people do sin today (1 John 1:8-10), it follows that we are all under law. That is, we are subject to the commands of the New Testament. To say that people, especially Christians, are not required to

obey Divine law today would be to deny that we can sin, for there would be no sin if there were no law.

***7:9-11 – I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. So the commandment that was designed to result in life instead resulted in death. Sin, using the law as an occasion, tricked me and slew me.***

**Paul was alive at one time before he went into sin.**

Paul describes a time when he was alive without the law, but when the commandment came or applied to him, sin came to life in him, leading to his death. Again, the death here must be spiritual death as in the context (see on 6:23).

When was Paul alive without the law, before the command applied to him, etc.? The only time I can think of would be in his early years before he became accountable for sin. At that time, he was “without the law” in that the law did not apply to him. So, he was spiritually alive, because he was not held accountable for sin. But as he matured, he became accountable, so the commandment “came” – i.e., it came to him in that it now applied to him. He soon disobeyed, so sin revived or “came alive” in his life (NASB, ESV). This resulted in his spiritual death.

Other passages show that children are born innocent, not accountable for sin. See Ezekiel 18:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Psalm 106:37,38; Matthew 19:14; 18:3. This is why babies need not be baptized. They are incapable of understanding what people must do to be forgiven of sins, so God does not hold them accountable for sin. The current passage confirms this concept.

Note also that this contradicts inherited depravity. If a child is born without sin, then how could he be born totally depraved as is taught in Calvinism?

**Sin took occasion by the commandment and led to death.**

The result of the sin was spiritual death. The command was given for the purpose of showing us how to please God, which would lead to eternal life (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11,13,21; Luke 10:28; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12). Yet, sin enters each life and leads us to become separated from God and spiritually dead.

This shows that the law or commands themselves were not bad, but sin (Satan) used the law as an opportunity to bring every man to spiritual death (2 Corinthians 3:7). Sin deceives us to practice lawlessness, thereby leading to spiritual death. This was demonstrated in the case of Eve, but all people repeat the pattern. This is why all people eventually need forgiveness.

Note that sin works by deceit. If people knew the consequences of sin, many would be more motivated to do what was right. But one of Satan’s favorite tricks is to deceive people into thinking, either that

certain practices are not wrong at all, or that they will suffer no consequences for them. Such is deceit, and leads many people to death.

**7:12,13 – The law is holy, righteous, and good. So did something good become responsible for death? Certainly not. But the sinfulness of sin is shown in that, working through what is good, it is shown to be exceeding sinful.**

The conclusion of Paul's explanation then, is that the law was not evil or sinful at all (verse 7). Rather, it was holy. The commands were holy, just, and good (Psalm 19:7-11). They showed how to live holy, good lives. And they would have led to spiritual life had people kept them. The weakness in the law, which led God to remove it, was not that the law itself was evil, but that the people did not keep it. Then the law could not permanently forgive their sins.

So again, had this good thing (the law) become the source of death for men? Again, the answer must be an emphatic denial. The law was not the source of death. Sin was the source of death. It was the **violation** of the law – not the law itself – that was the problem. The result shows, not that the law was bad, but how terrible sin is. Sin took this good thing and used it as a means of producing death in men. The result shows just how terrible sin actually is.

We may compare this to many other things that are good of themselves but are capable of being misused. A medicine may be intended to cure a dread disease. As such, it is a wonderful blessing, intended to save and preserve life. But suppose a person deliberately takes a whole bottle at once as a means of committing suicide. Does this make the medicine bad? No, but it surely makes suicide bad. And it is even worse in that something intended to give life would be used instead to produce such a horrible death.

The fact is that most sins are perversions of that which God gave for our good. This is true of perversions of the church, worship, and salvation. It is also true of sexual and moral sins. Almost invariably sin occurs when Satan persuades people to pervert that which God gave to be good. This shows how exceedingly wicked sin is that it takes that which is good – even the just and holy law – and uses it for evil purposes.

**7:14-17 – So the law is spiritual, but people are carnal, sold under sin. Paul said he did not practice what he wished to but did practice what he hated. So the law is good. But it is not the person who does it but the sin dwelling in him.**

### **The wretchedness of a sinner under condemnation of the law**

This context through the end of the chapter seems very difficult to understand and even depressing to contemplate. The best explanation, I believe, is that Paul here describes the condition of men in sin, outside

Christ, before conversion (especially Jews under the law, like Paul was before conversion). Paul uses first person and present tense, but he does this (as he sometimes does elsewhere) as a way of identifying with the people in the condition, especially since he himself has experienced the problem. It is a way of helping people realize that he understands their problem (compare 1 Corinthians 4:6; Romans 13:11-13; note by contrast how he speaks of himself in the third person in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7).

Some say that Paul is describing the problems faced by Christians (see Lard). Yet, Paul cannot be describing a problem he still faced as a Christian. He describes one who is “carnal, sold under sin” (verse 14). But this discussion continues into chapter 8, where 8:8,9 condemns those who are carnal. And 7:5 shows it is a past condition for Paul (compare 1 Corinthians 3:1ff).

He says sin dwells in him and he is captured under the law of sin (verses 17,23), yet he elsewhere shows that sin must not dwell in Christians nor may we let sin reign in our members – 6:11-19; Galatians 5:16-24; Ephesians 4:17ff; Colossians 3:5-14. He says he is “wretched” (verse 24), but that is not the state of one in Christ (Philippians 4:4ff). On the contrary, he says that Jesus delivers people from this wretched state (verses 24,25).

Specifically, he says he has been brought into captivity to the law of sin in his members and a body of death (7:23,24), but 8:2,3 says the law of the Spirit of life in Christ made him free from the law of sin and death. The problem Paul is discussing in chapter 7 is the fact that the Old Law could not free him from these problems (8:3). (See chapter 8, which continues the theme.)

So, Paul is using the historical present tense, just as we might do to tell a story that already happened. We often speak using “we,” when we refer to society or people in general, even when we ourselves do not do the thing described. We may say, “We have become extremely wicked. We practice violence and even murder. We abort our unborn babies. We gamble, steal, and commit adultery. Etc., etc.” Yet, we are describing the common practices of the people of our society, even though we practice little of it and may never have done many of the things mentioned. Sometimes, we use ourselves as an example to illustrate a point, even though we never have done the act and have no intention of doing so. I may say, “Suppose I divorce my wife, not for the cause of fornication...”

We may liken it to the example of the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes, especially in chapters 1 and 2. He describes the experiences of one who is seeking for the meaning and purpose of life. He looks in various different places – wealth, pleasures, wisdom, etc. – and finds it all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. These do not satisfy as the purpose of life, but then in the end he concludes that the answer is to fear God and keep his commandments. The writer does not mean to imply that he does not know the answers to the questions that he raises and still less

that there are no answers. Rather, he describes the problem and then finally gives us the solution. This is what I believe Paul is doing here. (The same thing is done throughout the whole book of Job.)

So, Paul used such language to express his understanding of the condition of those in sin, since he once had that condition. Imagine Paul's condition before Christ died, as he tried to follow the law. Then imagine him after the law was removed when Jesus died, but he still tried to cling to the law and even persecute the church. Then imagine him on the Damascus road after he knew he was wrong but had not yet been told what to do about it. This is the kind of person Paul is here describing. It especially described the Judaizers who sought to cling to the law after Jesus had died to remove it.

So, the passage describes the depraved and hopeless case of one who is guilty of sin before he is forgiven (as discussed in Ephesians 2). Man has physical urges and natural instincts that are neither good nor bad, moral or immoral, in and of themselves. God's law reveals proper ways to satisfy these urges. But sometimes the natural body sees ways to satisfy these urges that are improper; but it does not know the difference, so it still desires it.

As a result, we all eventually sin and become a slave of sin. We do not have God's promise to answer our prayers, nor do we have other blessings in Christ to strengthen us. We know we are guilty and not forgiven, so we despair and are wretched. We have little motivation to do good because doing good, of itself, will not remove our past guilt. We know we are wrong, wish to be right, but can see no solution to our wretchedness.

The solution, as Paul finally states, is forgiveness in Christ. As Christians, we still sin occasionally, but sin does not **reign** in our lives as before, and we have a means of forgiveness when we do sin (compare chapter 6,8). (Note that I have written these paragraphs in present tense and first person similar to what Paul did, but that does not prove I believe I am still in the wretched state of sin.)

So, I believe, Paul is here describing the state of an unconverted sinner, such as he was before conversion. It especially describes one who seeks to be justified by keeping a law like the Old Testament that cannot really forgive sin. He keeps sinning, leaving him hopeless. Remember that the context was referring to the law and how we were freed from it (7:1-6). The law is explained to include the Ten Commands (verse 7). This is "the law" or "the commandment" Paul refers to throughout (verses 8,9,10,11,12,13,14,16,22,25). What is there to lead us to conclude he is speaking of any other law? ("Law" sometimes has the definite article in this context, but sometimes not. "Commandment" nearly always has the definite article. Yet, the reference must be to the same "law" throughout.)

I grant that, to a much lesser degree, Christians may at times experience some similar problems, since we too sin. But we should not experience the hopelessness Paul describes here, since we have forgiveness and all the blessings of the gospel through Jesus. Paul is here talking about the hopelessness he (and those like him) felt and feel while trying to be justified by the Old Testament law.

### **The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.**

Paul describes the law as spiritual. It pertained to man's spiritual nature: his relationship with God and the hope of eternal life. That was its intent. And God's people should likewise be spiritual people, as described in chapter 8.

But all people also have a fleshly nature. "Carnal" is the adjective form of "flesh." To be "carnal" is to be "in the flesh," as in verse 5 (see notes there). This is described at length in chapter 8, contrasting the spiritual to the carnal (see notes there). The flesh and its desires are not inherently sinful. But the flesh does not know right from wrong. It finds something that it naturally desires, and wants it whether or not it is right. So, the spirit must learn right from wrong and control the flesh.

But all of us at times give in to the flesh and thereby commit sin. "Carnal" also here seems to describe people in whom the fleshly desires commonly take control: it describes the conduct of one who frequently allows his desires to lead him to sin. The result is that we are "sold under sin." We are under the control of sin, as described in chapter 6. And we cannot escape by any human power. Nor could people under the old law escape by any means provided by the law itself. Paul's point here continues his description of why men need the gospel.

"Carnal" (σαρκικός) – "fleshly, carnal ... 1. having the nature of flesh, i.e. under the control of the animal appetites ... governed by mere human nature ... not by the Spirit of God ... human, with the included idea of weakness ... 2. pertaining to the flesh, i.e. to the body ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **I practice what I do not want to practice.**

Paul says that he does not understand what he is doing. This does not mean he is not aware that he is doing certain things – that would imply mental incapacity. Rather, he means he does not understand the real nature of the activity. Some people do wrong without understanding that it is wrong or what the consequences of that wrong will be. When Paul was an unbeliever, he persecuted Christians. But he surely did not understand the error and consequences of his conduct (1 Timothy 1:13). He thought he was doing what he ought to do (Acts 26:9).

But here Paul explains further that he practices things that he hates and does not practice things that he wills or intends to do (Galatians 5:17). This implies that he does not understand how to make himself do what he knows he ought to do. Or perhaps, even if he knows he is doing

wrong, he does not realize how terrible it is and perhaps even how bad he will feel about it later. He acts wrongly without an appreciation of how wrong he is and what to do about it.

Everyone experiences this problem to some degree, including Christians. We do things we know we should not and we fail to do what we believe we ought to do. But Paul's point here, I believe, is that this was especially a problem for people trying to be justified by the Old Testament law. As we have discussed, the only way to stand justified before God under that law was to do everything right. The person who did what he should not do or failed to do what he ought to do was doomed. But everybody under that law had that problem and had no real solution. The law itself had no ultimate solution. The law emphasized dos and don'ts: that was the basis of justification. But nobody got the dos and don'ts right. And the law had no real forgiveness, leaving those subject to it in bondage and misery.

**This means that the law is good and the problem is sin.**

If we acknowledge that we ought to do good and avoid wrong, then we are agreeing that the law is good. We agree that we ought to do what it says. So, the problem is not the law. The problem is that men sin and violate the law.

So Paul says, "It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." Does he mean to say that he was not responsible or should not be blamed for the sin? This is a form of a "not ... but" expression. For many similar examples, see John 6:27; 12:44; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 15:10; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Mark 9:37; Matthew 10:20; Acts 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; Genesis 45:8.

The point of the expression is to emphasize the second element, but it in no way denies the first element. So, Paul is not denying his responsibility for his sins. Instead, he is saying that his fleshly desires take control and lead to the sin (verses 14,18). This is the problem of people in sin. They allow their desires to take control. They are dominated by sinful desires, resulting in bondage to sin.

While Christians wrestle with these problems, they have a means of forgiveness and a motivation to be different people. Paul is here describing people who have the habit of giving in to their desires: people in sin, living under a system that could not solve the problem.

**7:18-20 – In my flesh dwells nothing good; but I have the will but do not practice what is good. I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. So it is no more I that does it, but sin that dwells in me.**

These verses repeat and expand on verses 15-17. Paul says that he had the will or intention to do right, but he could not perform or properly practice what he intended (compare notes on verse 15).



But he adds that nothing good dwells in his flesh. This may sound like Calvinistic inherited depravity (see note following verse 25). But Paul is here talking about his flesh, not his spirit. The flesh is the physical part of man, especially the desires and appetites of the flesh (see on verses 5,14). Paul does not say there is no good in his spirit. On the contrary, he has already shown that his spirit – the inner man – delights in God’s law and seeks to do it (verses 15,16,19,22). This is impossible according to Calvinistic depravity, which claims man is wholly defiled in all parts of body and spirit, and is wholly incapable even of choosing to do good. Yet, contrary to Calvinism, Paul here plainly says his spirit did will to do good.

So Paul says that good does not dwell in his flesh. Note that he does not say evil does dwell in his flesh. He is not saying that his flesh is thoroughly evil. He just says nothing about it is inherently good. The flesh is not inherently good or evil. It has no moral sense about it. A sense of good or bad is the responsibility of the mind, not the flesh. So, flesh does not naturally tend to do good or evil. It just tends to do what it observes that it would like to do. But that often turns out to be evil. So, when the flesh takes control, as it does in the lives of unconverted sinners, the result is sin.

So, he wills or intends in his heart to do good, but in practice the flesh leads him to sin. Yes, Christians struggle with this, though they find a solution in Christ. But Paul is here describing this as the pattern for people in sin. They continually give in to sinful passions, becoming enslaved to sin. And under the law they had no solution. This is Paul’s point.

Then for emphasis he repeats in verses 19,20 the same points as in verses 15,17. He often did not do the good that he intended to do. Instead, he did evil that he intended not to practice. So again, the problem was not just in him (in his heart and spirit), but it was the practice of sin that had taken control of his life. As in the notes on verse 17, this does not mean he was free from responsibility. It just emphasizes the control sin had on his flesh.

***7:21-23 – So, he delighted after God’s law in his inner man, but there was a different law in his members warring with the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity to sin. The effect of this law was that, though he sought to do good, evil was still present.***

Paul then expresses a principle, which he calls a “law,” that evil is present even in the life of one who wants to do good. (Whiteside points to some alternate translations that read “in regard to the law.” In that case, the “law” may be God’s law, that people disobey, even though they want to do it.)

One might even, like Paul before his conversion, have a delight in God’s law in the inner man (Psalms 1:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16). But in his

members – that is in the flesh (see above on verse 18) – there was a law different from the law of God. This law was at war with the law of his mind, and brought him instead into captivity to the law of sin in his members (Galatians 5:17; Romans 6:13,19). The law of sin is contrasted to the law of God in verse 25.

As discussed on verse 18, the flesh of itself has no desire to do good. It will desire various experiences in its environment without regard for whether they are right or wrong. If it sees something it wants, it does not restrain itself because it is something that would violate God's law. So, the law in the flesh is to do whatever pleases itself, and such an approach eventually leads to sin. This tendency is opposed to the control of the mind, which seeks to submit to God's law. The result is continual conflict in which the mind is continually trying to bring the body into control.

This conflict exists in all of us. But Paul is especially describing the problem as it exists in the lives of those who have not been obeying God. Their bodies especially seek to overrule their minds, because their minds have not trained their bodies to follow the leading of the mind to do right. And those who so lived under the law were without hope of real forgiveness.

Note how this theme continues into chapter 8, where Paul continues describing the flesh, but there he explains how the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death (8:2). But the law of Moses cannot set us free (8:3).

(Note all the different “laws” that Paul mentions. Surely it is a mistake to conclude that, just because we have been freed from the Old Law, this means we are subject to no law at all. There are many different laws. Freedom from the Old Law does not prove that the gospel is not also a law of a different nature.)

***7:24,25 – Such a wretched man, who will deliver him from the body of this death? God deserves praise that the deliverance comes through Jesus Christ. So one serves the law of God with the mind but with the flesh serves the law of sin.***

### **Christ can deliver from the death of sin.**

Having expressed the conflict and frustration of one in sin, Paul cries out to express his wretchedness and to ask who can deliver him from this body of death. The body of death seems to refer to the fact that his subjection to the flesh (body) leads to spiritual death. He has been captured by his obedience to sin.

How can such expressions describe a Christian? Is a Christian wretched and in need of deliverance from death? On the contrary, Paul immediately states that Christ can deliver him (verse 25). So up to this point, he has not been describing the state of a Christian. He describes

rather the hopelessness of one who is lost in sin but cannot escape his problem because he is trying to escape it by the Old Law.

The key to the passage seems to me to be the fact that Christ delivers from the problems described in the context. It follows that Paul has described himself, but refers primarily to his life before his conversion. This is the state of a sinner, even a dedicated Jew, who has violated God's law and stands in need of forgiveness. But he finds no real forgiveness in the Old Law. The solution to his problem is found in Christ! This fits perfectly into the theme of the book up to this point. It also fits with the subsequent teaching of chapter 8, which will show that the law of Christ frees us from the problems Paul here describes.

**With my mind I serve the law of God but with the flesh the law of sin.**

Whiteside's explanation of this is that Christians, who allow their mind to control them, will serve the law of God; but sinners, who allow their flesh to control them, will serve the law of sin. So, these two expressions describe two different groups of people, or people in two different conditions.

Another view is that Paul is here giving a summary of what he has said about the man who has not been delivered from sin through Christ but is still trying to follow the Old Testament, as described in verses 7-24. In mind, such a person seeks to obey God, but in practice he allows the flesh to lead him to serve sin. So, both phrases refer to the same person at the same time. After stating in the first part of the verse that Jesus delivers one from such a problem, perhaps in the last part of the verse Paul returns to summarize the condition of one before he has been delivered. Through Christ I can be delivered from this problem, but of "myself" (without Christ) I have this conflict.

### **Romans 7:14-25 and Calvinistic total depravity**

Calvinism claims this context describes the total depravity of nature inherited from Adam. However:

1. The passage nowhere mentions Adam or Adam's sin.
2. It does not say anyone inherited sin or depravity.
3. The passage does describe depravity, but it is the consequence of sin the man himself practices (verses 15-20).
4. The passage actually contradicts **total** depravity. The spirit "delights" in God's law (verse 22), and man "wills" to do good (verses 18,19,21). But this is impossible according to total depravity, for it says man is **wholly** defiled in all parts of **soul** and body, opposite to all good, wholly inclined to all evil, and has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good. Total depravity has serious problems in this passage.
5. The context in verse 9 teaches the innocence of children (as discussed previously). Surely, verses 14-25 do not contradict verse 9.

The passage describes the condition of men in sin, outside Christ, before conversion (especially Jews under the law, like Paul was before conversion). As discussed above, the passage describes the depraved and hopeless case of one who is guilty of sin as a consequence of his own practice, before he is forgiven. He knows he is guilty and not forgiven, and the law cannot solve his problem. So he despairs and is wretched. The solution, as Paul finally states, is forgiveness in Christ. The theme continues in chapter 8.

# Romans 8

## 8:1-18 - The Spiritual Mind Must Overcome the Fleshly Mind.

This chapter follows up on Paul's discussion of the conflict he has described in the life of one who sinned under the law (7:7-25). Sin would lead to spiritual death, for which the law had no solution. Paul concluded the chapter by introducing Christ as the solution to the problem. Then in chap 8 he explains and enlarges on this solution.

***8:1,2 – There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ made us free from the law of sin and death.***

**Christ frees from condemnation those who walk according to the spirit.**

Here Paul concisely states the solution to the problem he had raised in 7:7-25. A man may recognize in his mind that he ought to obey God. He may even desire to obey. But we all give in to the desires of the flesh and commit sin (3:23). The result is condemnation and spiritual death. One under the Old Law had no solution. The law revealed his sin and condemnation, but who could deliver him from the condemnation that resulted (7:24)? The law could not, but Christ can; so thanks be to God (7:25)!

8:1 is joined to 7:25 by "therefore": a conclusion that follows from what has been said. The conclusion is that there is **no condemnation** to those who are in Christ! In Him we can be free from the death and condemnation of sin, from which the law could not free us. This is true "now": not before to those under the Old Testament, but to those who are now in Christ. Even today, one continues condemned in sin, if he does not come into Christ to receive the forgiveness Jesus offers. But those under the Old Testament had no choice: there was no lasting forgiveness available to them under the system they had.

Since this freedom is available to those in Christ, we must ask how one comes into Christ. The answer has already been supplied in 6:3,4: we are baptized into Christ. This is true for all who are baptized based on true faith and repentance – Galatians 3:26,27; Acts 2:38. To say it comes without condition, and especially without baptism, is to totally contradict the inspired record.

The KJV and NKJV include that this refers to those “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” This is omitted from the ASV, NASB, etc. However, it is discussed further in the context in verses 4-14. See notes on those verses for an explanation of these concepts.

Note that the passage does not say that, once a person comes into Christ, he can never again so sin as to stand condemned. The verse is not even considering the question of whether one who is in Christ can so sin as to be lost. To claim such cannot be lost would contradict whole hosts of passages, including many in this very context (see notes on verse 8). The KJV and NKJV show that one must live according to the spirit, in order to be free from condemnation. But as already discussed, the same point is made in many other verses in the context (verse 4). The only question being answered in verse 1 is whether or not the sinner can be freed from condemnation. The answer is a resounding “Yes!”: he can be set free in Christ.

### **The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees from the law of sin and death.**

“For” ties this verse back to verse 1, which in turn ties back to 7:7-25. Paul had stated that those who sinned under the law were enslaved under the condemnation of the law of sin and death (7:23,24). Sin makes us slaves to guilt and condemnation (6:12-23; John 8:32-34). But in Christ we are free from this control (7:25; 8:1; chapter 6; John 8:32).

Why or how do we become free? Verse 1 had said this freedom was for those who are in Christ. Verse 2 says it comes through the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. What law could that be? It must be the gospel of Christ, since the whole theme of the book is that the gospel saves us from sin: 1:16.

The gospel is the law of the Spirit of life in that it was revealed by the Holy Spirit – Galatians 1:6-12; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; John 14:16,26; 16:7ff. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life in that the message He reveals can give us spiritual life and eternal life. It reunites us to God, in contrast to the spiritual and eternal death that results from sin. See John 6:63,68.

But if it is correct that the gospel is the “law of the Spirit of life,” then it follows that the gospel is here called a “law.” When some teach that we are not subject to law at all today – or that no commands must be obeyed to be saved – they are denying that the gospel is a law. Yet, this and other passages plainly teach that it is a law. It contains commands we must obey to please God and to be saved. But it is a law that also has forgiveness by the death of Jesus.

This also shows, it appears to me, that the wretchedness Paul describes in 7:7-25 cannot refer to the condition of Christians serving God under the gospel. On the contrary, chapter 8 is showing that Christians under the gospel are free from the condemnation described in 7:7-25. This does not mean we are free from all struggles with sin. But

we are free from the condemnation, from which the law could not free us. This will be explained further as Paul proceeds.

***8:3,4 – What the law could not do because of weakness of the flesh, God sent His Son and condemned sin in the flesh, that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk after the spirit, not after the flesh.***

### **Christ did for us what the law could not do.**

Verse 3 again begins with “for,” which ties this verse back to verse 2. God in Christ has given us freedom that the law could not give us. It could not free us from the law of sin and death, because it was weak through the flesh.

The law could not really solve the sin problem (“law” here has the definite article, so I fail to see how anyone can deny that it refers to the Old Testament law). See Acts 13:38,39; Hebrews 7:18,19; 8:6-13. This was because it had no sacrifice that could completely remove the guilt of sin – Hebrews 10:4. It could not free men from the guilt and condemnation of sin. This is exactly what 7:7-25 was saying, which proves conclusively that Paul was there describing the problem of sinners under the law.

The law was “weak through the flesh.” This does not mean it failed to accomplish God’s purpose for it, or that God made a mistake in giving it. As discussed under 7:7-25, the law served the purpose for which God gave it, including the purpose of revealing how guilty men are. But it could not forgive the sin. So the “weakness” in the “flesh,” refers to the sins men committed because of the flesh (as in 7:7-25). The law could not then truly forgive the sins.

But God solved the problem by sending His Son Christ. Christ was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh. This cannot mean that He committed sin, since the Bible repeatedly states that He did not. But he lived in the same kind of human body that we have (1 Timothy 2:5; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 2:14,17). It is called “sinful” flesh because the desires of the flesh have led everyone else except Christ to commit sin. But it cannot be that flesh is inherently evil (Gnosticism), or that all people are born guilty of sin (Calvinism), otherwise Jesus would have been guilty of sin. Jesus came in the flesh just like us, since He could not die as the sacrifice for our sins unless He became a man (He could not die as God). But in the flesh He resisted temptation and did not sin (Hebrews 4:15,16).

He came “on account of sin”: because we were guilty of sin and needed His sacrifice. Or it can be translated “for sin,” in which case it probably means He came to be a sacrifice for our sins (ASV footnote). In any case, the point is that He came to solve our sin problem.

This condemned sin in the flesh. He showed by His life that we should not sin – there is no excuse for us in following the urges of the

flesh as we do (compare Matthew 12:41). But He also condemned to destruction the power of sin itself.

**The righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

“That” shows a result is about to be stated. The coming of Christ (verse 3) made it possible for “the righteous requirement of the law” to be fulfilled in us. Paul has discussed, since 7:7-25, that the problem of those under the law was that they could not have God’s favor if they sinned. But all sinned, and the law could not solve this problem for them (verse 3). So, in order to have fellowship or a covenant relationship with God, the law required that a man stand guiltless before God. He could do this by sinlessly obeying the commands. If he did not obey, the consequence would be death. So, the “requirement of the law” was that death was the penalty of disobedience to the law, and all were guilty (Romans 7:24; 6:23).

This requirement was fulfilled in Christ’s death for us (verse 3): He paid the penalty for our sins (1 Peter 2:24). This met the requirement of the law that the consequence of sin is death. In this way, we can be forgiven of sin and stand guiltless before God, so we can have fellowship and a covenant relationship with Him.

Note that the requirement referred to here (one must be sinless to stand before God and those who are guilty must die) is common to all Divine law. The death of Jesus satisfied this requirement for people under all laws God has ever given: Old Testament and New Testament – Hebrews 9:15. So if Paul here refers to those who were sinners under the law (7:7-25), this fits perfectly since he had just said the law could not solve this problem for us (verse 3). But the same lesson applies to us under the New Testament.

However, there are conditions to receiving this benefit through Christ. Specifically, we must walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. We have already studied the significance of walking (living or conducting our lives) according to the flesh. It refers to allowing our fleshly desires to so control our lives that the leads us to disobey God (7:5,18,23). In contrast, walking after the spirit must refer to proper emphasis on spiritual things, so that our desire to please God leads us to control our flesh to serve Him. This is described more fully in verse 5 and throughout the context through verse 14.

Note that the conditions for fellowship with God are based on how we “walk” – how we **live and act** – not just on what we believe or think. So, here is another passage in Romans that confirms that proper conduct is essential to justification by faith. See 2:4-11; 6:17,18; etc. See the list of passages about the importance of obedience in our introductory notes.

Some commentators think that the “requirement of the law” refers to a sinless life: the way to be justified under the law was to live without



sin. Since this is what the law required, and since Jesus fulfills the righteous requirement of the law, then He must have lived a sinless life in our place. So the verse is teaching that the sinless life of Jesus is imputed to the sinner: the sinner can stand just before God by having Jesus' sinless life credited to the sinner's account.

However, this concept is nowhere taught in Scripture. And there is no passage that teaches that the good deeds or bad deeds any one individual does can be transferred to someone else. The Scripture, however, often does teach the concept of a sacrifice that suffers the penalty of someone else's sins. This is fulfilled in the New Testament in that Christ was our sacrifice, paying the penalty of sin for us. That the wages of sin is death (as described in our explanation above) is surely a universal requirement of Divine law. This fits the context and all other passages, without inventing some concept that is found nowhere in Scripture and is foreign to the teaching.

**For more evidence about the imputation of Jesus' sinless life, see our article at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/) .**

***8:5-8 – Those who are after the flesh mind the things the flesh but this leads to death because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God and cannot be subject to the law of God; such people cannot please God. They who are after the spirit mind the things of the spirit which leads to life and peace.***

### **Minding things of the flesh vs. things of the spirit**

Most translations here capitalize "spirit," indicating they think it refers to the Holy Spirit. However, there is no capitalization in the original, of course. The contrast between flesh and spirit in this context leads me to conclude that the reference is to matters of spiritual concern in contrast to matters of physical or fleshly emphasis. Note how verse 6 refers to it as "carnally (fleshly) minded" in contrast to "spiritually minded." (If one concludes "spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit, no great violence is done to the passage, since those who follow the teachings of the Spirit must necessarily emphasize spiritual matters. So we come out at the same place.)

Paul introduced the concept of being "in the flesh" in 7:5, showing that Paul is still here referring to concepts back in chapter 7. See also 8:4 and 8:1 (KJV) that contrast walking according to the flesh to walking according to the spirit.

"According to the flesh" ("after the flesh" – ASV, KJV) refers to a mindset, attitude, or emphasis in priorities. Paul says it refers to those who "mind the things of the flesh" (verse 5) or are "carnally minded" (verse 6). They emphasize physical, material things. They are not concerned so much with spiritual matters: God, His word, His church,

eternal life, etc. Their primary interest is satisfying fleshly or physical desires: wealth, pleasure, power, fame, etc. This is what Paul referred to in 7:7-25, when he said the desires of the flesh lead people into sin (verses 14,18,23). We allow our material, earthly interests to control our decisions, which inevitably sooner or later leads us to do things that violate God's will.

"According to the spirit" ("after the spirit") refers to those who "mind the things of the spirit" or are "spiritually minded" (verse 6). Spiritual matters are their main concern. They are more concerned with pleasing God than with pleasing self.

The "mind" or attitude we have will necessarily show itself in how we "live" (verse 5) or "walk" (verse 1). Those who are carnally minded are those who "live" according to the flesh, and those who are spiritually minded are those who "live" according to the spirit. The concerns and interests of the mind must affect our lives. They result in actions or a way of life consistent with our mindset. But the emphasis here is on the mind, because the mind chooses how the body will act. Good or evil comes from the choices we make (Matthew 15:17-20; Proverbs 4:23). Nevertheless, as discussed in verse 4, this context shows that our conduct or life does affect our eternal destiny. Actions do matter under the gospel.

Here are some other passages that discuss the relative importance of physical or fleshly matters as related to spiritual matters: Matthew 6:19-34; 10:28,37; 16:24-27; Mark 10:29,30; Luke 10:38-42; 12:15-21; 14:26-33; 18:22-24; John 6:27,63; Romans 2:28,29; 8:1-14; 12:1,2; Galatians 2:20; 5:16-26; 6:7-9; Colossians 3:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:8; 6:6-11,17-19; Hebrews 11:13-16,24-26; James 4:4,13-15; 1 Peter 3:3,4; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4.

### **The carnal mind is enmity against God.**

Paul explains further the consequences of a person's attitude. He explains that the carnal mind leads to enmity against God, because it is not and cannot be subject to the law of God. This is what Paul had described as the struggle in 7:7-25. When the flesh controls our lives (as it does for all of us at some times in our lives), it will eventually lead us to sin. As explained in chapter 7, this is not because the flesh is inherently sinful, but because it simply does not know or care about what is right or wrong. It just knows what it would enjoy. If we allow it to control our lives, it will sooner or later lead to sin. In this sense, the carnal mind is enmity against God, and those who are "in the flesh" (compare 7:5) cannot please God.

Since this is the case, God forbids us to be carnally minded. He rebukes the attitude itself that places so much emphasis on material things. Therefore, the attitude here described becomes a sinful attitude in and of itself, even before it leads to sinful acts.

Then, the wages of sin is death. This must be spiritual death or separation from God, as in 5:12ff; 6:23. It cannot be physical death, since

that comes both to those who are carnally minded and those who are spiritually minded.

On the other hand, to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Those who emphasize spiritual things will control their conduct. They will live according to God's will. The mind must take control, learn right from wrong, and discipline the body to do right (1 Corinthians 9:27). And when such people do sin, as we all do, their conscience will lead them to repent and come back to God's service. The result will be spiritual life and peace with God (5:1,2). But all this can come, not through the Old Testament law that could not forgive sin, but only through Christ and His sacrifice under the gospel.

Of course, both states described here can be changed. The passage says the carnally minded person "cannot" please God. But that is true only so long as he continues to be carnally minded. He can repent, change, and become focused on spiritual things. As a result, he can be forgiven and saved. It follows likewise that the spiritually minded person can drift into sin, lose his proper emphasis, and be lost. Nothing here is intended to say that either state is permanent or unchangeable. If this can be seen here, then it must apply likewise to verse 1.

By referring to the "law *of God*," rather than just "the law," Paul could be showing that he does not here refer primarily to the Old Testament law. He could refer to the "law of the spirit of life" – i.e., the gospel (verse 2). Or he could refer to any Divine law, since the problem he describes would be true of any such law. However, the principle would apply to the problems Paul has described for people who were trying to follow the Old Testament. They were all, at times, carnally minded. In which case, they were not subject to the law of God, and so faced spiritual death. The principle, however, applies to whatever law of God one may be subject to. And again, the advantage of the gospel is that we can repent and be forgiven by the sacrifice it provides.

***8:9 – Christians are not in the flesh but in the spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in them. But if one does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ***

**The Christian must have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him.**

Paul has described the case of those who mind fleshly things and so are not subject to the law of God (verses 7,8). He now explains that this should not be the case of Christians. They should not be in the flesh (as in the previous verses) but "in the spirit." I continue to believe this refers to being spiritually minded, as in verses 1,4,5,6.

We will be spiritually minded, not carnally minded, if the Spirit of God dwells in us. If, in fact, one does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. It follows that all who belong to Christ do have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them (compare verse 11). So, we are "in the

spirit” and receive the blessings of verses 1-4, not the curses of verses 6-8, if we are numbered among true Christians: those in whom the Spirit dwells.

Note that being “in Christ” – verses 1,2 – is the same as belonging to Christ – verse 9. Note also that the “Spirit of God” is surely just another name for the “Spirit of Christ.” And note that having the Spirit dwell in us is equivalent to having or possessing the Spirit (verse 9). Nothing here says the Spirit enters a person unconditionally. Rather, the point is that we must choose to be spiritually minded, rather than walk after the flesh. If we do so, then the Holy Spirit will dwell in us.

### **How does the Holy Spirit dwell in the Christian?**

Note that Romans 8:10 immediately says that Christ is in us, and verse 1 says we are in Christ. We discussed this concept at length on Romans 6:3,4. People are often confused about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but people are rarely confused when discussing that we are in Christ and He is in us. Why should anyone assume the expression means something different for the Holy Spirit than it does for Christ?

### **Note the following relationships in which people are said to dwell in one another:**

\* The Father also dwells in us and we in Him: 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 John 4:14-16.

\* The Son also dwells in us and we in Him: Ephesians 3:17; John 15:4-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4.

\* The Father & Son dwell in one another: John 14:10,11; 14:20; 10:37,38.

\* Christians are in one another: 2 Corinthians 7:3; Philippians 1:7.

So, the Spirit does dwell in faithful Christians. But the Father and Son also dwell in us, and we dwell in them. And Christians are even in one another. If we can understand how the Father and Son dwell in us and we in them, then we can understand how the Spirit dwells in us, since the same language is used for all these cases.

Some people will argue at length that the Holy Spirit “personally” indwells Christians, yet they never argue that the Father and Son “personally” dwell in us or we in them. Why not? Why do we not see just as much effort to prove a personal indwelling of the Father and Son as the Holy Spirit? Why not argue that we personally dwell in the Father and Son? Evidently we all know the Father and Son do not personally dwell in us, we in them, etc. So why conclude that the parallel language for the Spirit means a personal indwelling?

### **The indwelling involves fellowship or a close relationship with the Spirit, including all the blessings that are associated with such a relationship.**

John 17:20-23 – For disciples to be “in” the Father and Son, they “in” us, and they “in” one another means to be “one.”

John 15:1-6 – We “abide in” Jesus as a branch abides in the vine: close contact. It is the opposite of being cut off or separated from Him (verses 2,5,6).

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 – God dwells in us as His temple if we are His people, sons and daughters. The point in context is fellowship vs. separation.

1 John 1:3,6,7; 2:3-6 – The subject is how to fellowship Father and Son, and how to know we are right with them. What is called “fellowship” in 1:3,6 is called “knowing” God or “abiding in” God in 2:3-6.

Ephesians 2:1-5,11-22 – We are a temple or habitation of God in the Spirit. Again, He dwells in or inhabits us. In what sense? The whole context shows we now have fellowship or union (reconciliation) with Him – access to Him – where before conversion we were separated or alienated from Him.

When the Bible says the Father and Son “dwell in” us and in one another, etc., it means we have a close relationship of unity and fellowship with them. Why assume it means something different when used for the Spirit dwelling in us? Many other Scriptures talk about having fellowship with the Spirit. Note 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1; Hebrews 6:4.

### **This fellowship results from the influence of the Holy Spirit through the word.**

The indwelling begins the moment we are forgiven of sins by obeying the gospel, God’s word. Note other verses that tie this indwelling to the word.

1 John 2:3-6 – We know we know God and are in Him if we keep His commands.

1 John 3:24 – If we keep His commands, He dwells in us and we in Him (compare 2:24).

Ephesians 3:17; Romans 10:17 – How does Jesus dwell in our hearts? By faith. But faith comes by hearing God’s word.

Ephesians 5:18,19; compare Colossians 3:16 – These are parallel passages. One says we are “filled with the Spirit” (this is not miracles but the indwelling, since all Christians are commanded to do it). The parallel says, “Let the **word** ... dwell in you...”

Ephesians 6:17 – The word is the sword of the Spirit. The word is not the Spirit, but is the agent used by the Spirit. If we know and obey the word, then we have fellowship with the Spirit and the Spirit is continually directing and influencing our lives through the word. (Compare John 8:31; 15:7-10; 2 John 9.)

**For further discussion of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, see our article on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

***8:10,11 – If Christ is in us, the body is dead because of sin but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If God’s Spirit dwells in us, as he raised Jesus, so He shall give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit.***

**The body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**

“The body” in the context appears to refer to the flesh, as in verses 1-9; note 7:24. If Christ is in us – if we have this fellowship with Christ, as discussed in verse 9 – then this fleshly emphasis must die. Note Galatians 5:24 – Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts (see Colossians 3:5ff; Galatians 2:20; and remember that Romans 7:7-8:11 is a good parallel to Galatians 5:16-6:9; compare also Romans 6:1-23).

When we come into Christ at baptism (6:3,4), we are making a commitment to die to the sins of the body (those the body leads us to commit). Note Romans 6:6 – Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. We are cleansed from guilt of these sins by the blood of Jesus.

But because the body of flesh leads to sin, it must be put to death: we must separate ourselves from its power. Further, it must remain dead: we must never allow our body’s sinful desires to control us again, to lead us to sin. 8:13 clinches this point: in order to live, we must put to death the deeds of the body. (That verse also proves that the deeds of the body refer to the same thing as living according to the flesh.)

Note that someone must die! If we allow the flesh to continue to control our lives, it will lead us to spiritual death because it leads us to commit sin (compare 6:23). If we wish to avoid the spiritual death caused by sin, we must put to death the fleshly desires that lead to sin.

But in Christ, while the sinful bodily desires must die, yet we live in the spirit because of righteousness. We are reunited with God spiritually, because our sins have been removed and we are living in righteousness. We are reckoned by God to be righteous, because our sins are forgiven. Though the fleshly desires must die, yet the spirit is alive.

(Some claim “the Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit, but this does not seem to me to fit the comparison to the body. The passage appears to jump back and forth between referring to our spirit and to the Holy Spirit. However, it is true that we receive life through following the teaching of the Holy Spirit, so no serious violence is done to Scriptural teaching.)

(Note that “the body is dead” cannot refer to spiritual death or alienation from God, since it describes people in whom Christ dwells and who are spiritually alive. It also cannot refer to physical death, since again it refers to people in whom Christ dwells. What does Christ dwelling in us have to do with physical death? Don’t sinners also die

physically? Further, it is present tense: the body is dead, not the body will die. And again, verse 13 explains that the reference is to putting to death the deeds of the body.)

### **God's spirit will give life to our mortal bodies.**

While it is true that the flesh (body) must remain dead to its sinful passions (verse 10), yet in another sense our mortal bodies are given new life by the power of God (who raised Jesus, thereby giving Him life), if the Spirit dwells in us. This cannot refer to the physical resurrection of the dead at Jesus' second coming, since all will be raised then whether or not they have God's Spirit (John 5:28,29).

I conclude that the passage refers to a renewal of life in which we begin to use our bodies for the proper purpose of serving God, instead of serving sin (Romans 12:1,2; 6:12-18; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20). The point is that our spirits must control our bodies, instead of vice-versa (compare verses 10,11 to verses 12,13). God's word can empower us to accomplish this change after our sins are forgiven. So our bodies remain dead in that they are dead to the sinful lusts of the flesh, but yet they are quickened in another sense: we now begin to use them to serve God by the guidance of the Spirit.

The demonstration that proves the gospel has the power to enliven us spiritually is the resurrection of Christ. His resurrection is a foundation fact of the New Testament, not of the Old Testament – 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. The same power that raised Jesus is active in the gospel (1:16) and can empower us to so control our bodies as to live for God. We may not understand how this power works, just as we don't understand how God raised Jesus from the dead; but we must believe it can work in us through the gospel. This is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (8:2). It not only forgives us according to God's plan, but also empowers us to control our bodies to submit to God's will.

(Note that, if verses 10,11 are taken to refer to the physical death and resurrection of the body, it would do no violence to overall Bible teaching, but it does not fit the context. I do not believe that is the meaning here.)

### **7:7-25 compared to 8:1-11**

We should now see how the gospel, described here in 8:1-11, can solve the problem discussed in 7:7-25. Under the Old Testament, even if a man "minded the things of the spirit" – i.e., if he wanted to obey God's will – still he sinned from time to time. When he did, he came under condemnation of sin through the flesh. The law could then do nothing for him. He was completely overpowered by guilt, as the law made no provision to completely remove guilt. (Whiteside says this refers to a regular life of sin, but he offers no proof. James 2:10 shows that one sin would condemn under the law as surely as many.)



Under the gospel, however, a man who minds the things of the spirit can be saved, though he sins occasionally, because there is provision for forgiveness of sins. The man who is lost now is the man who “minds fleshly things” and does not meet the conditions for forgiveness.

***8:12,13 – So we are not debtors to live after the flesh, since if we do we will die. But if by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live.***

### **We are not debtors to live according to the flesh.**

“Therefore” shows a conclusion is being reached to the discussion in verses 1-11 (and even back to chapter 7). The conclusion is that we owe no debt or obligation to our fleshly bodies to follow their desires. Fleshly bodies and material pursuits deserve no loyalty, allegiance, or concern, such as is often given them.

As has been shown, when we live according to the flesh, we die spiritually, because the flesh leads us to disobey God (verses 6-8). Why should we dedicate ourselves to pursuits that lead to destruction? In contrast, emphasizing spiritual concerns or spiritual-mindedness will teach us to control our bodies, resulting in spiritual life. (Living according to the flesh vs. according to the spirit must be the same as is discussed in verses 5,6.)

“Life” and “death” here must have spiritual meaning, not physical, for we all die physically regardless of whether we mind the things of the flesh or the things of the spirit. Note also how “flesh” and “body” are here used interchangeably, showing that we have been correct in taking them this way throughout the context.

### **These teachings find their ultimate application in our lives or “deeds.”**

The emphasis is on the mind or attitude (verses 5,6,7), because the mind ultimately determines how we act (see verse 5). But the final result of our thoughts will express itself in our acts or deeds. When a man does not control his life, he has not properly used his mind, and has not allowed the Spirit (through His word) to control and guide him.

Throughout these verses, in the very midst of Paul’s discussion of salvation by grace through faith, we are taught that outward acts do matter and are essential to determine our destiny. Note the terms: “walk” (verse 4), “live” (verse 12), “live ... deeds” (verse 13). People are seriously in error when they teach that our lives and deeds have nothing to do with spiritual life or death.

Finally, note the clear statement that Christians can so act or live as to fall from grace and be eternally lost. Again, in the midst of this book, that many claim is a Calvinist textbook, Paul teaches that the “brethren” (verse 11) or “saints” to whom he writes (1:7) “will die” if they live after the flesh. Living spiritually is conditioned on putting to death the deeds of the body.



**8:14,15 – As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. We did not receive the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father.**

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

To be a true child of God, one must be led by the Spirit of God. However, this does not say how the Spirit leads us. Some assume the Holy Spirit dwells personally in us and leads in some mysterious, better-felt-than-told supernatural or miraculous way, separate and apart from the word. But neither this nor any other passage says any such thing is involved in the leading that all Christians have.

It is true that some Christians, like apostles and prophets, were led by direct revelation before the Scriptures were completed. But even then, not all Christians possessed such miraculous gifts – 1 Corinthians 12:28-30. And such gifts ceased when the written word was completed – 1 Corinthians 13:8-11; Jude 3. The gifts were needed in the age when people could not learn God's will from the written word; but when the Scriptures were completed, the gifts were no longer needed, so they ceased. People could receive such powers only if one of Jesus' apostles was directly involved, but apostles no longer live on earth (Acts 1:21,22; 8:14-18).

How does the Spirit lead men today? The context indicates that He leads through His revealed word, the gospel, the law of the Spirit (see 8:2). This is the theme of the book (1:16). Why would Paul write a book designed to teach that the gospel is the power of God to save, then teach that Christians are led by the Spirit directly apart from the gospel?

The Spirit revealed the message of the gospel to the inspired apostles and prophets – 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2:10-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; John 16:13; Matthew 10:19,20; Galatians 1:8-12; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Luke 10:16. These inspired men received all truth and recorded it in the Scriptures – John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; James 1:25; Jude 3. God then preserves this message for us – 1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 John 2; Jude 3.

Christians must be led by the Holy Spirit. But that leading today is accomplished through Scripture, not by any direct means apart from Scripture.

**For further discussion of the authority of Scripture compared to direct revelation and miracles for today, see our articles on those subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

## **You received, not the spirit of bondage to fear, but the Spirit of adoption.**

As Paul has described, men under the law were in bondage to sin and death, which led to the fear of punishment (Hebrews 2:14,15). They knew they had violated the law, but could not be forgiven by the law itself. The fact we are sons of God (verse 14) under the gospel, however, frees us from the power and consequences of sin (8:2). So, we do not receive again (as under the Old Testament) a spirit of bondage unto fear. This appears to me again to contrast the freedom and blessings we have in Christ to the bondage of those who seek to be saved by following the old law as discussed in 7:14-25.

Instead of the spirit of bondage, we receive under the gospel the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry “Abba, Father.” We are now forgiven of sin, which makes us children of God. This enables us to truly view Him as our Father. To enter this relationship, we must be forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus; and to remain in this relationship, we must remain faithful, being led by the Spirit (verse 14). Then we are adopted as sons of God, free to call Him “Father.” See Galatians 4:4-7.

Nothing here means children of God will never sin, nor that a sinless life is necessary to eternal life. It does mean we must strive to diligently live without sin and come to God for forgiveness when we sin, renewing our determination to live apart from sin (repentance). Those under the Old Testament did not have the sacrifice of Christ to forgive, so they remained in bondage to sin.

The concept of “children of God” refers to the relationship we have with God when our sins have been washed away by Jesus’ blood – John 3:3-5; 1 Peter 1:22,23; James 1:18-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17. When we are baptized, our sins are removed, eliminating the barrier that alienated us from God – John 3:5; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27. God adds us to His spiritual family, the church – 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Corinthians 12:13. If we continue faithful in service to our Father, we ultimately receive the eternal inheritance that He offers His children – 8:17; 1 Peter 1:3,4.

“Spirit” of adoption could refer to the Holy Spirit, as in verses 14,16. Or it could refer to the disposition or attitude we have as a result of the blessings of the gospel. Surely, “the spirit of bondage” is not the Holy Spirit, but an attitude, which leads me to think the “spirit of adoption” is also an attitude. Note that verse 16 also mentions our spirit, so the word “spirit” is used in various ways in the context. Whichever view one takes, no violence is done to the passage.

“Abba” is simply another term for Father, but expresses a close relationship, like “Daddy” or “Papa.” It is the Aramaic term spoken in early infancy in addressing a father. It implies personal connotations of love and trust toward a respected parent. In this sense, it emphasizes personal closeness. See Galatians 4:6; Mark 14:36.

***8:16-18 – The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and therefore heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if we suffer with Him. The present sufferings cannot be compared to the glory to be revealed.***

**The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.**

Verses 14,15 said that we are children of God, if we are led by the Spirit. Verse 16 then describes the testimony that assures us we are children of God. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. Note the word “with.” Two individuals act as witnesses in this testimony: God’s Spirit and our own human spirit. These spirits act jointly in giving testimony.

How does the Holy Spirit testify in this matter? Some assume a meaning that fits their preconceived belief but is not what the passage says. They assume the Spirit gives testimony directly to our heart by some mysterious, direct, “better felt than told” feeling or sense of assurance, separate and apart from the Bible.

But as discussed on verse 14, there is nothing in the verse, in the context, or in any other passage that indicates this is how the Spirit bears witness. In fact, the verse implies that such is **not** the meaning. Such a view would involve the Spirit in bearing witness **to** our spirit, but the passage nowhere says the Holy Spirit gives witness “to” our spirit. That would involve just one witness. But the verse says the Spirit bears witness “with” our spirit: that makes **two** witnesses testifying jointly.

As in verse 14, the Scriptural view is that the Spirit bears witness through the word, and we bear witness by our response to the word. So, both spirits testify together. The Spirit teaches what one must do to be a child of God. Our spirit testifies whether or not we have done what the Spirit says we must do to be a child of God. The result is joint testimony regarding who are God’s children.

This view conforms to the passage in its context. It fits the language of the verse. It also fits the immediate context, which shows there are conditions we must meet to be children of God: we must be led by the Spirit (verse 14), must be willing to suffer (verse 17), and must emphasize spiritual interests instead of being led by fleshly lusts (verses 4,6-8,13). These conditions are stated here in the law of the Spirit (verse 2). My spirit then testifies, by my words, thoughts, and deeds, whether or not I have met those conditions. So, the two testimonies combine to show whether I am or am not a child of God.

This view also fits the overall theme of the book that the gospel is God’s power to save (1:16). The gospel – not some power or message separate from the gospel – serves as the message of the Spirit that tells us how to know we are children of God.

This view also conforms to other verses that relate to the subject:

Many verses state conditions (revealed by the Spirit) that we must meet to be saved and become born again as children of God: John 1:12,13; 3:1-7; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Romans 6:3,5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26,27.

Other passages also assure us that we must study and know the Scriptures in order to know whether or not we have been saved and born again: 1 John 2:3-6; 4:1,6; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Galatians 1:8,9; Acts 17:11. John 6:44,45; 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Romans 1:16; 10:13,14,17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Revelation 3:20.

And other Scriptures warn that we can be deceived into thinking we are saved by mistakenly following other standards, such as feelings, human doctrine, etc.: Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; John 5:43; Matthew 7:15-23; 15:14; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter chapter 2.

I conclude that the Spirit bears witness through the word, telling what is required to be a child of God. My spirit bears witness whether I have or have not done what the word teaches. In this way, the two together testify regarding my status as a child of God.

(Note that most newer translations use the pronoun “Himself” here to refer to the Spirit – NKJV, NASB, ASV, ESV. The KJV, however, says “itself.” The original Greek word is neuter, but that is done simply to agree with the Greek word for Spirit which is always neuter in Greek. So the translators, even though the original word is neuter, generally translated in such a way to indicate that the Holy Spirit is a personal being.)

### **Children of God are heirs of God.**

Paul then states the ultimate reward of sonship to God: if we are children, we will be heirs. We will receive the inheritance from God, being joint-heirs with Christ – i.e., we will be glorified with Him. The inheritance and glory Paul refers to is eternal life: Acts 20:32; Titus 3:7; 1 Peter 1:3,4; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 2:10. Matthew 5:10-12; 25:46; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9,10; Philippians 3:20; Revelation 21:3-5; 22:3,4; Romans 2:5-11; Luke 16:19-31; 1 John 5:11,12.

We receive this glory with Christ as joint-heirs, but that does not mean we receive it to the degree or extent that He has it. Under the Old Testament, for example, all sons might inherit jointly, but one received the birthright and so a much greater portion than the others. So, we will be with Jesus in His eternal home, but that does not mean we receive the extent of honor and glory He will receive.

## **We must be willing to suffer.**

Note again that the Scriptures attach a condition to receiving this inheritance: we must be willing to suffer with Christ. As with the glory, so we suffer “with” Christ, but that does not mean we suffer to the degree that He suffered. Nevertheless, the clear message is that we will not receive the reward if we are not willing to suffer for Him. We must be willing to endure hardship, trial, temptation, and persecution, as He did. For some examples of these hardships, see verses 37-39. See also Matthew 5:10-12; 13:21; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 1:4-10; 4:17; 7:4; 2 Timothy 3:12; Hebrews 10:32-36; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1,15-19; 5:10.

In the preceding verses, Paul has shown that the gospel (as revealed by the Spirit) is able to free us from the bondage of sin that leads to death. But this occurs only in accord with the human will. We must be willing to follow the instruction, walking as the Spirit instructs in the word. If we cease so acting, we must die. So, justification is from God through the gospel, but it requires man’s free will and choice to obey and serve. This requires, in particular, a willingness to suffer for Christ.

We are sustained through this suffering by the hope of glory that awaits us. The suffering is “of this present time” – we endure it during life here on earth. But the glory is a future reward after this life: it “shall be revealed.”

Verse 18 then compares the present suffering to the future glory. The reward is so wonderful that the suffering in this life cannot compare to it. If so, then in order to receive the reward, we should willingly endure whatever suffering or hardship this life presents (1 Peter 1:3-7). If we keep our eyes on that future goal, rather than focusing on the present hardships, we will find the suffering much easier to endure. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, but it seemed only a few days because of his love for her (Genesis 29:21). So, our reward should motivate us to suffer willingly. Compare 2 Timothy 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 4:16,17.

Many lose sight of the goal and so faint under tribulation (Matthew 13:21). Would you live in a tent for a week, if you knew the reward would be a mansion to live in for the rest of your life? Would you live on bread and water for a month, if you knew the result would be a guaranteed income sufficient to provide necessities and luxuries for the rest of your life? Who would be unwilling to endure such hardship, if they really believed the rewards would follow? Likewise, we must endure a lifetime of suffering for God in this life, but the reward is life in heaven with God and the saints of all ages for eternity. This passage assures us of that reward just as surely as it assures us of the suffering.

Consider some examples of things you suffer in this life. How great a trouble are they to you? Think, then, of how great the reward must be, if these sufferings cannot even be compared to the reward!

Have we met the conditions of sonship here described? Are we walking in the spirit or in the flesh? Are we led by the Spirit through His word? What have we suffered or sacrificed for the cause of Christ? Some are unwilling to study, pray, teach, give, or even attend classes to study Scriptures like this! Jesus suffered the ultimate sacrifice for us. We receive His reward only if we suffer with Him.

### **8:19-39 - God Plans and Provides for His Children.**

Paul has introduced the concept of being children of God, if we are willing to suffer for Him. He proceeds to enlarge on the concept of being children of God, what it requires of us, how the Spirit helps us remain faithful, and the hardships we must endure to receive the reward.

***8:19-21 – With earnest expectation the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God. The creation was subjected to vanity by reason of the one who subjected it, in hope that it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.***

#### **The creation awaits the revealing of the sons of God.**

Paul here describes the earnest expectation with which we look forward to learning what the reward of glory will be and who will receive it. There can be no doubt that this is the point of Paul's discussion here, but there is doubt about what "creation" he refers to. Does it refer to all created things (including plants and animals, as well as man)? Is it all people? Or is it only Christians: the spiritual new creation?

I cannot conclusively answer this question, but still the point Paul teaches is clear and forceful: we do not know what our reward will be like or who all will receive it, but we are eager to find out. And this hope is what sustains our service to God. There will surely come a time when the sons of God are revealed in glory (Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:1-3). So, we await and expect the answer: "the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God."

If "the creation" is the spiritual creation of God – i.e., Christians (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:15) – we can surely see that they earnestly expect this revelation. If it be all mankind or the human race in general (Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23), again we can understand how people generally have some concept that God will reward His true people, so all would be interested. If Paul refers to the whole natural creation, including plants and animals, then it must be a hyperbolic expression, as often found in the Psalms, in which even inanimate objects are concerned about God's will and His praises (Psalms 96:12; 98:8; etc. – note that Genesis 3:17,18 says that, not only was Adam cursed for his sin, but the ground was also cursed). In any case, regardless of who "the creation" may be, the ultimate point is the same.

## **The creation was subjected to futility, but will be delivered from the bondage of corruption.**

All of us on earth are subject to vanity or futility (verse 20) and corruption (verse 21). Many physical aspects of life seem frustrating, vain, or useless (compare Psalms 89:47,48; 39:5; Ecclesiastes 1:2; etc.). The things we labor for often are temporary and not satisfying. They are easily lost by the powers of corruption in this earth: forces that came as a result of sin (death, disease, corrosion, etc.).

For worldly people, the highest goals they have pertain to this life, so their lives are surely subject to futility. But even Christians face suffering, death, and sickness. Our work is frustrated by “thorns and thistles.” We eat bread by the sweat of our brows (Genesis 3:17-19). We do work, only to find that we must do it again, because the forces of nature have undone it. Often we fail at what we attempt to do, because we lack strength, wisdom, or ability or because other people oppose our efforts. We are tempted, tried, and persecuted. So, this life itself often seems empty, even to the best of us.

The creation was subjected to futility not willingly – i.e., we don’t like the problems we face and would prefer that it not be that way. Yet it is this way “because of him who subjected it in hope.” This appears to refer to God. Much of this futility exists here as a consequence of sin (Genesis 3:17-19). Much comes as a result of Satan’s temptations (as in the case of Job); this God does not cause, but does allow, as it serves His purpose of testing man. We are free moral agents: free to choose right from wrong and thereby demonstrate our love and allegiance to God. But in order for us to make this choice, there must be real alternatives to serving God.

So, in response to man’s sin, God has placed man in a life where much that we face is vain and constitutes suffering. Yet, this vanity and suffering is not the final or ultimate purpose of life. Many see only the suffering and so are miserable in this life. But Paul urges us to keep these things in perspective and consider our hope. The ultimate goal we seek is deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. This glory, to be revealed to God’s true children (verse 18), is what sustains us through the hardships of the bondage of corruption. Someday, all this will be resolved. It is the hope of this glory that gives life meaning.

### **Further notes on what the significance of the “creation”:**

Whiteside says the creation here cannot refer to the earth itself or to the animals and plants, because there is no evidence that pain, death, and suffering among the animals began as a consequence of man’s sin. However:

There is no record of animal death before man sinned.



Genesis 1:28,29; 2:16; 3:2 – Before sin, man had dominion over the animals, but nothing says he ate them. God told him to eat herbs and the fruit of the trees.

Genesis 1:30 – In creation God also ordained that animals eat herbs.

Genesis 3:21 – After the sin, God clothed people with animal skins. This is the first indication of animal death.

Genesis 9:3 – Only after sin occurred did God ordain for man to eat animals. If animal death was the natural order, why did God not authorize eating of animal flesh from the beginning? And why did He give special authority for men to practice it only after sin had come into the world?

Genesis 3:17 – The ground was cursed after man sinned.

God says: “by man came death” (1 Corinthians 15:21). If death is a curse and all the world came under that curse as a result of sin, why would death exist before sin? If death was the order of nature in the “very good” creation before sin, then how could it constitute a curse for sin?

Note: plants would not necessarily die if animals ate part of them, such as cows eating grass or men eating fruit. Furthermore, unlike men and animals, plants do not have the “breath of life.” No verse describes plants as having minds or suffering pain. Killing them is not “shedding blood.” Animal sacrifices required shedding blood as a consequence of sin. Men and animals die, but plants wither – Isaiah 40:7,8; Jonah 4:7; Matthew 13:5,6; 21:18,19.

Whiteside says the creation must refer only to Christians or saved people, since the creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

But it could be that the term “hope” (verse 20) implies that the reference is to all men, not just to Christians. All have hope of being delivered from corruption, etc., in that the gospel and the sacrifice of Jesus bring hope to all, though many have not appropriated that hope.

On the other hand, verse 22 contrasts “the whole creation” to “we **also** who have the firstfruits of the Spirit” (verse 23). That would imply that the “whole creation” is not just Christians, but is broader. Perhaps “the whole creation” emphasizes all that God made, then verse 23 refers especially to those who are saved. But if so, then in what sense will “the creation” be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (verse 21)? This I cannot answer. Perhaps the idea is that, when Jesus comes again and raises the righteous, though the earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3) nevertheless the curse upon the ground will end and all that will continue will be the glorious freedom of the sons of God.

Once again, however, the main lesson is the same, regardless of whether or not we can determine exactly what “the creation” refers to.



**8:22,23 – The whole creation groans and travails in pain until now. And we also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body.**

**The whole creation groans and labors with birth pains until now.**

This suffering, Paul says, characterizes “the whole creation” (see notes on verse 21). This could refer to all the physical creation, including plants and animals. Or it could refer to all humanity as suffering a life of hardship. In any case, it must include at least all humanity, not just Christians (to whom it contrasts – see verse 23).

**We who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan, awaiting our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.**

The groaning of suffering characterizes, not just “the whole creation” (verse 22), but specifically all those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit. To whom does this refer? Since Paul uses “we ourselves,” this must at least include Paul and other people.

Whiteside says the “firstfruits of the Spirit” refers to those who possessed miraculous powers in the first century. So, the meaning would be that even apostles and inspired men suffered problems in this life. But if so, it would still imply that all Christians can expect to suffer in this life.

Others say the “firstfruits of the Spirit” refers to the “earnest of the Spirit”: the initial blessings we receive in this life as Christians, which blessings are the first installment on the future blessings we will receive in eternal glory (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13,14). So even Christians (in contrast to the whole creation – verse 22) do suffer in this life. This view makes more sense to me.

The lesson for us all is that we can expect hardship in this life, while we wait the revelation of the glory of God’s sons. This glory is here described as our “adoption, the redemption of our body.” This apparently refers to the resurrection of all men, when Jesus returns and our bodies are raised to glory (1 Corinthians 15). Our bodies now suffer and die, being subject to the power of Satan. Our spirits are redeemed from sin in this life. At the resurrection, our bodies will also be bought back from the power of Satan, who causes suffering and death.

It is not clear that this refers back to the life given to our mortal bodies in verse 11, which we concluded was not the resurrection from the dead (see notes on verse 11). The adoption of verse 23 appears to be in the future, even for those who are already children of God. The emphasis seems here to be on the fact that, though our spirit has been given life in Christ in this life, yet in the future the body will also receive renewed life (compare Luke 20:36).

**8:24,25 – We were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope: who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we patiently wait for it.**

**Hope motivates us to persevere for what we have not yet received.**

Paul summarizes the message of verses 18-25, showing the essential role that hope plays in salvation. Not only is the gospel better than the Old Testament in that it can free us from sin (verses 1-11), but it also offers a better hope. We are saved in hope: the theme of hope runs completely through the New Testament teaching of salvation.

Paul shows that hope motivates our service, especially our patient endurance of suffering. If we hope for what we do not have, then we are willing to wait patiently and endure hardship to receive it. In this life, we endure the suffering and trouble that Paul describes, but we hope for future glory and freedom from bondage.

Hope is desire plus expectation. If we have strong desire for something and truly expect it (based on faith), then we are willing to patiently endure the course of action needed to obtain that goal. This is often true in life, such as a child learning to walk, a young couple in courtship, an athlete training to compete, etc.

See Acts 24:15; Ephesians 2:12; 4:4; Romans 5:1-5; 12:12; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 15:19; Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 4:13; 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:2; 2:11-14; 3:7; Hebrews 6:18,19; 10:23; 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3,4,13,21; 1 John 3:3.

**Hope is directed toward a goal that we do not already “see.”**

“See” is used here as in “nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen,” or “that’s more money than I’ll ever see,” etc. So, the meaning is to actually possess or experience a thing (compare John 8:51). This contrasts “hope” and “sight,” like 2 Corinthians 5:7 and Hebrews 11:1 contrast “faith” and “sight.” When we personally possess something, it is no longer a matter of faith and hope. We can enjoy it, but we no longer hope for it. So, Paul says that, as we suffer in this life, we hope for the glory offered by the gospel. This motivates us to endure the suffering and remain faithful. (Compare 1 Peter 1:13.)

So, the gospel saves us from sin, which the Old Testament could not do (verses 1-4). But we must be led by the Spirit, as children of God, which requires us to suffer for Christ (verses 5-17). The gospel urges us to endure this hardship, because we hope for a future inheritance (verses 17-25). Hope not only leads us to become Christians, but also motivates us to persevere through hardship.

**8:26,27 – The Spirit helps our infirmity, since we do not know how to pray as we ought, so the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. And He who searches the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because he makes intercession for the saints according to God’s will.**

**The Holy Spirit helps us in matters for which we do not know what to pray.**

The hope Paul just described will help us endure hardship, so we can receive the reward. Here Paul describes yet another help (note “likewise”): the aid offered us in prayer by the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit” in verse 26 must be the Holy Spirit, since it makes no sense to say that our own spirit makes intercession on our behalf.

The Spirit “helps our infirmity” or weakness. “Help” describes the idea of one who takes one end of the burden, we take the other end, and so together we carry our burden. The Spirit does not carry the burden without our effort, but neither must we carry it alone without help. We must actively bear our burden, then the Spirit will help us.

The infirmity or weakness we have, which we need help to carry, is that “we do not know what we should pray for as we ought.” Often, especially in times of suffering, we have needs we cannot express: they are “groanings which cannot be uttered.” That is, we cannot utter them: we don’t know what we should pray. But the Spirit knows all things and so is able to utter them on our behalf. This may be compared to saying that my math teacher helps me with unworkable problems – unworkable to me, but not to him. So, the Spirit intercedes for us regarding these groanings that we cannot utter: matters in which we do not know what we should pray.

We might be unable to pray as we ought for a variety of reasons, none of which imply sinful neglect or ignorance on our part. Maybe we have a problem that needs to be solved, but we simply don’t even know what solution to suggest in prayer. Any solution at all may be beyond our human ability to conceive. Or we may be able to conceive one or more possible solutions, but we don’t know which one is best. Or maybe there is another solution we have not even thought of that would be better than anything our finite minds conceive. Or perhaps there are several Scriptural alternatives, none of which would violate any Biblical principle. But we don’t know what would be best, like God would know in His infinite wisdom.

For example, when we or a loved one is sick, we don’t know what outcome is according to the Lord’s will. So, we pray for healing, but we realize that the Lord may choose a different course (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Or perhaps our minds are so distraught, perplexed, and confused as we deal with a problem, that we simply cannot think of a specific solution to pray for at the time we are suffering. Or we may have some concept of

what to ask, but we cannot find words to adequately express our request or our need.

### **He makes intercession for us according to the will of God.**

*“He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is.”*

“He” who so searches could refer to the Father, who searches the thoughts of the Holy Spirit and thereby knows what the Spirit desires on our behalf. But it seems more likely that “He” refers to the Holy Spirit: the same “He” referred to in the last part of the verse, who makes intercession for us. In this latter view, “the mind of the Spirit” is not the mind of the Holy Spirit, but the human mind, which is spiritual instead of fleshly in emphasis.

The Spirit searches our hearts (just as He can search the mind of God – 1 Corinthians 2:10,11), and there He sees whether or not we have the “mind of the spirit,” as discussed in verses 4-14, especially verse 6. He knows whether or not we are walking after the spirit (verse 4), minding the things of the spirit (verse 5), and are led by the Spirit (verse 14). If so, He is willing to intercede on our behalf. If we are not this kind of person, He does not intercede for us. (For other verses regarding searching the heart, see Jeremiah 17:10; Psalms 139:1ff; Luke 15:15; Acts 1:24; Revelation 2:23; etc.)

*How does the Holy Spirit intercede for us?*

The passage gives no details about how the Spirit does this. It would **not** be by putting into our minds the words we ought to use to pray, nor would it be by telling us (apart from the Scriptures) which of various possible courses of action we should take. Such acts would constitute imparting revelation or direct guidance apart from the word, but that is something that was never promised to all Christians and that ceased entirely when the New Testament was completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-11). Nor does it mean the same as being a mediator, since Christ is the only Mediator between us and God – 1 Timothy 2:5.

The basic meaning of “intercede” involves a person speaking to another person to make a request on behalf of a third party. As such, Christ also intercedes for us (see verse 34), and we can intercede for others (1 Timothy 2:1). So, the Holy Spirit is able to search our hearts, know what we are trying to say and ought to say in prayer, and then interpret our intentions and real needs to the Father. He may also enter a plea on our behalf in ways of which we have not even thought.

How does this differ from Jesus’ work as the one Mediator? There may be several differences. As an intercessor, the Holy Spirit makes requests to God on our behalf. These may or may not be our own actual requests. It may be something other than what we requested, but which the Holy Spirit believes we need. We can similarly make intercessions for others (1 Timothy 2:1). So, we are praying on their behalf, but we are

not in any sense an avenue through which they pray to God nor do we make it possible for God to hear their prayers.

Regarding Jesus as Mediator, however: (1) God does not hear the prayers of those who are not His children or who do not serve Him (James 5:16; 1 John 3:22; Proverbs 28:9; 15:8,29; Psalm 66:18; Isaiah 1:15-17; 59:1,2). Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice to enable us to be forgiven of sin and so have fellowship with God. He thereby becomes the arbiter or agent by whom we are reconciled to God, so that God will hear the prayers we offer (note the references to Jesus' work in salvation in the context of 1 Timothy 2:5). The concept of a mediator includes being the avenue or means to achieve peace between estranged parties. Only Jesus does this, since He is our only sacrifice for sin. This is surely not the work the Holy Spirit or anyone else does.

(2) As such, Jesus makes it possible for God to hear our own actual prayers, whereas an intercessor would simply make additional requests or explanations as he chooses to make and believes need to be made. We too, for example, can intercede for others, but we make our requests to God on behalf of others; we do not in any sense serve as an intermediary for others to approach God in prayer. The intercessor may or may not have been asked to make the request, but he makes his own requests to God. He does not serve as an intermediary to enable God to hear other people's prayers.

“Intercede” (εντυγχανω) – “1) to light upon a person or a thing, fall in with, hit upon, a person or a thing 2) to go to or meet a person, especially for the purpose of conversation, consultation, or supplication 3) to pray, entreat 4) make intercession for any one” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Mediator” (μεσιτης) – “lit., ‘a go-between’ ... is used in two ways in the NT, (a) ‘one who mediates’ between two parties with a view to producing peace, as in 1Ti 2:5, though more than mere ‘mediatorship’ is in view, for the salvation of men necessitated that the Mediator should Himself possess the nature and attributes of Him towards whom He acts, and should likewise participate in the nature of those for whom He acts (sin apart); only by being possessed both of deity and humanity could He comprehend the claims of the one and the needs of the other; further, the claims and the needs could be met only by One who, Himself being proved sinless, would offer Himself an expiatory sacrifice on behalf of men; (b) ‘one who acts as a guarantee’ so as to secure something which otherwise would not be obtained. Thus in Heb 8:6; Heb 9:15; Heb 12:24 Christ is the Surety of ‘the better covenant,’ ‘the new covenant,’ guaranteeing its terms for His people...” – Vine.

“Mediator” (μεσιτης, G3316) – “1) one who intervenes between two, either in order to make or restore peace and friendship, or form a

compact, or for ratifying a covenant 2) a medium of communication, arbitrator” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

*“According to the will of God”*

Nothing discussed here contradicts the teaching of the New Testament in other places. Rather, it occurs in harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places regarding the Holy Spirit.

Specifically, this work in no way requires a personal, direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Nor does it contradict the fact that the Holy Spirit teaches or guides Christians today only through the word. This intercession seems to be the only act mentioned in Scripture, done today by the Holy Spirit on behalf of Christians, which is not done through the agency of the word (some think even this is done through the word). Nevertheless, it involves no imparting of information to the Christian: no inspiration or knowledge or guidance apart from the word. It is not something given to the Christian, but something given to God on behalf of the Christian.

Finally, note that this teaching illustrates the concept that God works to help us with our human weaknesses and inabilities. Fulfillment of some Divine commands may be matters of degree, which in turn depend on our abilities. God counts us faithful if we do our best, then He helps with our inabilities. He does not require us to work up to the level of ability that others possess, but only to our own level of ability (2 Corinthians 8:12; Matthew 25:14-30). If we do our best with zeal and commitment, recognizing our weaknesses and seeking His help, He will work with us and compensate for our human inabilities. But He does this only as He sees we have “the mind of the spirit” – i.e., we are spiritually minded and committed to His service.

***8:28-30 – All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Whom He foreknew He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, and whom He foreordained He also called, justified, and glorified.***

In verses 28-30 Paul describes another great blessing promised to those who faithfully endure suffering and are led by the Spirit. That promise is the over-ruling power of God to make trials and hardships work out for our ultimate good. This idea carries into verses 31-39, although those verses appear to summarize all of chapter 8, not just verses 28-30.

***All things work together for good.***

The promise here is that the eventual outcome of all suffering, trials, temptations, persecutions, and hardship will be for our eventual good (compare verses 35-39, especially verse 37). Such a promise depends on God’s power and wisdom. The lesson is that God is able to take seemingly bad events and make them work for our good in His service.

This does not mean that God causes these sufferings. Satan is often the ultimate cause: Job 1; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10; Luke 13:16; Matthew 4:1ff; James 1:13-15. God sometimes brings difficulties on us to chastise us (Hebrews 12:5-11), and He has put people to the test (Genesis 22). When God does so, He acts for our ultimate benefit. But the passage shows that God has the power to take even those sufferings that Satan causes and make them work out for our ultimate good.

Many other passages affirm that God can make suffering work for our good: Psalms 119:71; 1 Peter 1:6,7; James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; etc. And note in this context Romans 8:31-39, especially verse 37. The Bible contains many examples: Joseph's mistreatment by his brothers (Genesis 50:20; 45:4-11); Job's afflictions; Jesus' crucifixion; persecution against the early church that led to the spread of the gospel (Acts 8:1-4); Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10); etc.

Many everyday illustrations help us understand how hardship or trial can result in good. Sun melts butter but hardens brick. Fire purifies gold. Muscles and bones in the body must work and endure stress to grow and be strong. Sailboats can travel in totally opposite directions using the same wind (in fact, a contrary wind is better than no wind at all).

Some commentators claim that "all things" must be understood to apply only to a limited or restricted range of things in the context, such as only those acts that God does on our behalf (see Whiteside). So some claim that many trials in life are not included in Paul's reference here and so do not result in our good.

But while I agree that expressions such as "all things" are often limited by context, nevertheless, the context here specifically includes the problems and suffering of life. In fact, that seems to be a primary subject in context: note verses 17,18,20,22,26,31-39. Indeed, it is hard to find a verse from verse 17 to verse 39 that does not have some reference to suffering. Failure to make application of verse 28 to "all things" that we suffer in life seems to me to miss the main point of the verse. As we have shown, many Scriptures emphasize God's power to make good come from hardship, even if Satan is the cause of the hardship.

This is not to say that the immediate effect of suffering is beneficial, nor that the physical effects are good, nor that we will always understand the good that will come. What Paul describes in context is our ultimate good in God's service. The good may not be obvious for years (as in Joseph's case), and we may never understand it in this life. In fact, the good may not even occur in this life. It may be that the ultimate benefit is received in our eternal reward after this life. Yet, I see no Scriptural grounds for restricting the verse so as to eliminate the application to the problems and troubles of life.

## **To those who love God and are called**

The verse does, however, put a limit on those to whom this promise applies. It applies to those who love God, being called according to His purpose. There are conditions we must meet in order to receive the promised blessing.

Who loves God? This refers to those who love God enough to obey His teaching: John 14:15,21-24; 1 John 2:1-6; 5:3; 2 John 6. There is no promise that suffering and temptation will benefit those who give in and commit sin as a result. The promise is to those who remain faithful and obedient despite the problems.

The calling according to God's purpose was discussed at length on 1:6,7 (see our notes there). We are called by the gospel (which reveals God's purpose). Those who are called here are those who love God, so the meaning here refers to those who obey the call of the gospel (as described more fully in verses 29,30). See Hebrews 9:15; 1 Corinthians 1:24.

### **According to His purpose.**

Verses 29,30 describe further the process of "calling" as in verse 28. This tells how men are saved from sin so they may receive eternal glory (verse 30, compare verse 17; Ephesians 3:11; 1:9-11).

The expression "according to His purpose" is critical to a proper understanding of Paul's teaching. God's foreknowledge, predestination, and election of men all operate in harmony with God's purpose as revealed in Scripture. That purpose requires us to understand and believe the following truths:

*God desires all men to have the opportunity to be saved, so He extends His grace through the gospel to all.*

See Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; Titus 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:4,6; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 2:9; John 1:29; 3:16; Acts 10:34,35; Matthew 11:28; Luke 2:10; Romans 5:18,19.

*God decreed conditions of salvation that all rational people are capable of meeting.*

See Mark 16:15,16; John 3:14-16; Acts 17:30,31; 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 10:32; Acts 2:38,39; Romans 10:13,14,17; 1 Peter 1:22; Romans 6:13,16-18; 2 Corinthians 8:5; Philippians 2:12; 1 Timothy 4:16.

(Romans 1:16; John 6:44,45; 1:7; 6:40; Acts 10:43; 13:39; 17:30,31; Hebrews 5:9; John 12:26; 2 John 9; Acts 22:16)

*Men are free moral agents, having the power granted them by God to choose whether or not to serve Him.*

See Genesis 2:16,17; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15; 11:25; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; Psalm 119:30; Deuteronomy 30:15-19; Isaiah 1:18-20; Matthew 23:37; 13:14,15; Revelation 3:20; 22:17.



*God is no respecter of persons.*

Romans 2:6-11 – If God chooses to save some but not others, either the choice must be based on the conduct of the people (hence, conditional) or else God is a respecter of persons. (Compare Acts 10:34,35)

God's word says that, for Him to grant eternal life to those who do **not** choose to meet the conditions, or for Him to punish those who **do** meet the conditions, would constitute respect of persons.

Many people, including especially Calvinists, use Romans 8:28-30 to teach conclusions that directly contradict the purpose of God as stated in the above Scriptures. They define terms to suit their doctrine but without Scriptural basis; then they assume a conclusion that, not only is not stated, but in fact contradicts other plain Scriptures. Nothing in Scripture, and therefore nothing in our context, teaches the Calvinistic concept that God predestines and elects individuals to salvation unconditionally by His arbitrary choice separate, apart, and without regard to the character and will of each individual.

God's calling of man, including His foreknowledge and predestination, operates in accord with His purpose. His purpose is revealed in His word. And His word teaches all the above facts. So, the teaching of Romans 8 must be understood in a way that harmonizes with the above facts.

**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined. Those He predestined, He called, justified, and glorified.**

The Bible teaches God's foreknowledge and predestination (Ephesians 1:3-14; Romans 11:5-7; 1 Peter 1:1,2; 2:9; 2 Peter 1:10; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:10; 1 Cor 1:26-29; Acts 13:48; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; Mark 13:20; Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1; Revelation 17:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:4). But it does not teach that God predestines individuals to be saved (or lost) unconditionally without regard to their character or will. Remember that all this operates "according to God's purpose," which we have shown to mean that God chooses to give all men a choice whether to obey the gospel or not.

In what sense then does God foreknow or predestine men?

*God does not force people against their will to be good or bad, but he can foreknow what choices they will make.*

Before they did good or evil, God foreknew that certain people would be sinners. Examples: Judas – John 13:21-26; 6:70f; Matthew 26:20-25,50; Acts 1:16-20,25; Pharaoh – Exodus 4:21; 14:17,18.

Calvinists argue that, since God knows everything, He must know all about a person's life, even before he is born. But if God knows a thing, they conclude it is decreed and cannot be avoided. Therefore, one's eternal destiny is decreed before his is born. He has no choice. However:

Judas was already a thief before He betrayed Jesus – John 12:6. This evil was nowhere predicted.

Pharaoh was also evil before God hardened his heart – Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12.

God did not make these men evil. He simply foreknew what choice they would make, then He used them accordingly. If foreknowing and prophesying a thing means that God **decreed** it, so men have no choice, then since these men sinned, it must follow that God **decreed them to commit sin**. This violates His righteous character and makes Him a respecter of persons.

Jesus' death was also foreknown and prophesied – Isaiah 53; John 3:14; 12:27; Matthew 16:21. Nevertheless, Matthew 26:53 shows that Jesus could call down 12 legions of angels to stop it. Despite the fact the event had been prophesied, Jesus still had a choice.

God foreordained that Jesus would die (1 Peter 1:20; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Luke 22:22). This involved a sin committed by those who killed Him. If this means that God compelled these men to be evil, so they had no choice, then again God decreed that men must commit sin! Once again, the fact is that these men were evil before God used them to crucify Jesus.

Regardless of how one attempts to explain it, God's foreknowledge does not prove that He makes men commit sin or be righteous. In all these passages men were sinners **before** God used them for His purposes. He did not make them become sinners. We have already proved abundantly that men have the power to choose whether they will be sinners or righteous.

*Though God foreknew some events, that does not prove He foreknows all the acts of all men.*

God is both all-powerful and all-knowing. His power to know is just a part of His overall power. He has the power to do anything He chooses to do. But does He do everything He has the power to do? Obviously, there are many things God could do but chooses not to do. To claim that God is all-powerful is not to say that He will actually do everything He has the power to do.

Since His power to know is part of His overall power, I believe it follows that, just as He may choose to not exercise His power to do some things, so He may choose to not exercise His power to know some things about the future. As with all His other powers, He could choose to know only those things that suit His purposes. If we really believe that God is all-powerful, then wouldn't that include the power to choose not to know some things about the future, if He wills to not know them?

Consider some examples that appear to indicate that God did not know certain things before they happened. But then when they happened He deliberately chose to exercise His power to know them.

Genesis 11:5 – At the tower of Babel, God “came down to see” what the people were doing.

Genesis 18:20,21 – God went to see what Sodom and Gomorrah were doing.

Genesis 22:12 – After Abraham had proved he was willing to offer Isaac, God said, “**Now** I know that you fear God ...” Did He not know beforehand?

Surely, God chooses to know everything that has happened in the past and everything that happens in the present, because the Bible says so. He will bring every work into judgment with every hidden thing -- Ecclesiastes 12:14; etc.

God can do whatever He chooses to do. But we only know what He chooses to do by what He says in the Bible. I know He chooses to know everything in the **past** and **present** because the Bible says so. I also know that He has the **power** to know anything in the future that He chooses to know, and I know that He has exercised His power to know **some** things in the future, because the Bible says so. The question is: Where does the Bible say that God has chosen to know **everything** that will happen in the **future** in the life of **every** individual? The passages above appear to me to indicate that God chose not to know certain things **before** they happened.

Some commentators point out that the fact God foreknows something does not prove that He decrees it. He may simply choose to know that certain individuals will make certain choices, then He makes His plans accordingly. This is true in some cases, but I do not see the evidence that God foreknows all man’s conduct in every case.

Psalms 139:16 implies God knows the length of days of our lives before we are born. (The NASB and ESV on verse 4 say that God knows what we are going to say before we say it, but other translations simply say that He knows what we do say, not necessarily before we say it.) But even this does not say that God knew everything about every person’s life before the world began and especially that He foreknew their eternal destinies.

God’s power is clearly beyond the ability of our finite human minds to understand, so we should be cautious in absolutely affirming that we understand God’s abilities. Perhaps I have missed something here. And I surely have no desire for anything I have said to lead anyone to belittle the power of God.

As already stated, God has the **ability** to know anything in the future just like He has the **ability** to do anything He chooses to do. God has the ability to punish sinners at any time by destroying whole cities (Sodom and Gomorrah) or even the whole earth (the flood). The fact that He is not doing those things right now does not deny that He has the power to do them or that He will do so again at the end of the world. It

is not a question of His power, but entirely of His will. That is all I am saying about God's use of His power to know the future.

But in any case, by whatever means one explains it, it cannot be denied that God's power to foreknow the actions of people does not invalidate man's power to choose. The Bible clearly says that God allows men to choose to do good or evil.

*Biblical predestination says that God chose a certain kind of people or group of people to be saved, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to be in that body.*

A person's method of predetermining what choice He will make can be **conditional** (and usually is). For example, when we choose a marriage partner, a home, a car, an employee or a company to work for, a political candidate, etc., usually the choice we make depends on the character and nature of the possible prospects. We predetermine our standards regarding what we are looking for, then we measure each prospect by how well it measures up to the standards we set. We then predestine (predetermine) that we will choose the one(s) that meet those standards. It is entirely possible that those criteria depend on what choices the other individual makes.

Illustration: When I was young we were picking out a puppy from a litter. We decided to call the puppies to come out from their hiding place, and the first one that came out would be the one we would keep. So, we chose the one that chose to heed our call. This is exactly how God predestines us to salvation.

Illustration: Before the school year begins, a teacher may not know what specific students he will have, but he can foreknow the **kinds or types** of students he will have. So, he foreordains or predestines the treatment each kind will receive. This may include knowing that certain kinds of students will choose to act in certain ways, so the teacher decides how he will react to each of these kinds of the students (some will be promoted for studying hard, others will not be promoted because they fail to meet the standards, some will be punished for disrupting class, etc.).

So, the teacher does not necessarily foreknow and predetermine what he will do to each individual student. But he foreknows the kinds of students kids will choose to be, so he predetermines how he will deal with each kind. Each student decides which kind he is, and then the teacher deals with each one as he had foreordained that kind of student to be treated.

Likewise, God foreknew that some people would be willing to believe His word and obey, but others would not. So, He predestined that those who obey by faith will be saved, and those who do not will be lost. He then calls all men by the gospel, but each individual decides whether or not he will respond to the gospel by obedient faith. When he obeys, he is justified or declared to be righteous, as we have studied throughout

the book of Romans. He is then glorified with eternal life (Romans 2:6-10; 6:23). So, the saved were predestined to eternal life; but this is conditional (not unconditional) and they do have a choice.

Remember, we are called according to God's purpose. Those who are foreknown and predestined are those who accept the call. The view we have described harmonizes with all the Scriptures we have listed about God's eternal purpose. Calvinistic predestination contradicts multitudes of Scriptures, and therefore it is not according to God's purpose.

"Predestine" (προορίζω) – "decide upon beforehand, predetermine..." – *Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich*.

"Foreknowledge" (προγνωσις) – "1. foreknowledge ... 2. forethought, pre-arrangement ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Conformed to the image of His Son,**

God predetermined that those who were willing to submit to His will should be conformed or shaped to fit the likeness of His Son. This conformation begins in this life, as we pattern our lives after Jesus' example according to the teaching of God's word – Acts 11:26; John 8:31; 15:8; 1 Peter 2:21,22; 1 John 2:6; Philippians 2:5; Matthew 16:24; 10:38; 11:29; John 13:15; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:10. Though we fail at times to live above sin as He did, yet if we meet God's conditions, He forgives us.

This molding to the likeness of Jesus is completed in the resurrection, when we are raised to have a spiritual body that will be glorified with Him – Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 15:49; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2.

Jesus thereby became the firstborn among many brethren – i.e., He has the preeminence (as did the firstborn son in a family) among all these who inherit the eternal glory (compare 8:16,17).

**8:31,32 – So, if God is for us, who can be against us? Since God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us, why would He not also give us all things that we need?**

### **If God is for us, who can be against us?**

Paul now reaches a conclusion to the things he has said throughout chapter 8 regarding the burden and hardship of sin and therefore of a law that could not forgive sin (chapter 7). Under the gospel we can become children of God by having our sins forgiven. This requires suffering hardship, but Paul has described various blessings God gives to make this easier. He now summarizes the beauty of this conclusion.

All the blessings that Paul has described surely show that God is working with us for our salvation, if we meet the conditions he has described. We must meet these conditions in order for God to be for us.

If then God is pleased with us and so is willing to work on our behalf, Paul asks what does it matter who opposes us or is displeased with us? Of course, many people may in fact oppose us. Satan will surely oppose us. But if the omnipotent, all-wise, loving God of the universe is pleased with us, no one else really matters! Compare Psalms 118:6; Matthew 10:28.

Far too often we are much too concerned about how others view us. We let them hinder our service to God, because we want people on our side. Such is a failure to love God above all others (Matthew 6:33; 10:34-37). Though parents, spouse, children, friends, and enemies all oppose us, we should still serve God, since His attitude toward us is all that matters in the end.

See also John 12:42,43; 5:44; Galatians 1:10; Matthew 6:1-18; 23:5; 2 Corinthians 10:12,18; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

**If God did not spare His own Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?**

Paul here offers the supreme proof of God's love and of His desire to give us all that we need in His service. He did not spare even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. This was God's supreme sacrifice (John 3:16; Romans 5:5-8; 1 John 4:9-11). If God is willing to make such a sacrifice, how can we doubt His love and His ability to meet all our needs?

We should rest assured that God will always give us everything we need to serve Him: all the blessings mentioned here and even things we may not realize that we need (Ephesians 1:3; James 1:17). Why would we ever doubt His wisdom, love, or provisions for us? Why would we question Him for allowing problems to come? This is surely Paul's point in context.

**8:33,34 – Who can effectively make charges against God's elect? If God justifies, who can condemn? Christ died, arose from the dead, and is at God's right hand, making intercession for us.**

**If God justifies us, who can condemn us?**

These verses continue the theme begun in verses 31,32. Paul here asks who can cause us to stand condemned if God has justified us? If God is pleased to forgive our sins, who has the power to defeat His purpose and election? Who can bring such a charge against us as to cause us to stand condemned? The obvious implied answer is that no one can do so (compare verses 31,32).

Paul continues giving us assurance of our blessings under the gospel by showing that Christ died for us and arose, so that He is now at God's right hand to make intercession for us. Surely this demonstrates that Jesus also loves us and works for us, even as the Father does. If we stand justified by His death and resurrection, why would He condemn us? See

also Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1; Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55,56; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22.

Regarding the concept of “intercession,” see notes on verse 27 regarding the Holy Spirit. Both the Spirit and the Son intercede on our behalf. Jesus is mediator as well as an intercessor – see verse 27 regarding the difference.

Note that nothing here or anywhere in verses 31-39 states that it is impossible for the elect to so sin as to be lost. Paul is discussing who are among the elect and so stand justified before God. He describes our condition in that state, so long as we remain in that state. But to remain in that state, we must continue to be faithful. God is for us because we have met the conditions of faithfulness. If we remain faithful, no one and nothing else outside ourselves can successfully condemn or cause us to be lost.

Verses 35-39 then list some of these specific forces that cannot condemn us. But this nowhere proves that it is impossible for us to choose to disobey God or so violate His will that we would be eternally lost. For evidence that we can so sin as to be lost, see John 15:1-6; Acts 8:12-24; Romans 6:12-18; 8:12-17; Galatians 5:1-4; 6:7-9; 1 Corinthians 9:25-10:12; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 5:8; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; Hebrews 3:6,11-14; 4:9,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22.

### **The “elect”**

This concept is closely related to the discussion of foreknowledge and predestination in verses 28-30 – see notes there. “Elect” simply means chosen. The elect are those who are chosen to be justified by God. Note that nothing in these verses states or remotely implies the Calvinistic concept of an arbitrary, unconditional election. Rather, those who are justified, and hence elect, are those who choose to obey God and become what He wants them to be. God’s choice depends on our choice.

In our study on verses 28-30, we learned that God desires all men to be saved. So, Christ died for all and extended or offered grace to all through the gospel. The gospel includes conditions of salvation that all people are capable of meeting. So, God grants to each person the power of free will to choose whether or not he will respond to the gospel.

As also pointed out on verses 28-30, the New Testament unquestionably refers to “election” and “predestination.” But the question is: ***How is it determined whether or not any particular individual is or is not among the elect?*** Is that determined unconditionally or conditionally.

Biblical election says that God chose a body or group of people to be saved, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to be in that body. God’s “elect” is just another name for faithful members of the church. God predestined the faithful to be saved, but each individual decides whether or not he will be among the faithful. So, the saved are

the elect who are predestined to eternal life; but this is conditional (not unconditional) and they do have a choice. Consider the evidence:

*People are “elect” according to the will of God.*

Ephesians 1:5,11 – We are predestined according to His will, according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Corinthians 2:7)

Calvinists assume God wills to choose each individual unconditionally. But where do these passages say this? The will of God regarding man’s salvation is revealed in the Scriptures. We have already proved by Scripture that God willed to offer salvation to **all**, then to let each individual **choose** whether or not he will respond.

*People are elect “in Christ.”*

Ephesians 1:4 – God chose us “**in Him**” (Christ). (Compare verse 6 – in the beloved; verse 7 – in whom; verses 10,11 – in Him; verses 3,10,13; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:10.)

Note other passages that show the circumstances or blessings of those in Christ:

- \* Made near unto God (Ephesians 2:12-17)
- \* New creatures (born again) (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:3,4)
- \* No condemnation (Romans 8:1)
- \* Grace (2 Timothy 2:1)
- \* Salvation (2 Timothy 2:10)
- \* Eternal life (1 John 5:11,12)
- \* All spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3)

These passages are surely describing the elect, but they refer to them as those who are “in Christ.” But how does an individual come into Christ?

Galatians 3:26,27; Romans 6:3,4 – We are **baptized** into Christ, after hearing, believing, etc. This makes us members of God’s family the church, saved from our sins.

Again, salvation is conditional. It is offered to all, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to meet the conditions. The concept of conditional election does not contradict Bible doctrine but is part of it.

*People are elect in Christ’s spiritual body, the church.*

Ephesians 1:3-14 – Paul addresses the elect in Christ. But the rest of the book refers to them as the church, the body of Christ. This is the theme of the book.

1:22,23 – Jesus is head of the church, His body.

2:13,16 – To be reconciled “in Christ” is to be reconciled in His body or household (verse 19), the temple of the Lord (verses 21,22).

3:10,11 – We are predestined according to God’s purpose (1:11), but His eternal purpose is revealed in the church.



5:22-33 – Jesus is Head and Savior of the body, having loved it and gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse it. Note that it is a **body** or group that is destined to be saved. (Compare 3:21; 4:4,16.)

1 Peter 1:22,23 – The elect (1:1,2; 2:9) are those who “purified your souls” in **obedience** to the truth and so were born again: born into God’s family, the church (1 Timothy 3:15).

1 Corinthians 12:13 – We are baptized into that one body. Acts 2:38,41,47 – When we repent and are baptized, we receive remission and are added by the Lord to the church.

So, from eternity, God knew there would be people willing to obey Him. He purposed to establish the church (Ephesians 3:10,11) as the body that would contain all saved people (5:23,25). These would be His special people, the elect (1:3-14; 1 Peter 2:9,10). This body He decreed to be destined for eternal glory (1:3-14).

However, God grants each individual the power to choose to meet the conditions to enter that body or not enter. Once in the body, each has the power to continue faithful and receive the reward or to fall away and be lost (those who fall will be removed from the body before it enters glory – Matthew 13:41-43; Revelation 17:14; 2 Peter 1:10).

Biblical election is conditional. God offers all people the opportunity to respond to the message of the gospel. Those who respond as taught in God’s word become part of that group that was chosen by God to receive eternal life. God chooses to save those who choose to obey and serve Him.

***8:35,36 – Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword? It is written that we are killed all day long for God’s sake, counted as sheep for the slaughter.***

**What problems in life can separate us from Christ’s love?**

Paul has shown in verses 31-34 that no one can condemn us if we are found acceptable in God’s eyes. In verses 35-39 he names some specific aspects of what we must suffer for the cause of Christ (verses 17,18). Then he asks whether or not any of these particulars can hinder our relationship with God. The answer in each case must be “No!”

Whiteside explains that the “love of Christ” can refer either to our love for Christ or His love for us. Actually, the point Paul is making is the same regardless of which of these is meant. Whiteside believes, however, that it means our love for Christ, since no one would believe that God would cease loving us because we suffer for Him. His view is that none of these problems can force us to stop loving God, if we maintain our commitment to Him. This is a true concept, but I suspect is not the view Paul had in mind.

I believe “the love of Christ” refers to His love for us. Paul has been discussing the evidences of God’s love for us (verses 31-34), not vice-

versa. He has shown that no external force can separate us from the benefits that God offers us because of His love. All the blessings Paul has described are ours regardless of what problems men or Satan can throw at us. So, none of the things Paul lists can hinder us from receiving the full force or benefit of Jesus' love.

It is true that, if people knew that a man was suffering because God was pleased with Him, they would not expect God to stop loving Him for this. Nevertheless, suffering people often do think that they are suffering because God does not love them. In the first place, suffering may come for many reasons other than because one is pleasing to God. Even if, like Job, he is suffering because he has been faithful, he may not know that is why he is suffering. Job surely expressed doubts about God's love for him. So Paul's point is that we can be assured that the fact we are suffering does not prove we have lost God's love. And if we remain faithful despite these hardships, then we will continue to receive His full love.

But again, whichever view one takes, the ultimate lesson is the same: the problems of life cannot cause us to lose our relationship with God, if we remain faithful throughout.

I see no benefit in analyzing each of the terms Paul lists in describing suffering. The power of Paul's point lies in its poetic expression. He is simply saying that no external force, whatever it may be, can keep us from the blessings that God's love provides. But note that all the items in the list are external forces acting from outside the Christian. If within ourselves we lose our commitment to God's service, we most surely will die spiritually and be separated from God. As observed on verses 33,34, Paul is not teaching once saved, always saved. We must keep ourselves in the love of God – Jude 21. But none of these outside forces can compel us against our will to turn from God.

**We are killed all day long, counted as sheep for the slaughter.**

Here Paul quotes Psalm 44:22, confirming the fact that God's people will suffer in this life. The quotation poetically describes that God's people have suffered and even died for His cause. Persecutors have literally slain Christians all day long. Such can occur. If it does occur, it does not prove God has deserted us or does not love us. So, we must be willing to endure without losing faith.

God has not promised His people a "bed of roses" in this life. We should not expect a life free from hardship, heartbreak, trial, temptation, or persecution, simply because we serve God. We may or may not literally die for the cause of Christ, yet the passage poetically describes the fact that all of God's servants will suffer in some way for His cause.

Preachers do a great disservice when they lead people to believe that, if they just become Christians, their problems in this life will be resolved, or that God has promised to do miracles to remove all their

hardships if they will trust Him (and send the preacher a “seed faith offering”). The examples of faithful servants of God such as Job, Jesus Himself, the apostles, and other early Christians all demonstrate the truth that God’s people do suffer in this life. Doctrines that teach otherwise simply cause despair when hardship and persecution continue even for those who are faithful.

***8:37-39 – In all these things we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us. Neither death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.***

### **We are more than conquerors.**

Though we can be sure we will have to suffer, yet God promises to give what we need so that we can endure the hardship. He will give all the blessings Paul has described in context and much more. As a result, instead of being defeated by our trials, we can conquer them. So, it is not God’s plan to keep us from troubles. Rather, it is His plan to give us strength and blessings to overcome the troubles.

But in what sense are we “more than conquerors” through these trials? If we allow suffering to lead us to sin, then we are separated from God. This is what Satan hopes suffering will produce, as he hoped in the case of Job. But if we use God’s provisions so that we remain faithful, then we defeat the trials; they do not defeat us.

But we are **more** than conquerors in that, if we endure faithfully, the suffering actually strengthens us and makes us better Christians (compare verse 28). We are actually drawn closer to God. Our weaknesses and impurities are removed. We learn patience and faith. And we ultimately receive eternal life. We are conquerors, if the trials do not defeat us. But we are more than conquerors, because we are actually benefited by that which Satan sent to defeat us.

This occurs “through Him that loved us” (compare Philippians 4:13). We cannot achieve this by trusting in our human power. We must trust God for the strength, guidance, and blessings we need to endure. It follows that Christians fail to endure trial, either because they do not understand God’s teaching about trials, or because they do not believe that God has fully provided all they need to remain faithful. The failure is in us, not in God.

### **No created thing is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ.**

Verses 38,39 express the same idea as verse 35 except that, whereas verse 35 was a question, verses 38,39 answer that question emphatically. None of the problems listed here or in verse 35 can separate us from the love of God (see notes on verse 35).

Again, there may be little value in considering the individual forces listed. The main point is the overall impact of the list. Whether we live or die, nothing we face now and nothing we can ever face in the future, nothing physical – “no created thing,” neither those listed nor any other one can think of – can keep us away from the benefits of Christ’s love. If we take the way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), we can always defeat Satan and his power by the armor God provides (Ephesians 6:10-18).

We may wonder about the inclusion of “angels” in the list. As in Galatians 1:8,9, the point is not that true angels would ever try to lead us to sin. But even if they did, they could not succeed. (Or since “angel” in the general sense means a messenger, perhaps the reference is to messengers of Satan.)

Let us learn the lesson and always look to God for the strength and guidance we need. Let us not grow weary in doing good, but always press on knowing that nothing can destroy our eternal hope if God is for us. The reward we will receive will be far greater than anything we may suffer here (verse 18).

# Romans 9

## Chapters 9-11 – God’s Eternal Purpose Required Using Israel.

Paul has shown in previous chapters that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. He has shown that the gospel meets the needs of all, which the Old Testament could not do. In doing this, he has shown that the Old Testament is no longer in effect as God’s law.

These conclusions raise a number of questions regarding the status of the Israelite nation. They had many special blessings under the Old Testament. In their own minds, they had even more blessings than God ever promised them, and they were convinced that their special status could never end. This naturally resulted in a number of questions about the status of the Jews under the gospel. Paul deals with these in chapter 9-11.

In his response to these questions, Paul discusses various aspects of God’s work in developing His eternal purpose. Calvinists and Premillennialists have a heyday with the context, reading into the text conclusions that directly contradict what is plainly taught here or elsewhere. But, we must remember that much of what Paul says refers to God’s use of nations and individuals in bringing about His plans. God intended all along to provide a means whereby people could be saved from sin and receive eternal life. To develop this plan, however, God used men and nations – good men and bad men, good nations and bad nations – to develop His plans. He did not force men to be good or bad, but He took men as they chose to be (good or bad) and used them to develop His plan.

The fact that God used any individual or nation did not, of itself, prove they would be saved spiritually. The Jews, in particular, thought that, since God had given them a favored status, He should now save them eternally. This was never God’s intent. His use of a person or nation proved only that they had a purpose in the development of His plan. Many of them, in fact, were used expressly because they were evil, so God used them accordingly (such as Pharaoh, Judas, and the Jews who crucified Jesus). The plan of God ultimately made eternal salvation

available to men, but His use of men along the way proves nothing about their personal salvation.

## **9:1-21 - God Used Israel to Accomplish His Purposes.**

***Several statements in this context “sound like” Calvinistic predestination:***

Verses 11-13 – God chose Jacob even before he and Esau were born or had done anything good or bad. He hated Esau and loved Jacob.

Verses 15-18 – God has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills. This is determined by God, not by the person who “wills” to receive His mercy.

Verses 19-24 – God forms men for destruction or glory like a potter with clay.

This is a main proof text on which Calvinistic predestination rests. Calvinists argue that this means God chooses to eternally save or condemn men unconditionally, entirely according to God’s whim.

***The Calvinistic view of Romans 9 contradicts other Scriptures.***

***Calvinism contradicts all the other passages showing God wants all to be saved, gives them the power to choose, etc.***

We have already established this by Scripture. Calvinism would make the Bible self-contradictory. We should accept a view that harmonizes with all the Scriptures. See notes on Romans 8:28-30.

### **Calvinism contradicts the overall teaching of the book of Romans.**

1:16 – The gospel is God’s power to save ***everyone*** who believes (it is conditional, and everyone can meet the conditions).

2:6-11 – God is ***no respecter of persons***. For each individual, eternal life or condemnation is determined by what he ***does***, good or bad.

5:18,19 – Justification by Jesus’ death comes to ***all*** men – the same all men who receive condemnation as a result of Adam’s sin.

6:13,16-18 – Man must yield his own members to God to be made free from sin.

### **Calvinism contradicts the immediate context of Romans 9-11.**

All three of these chapters discuss God’s dealing with the nation of Israel.

10:1-3 – Paul hoped and prayed for the salvation of Israel. If he believed that some would be damned by God’s unchangeable decree, why pray for God to save them? Such a prayer would be unscriptural, contradicting what God’s will teaches, if Calvinism is true.

10:13 – **Whoever** calls on the Lord will be saved. All have power to choose.

10:21 – God spread His hands to Israel (inviting them), but they were disobedient and contrary. Note that God was willing to accept them, but they chose to reject God’s invitation.

11:7-14 – “The rest” of Israel were not elect, but were hardened. Nevertheless, Paul was trying “by any means” to save some of them! Why so? Calvinism says if they were non-elect and were hardened, they cannot be saved, so why try? Was Paul working directly against the decrees of God?

11:19-24 – Non-elect Israelites were “cut off” because of unbelief, and Gentiles were grafted in. But those Israelites could be grafted in again and Gentiles could be cut off again, depending on their belief or unbelief. Salvation is conditional; non-elect people can change and be accepted.

11:32 – God offers mercy to **all**. This must include the non-elect Israelites being discussed. And since God is no respecter of persons, it must also include all Gentiles.

The very context of Romans 9 contains the main points we have taught about conditional salvation. So the main Calvinist proof text creates insurmountable difficulties and contradictions, if it is explained as Calvinists do.

Whatever the context teaches, it is not teaching Calvinistic predestination. Let us examine the passage to determine its true meaning.

***9:1-3 – Paul’s conscience bore witness that he was speaking the truth when he said he had great sorrow and pain in his heart. He could wish to be anathema from Christ for the sake of his kinsmen according to the flesh.***

Under the gospel, God no longer had any special blessings for the Jews above what the Gentiles could receive. And in practice, many Jews had rejected Jesus, so they had no hope for eternal life under the gospel unless they repented (9:30-10:3). Paul expresses his grief for this.

Considering how terribly the Jews had persecuted Paul, one might expect him to be filled with hatred and bitterness toward them. Some might think that such bitterness was the real motivation behind his teaching that Jews had lost God’s favor. So, Paul begins this discussion by assuring them of his good will.

Paul’s attitude toward his countrymen (fellow Jews) was actually one of great sorrow and grief. Their rejection gave him no joy at all. He had labored for their salvation. He reminds them of this later along the way (10:1-3).

Several expressions demonstrate the sincerity of Paul’s concern for them. He affirms that he “speaks the truth in Christ.” I.e., as a Christian,

he knew he must speak the truth and not lie. So, he adds, “I lie not.” He said that his conscience knew his real attitude and it would bear witness to his concern. He spoke “in the Spirit”: the fact he was inspired would give conclusive proof that he spoke the truth. The Spirit would never have allowed him to write lies in his record.

Paul reminds them that he himself was a Jew by physical birth. The Jews were his fleshly kinsmen. In fact, he goes so far as to state that he would be willing to be accursed, separated from Christ, if it would lead to the salvation of his Jewish relatives. Such an incredible statement! Of course, Paul could never save them by becoming accursed from Christ, so he is not making such an offer. But he is attempting to express the depth of his sincere love for them. Compare Moses’ statement in Exodus 32:30-35.

***9:4,5 – The Israelites had the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises. Theirs were the fathers from whom came Christ in the flesh, who is over all.***

### **A summary of blessings God had given Israel**

Paul did not in any way belittle or begrudge the blessings God had given the nation of Israel. On the contrary, being a Jew by race himself, he recognized and appreciated these blessings. He loved his Jewish ancestry because of the exalted role it had in God’s purpose.

Paul here lists many of the blessings God had given to the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob or Israel.

#### *The adoption*

God had adopted Israel as His special chosen people – Exodus 4:22; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8; Deuteronomy 14:2; Isaiah 43:1; Exodus 19:5,6.

#### *The glory*

The Old Testament law and service were glorious in many ways. Some think this refers especially to the glory that the presence of God showed when it came down upon Mt. Sinai and then dwelt in the tabernacle or temple. See Exodus 40:34; 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:6-14; 1 Kings 8:11; Hebrews 9:5; 1 Samuel 4:21; Isaiah 46:12; Psalms 63:2.

#### *The covenants*

Israel inherited great blessings as a result of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. And, of course, the Old law itself, given through Moses, was a covenant. See Genesis 17:2; 15:18; Deuteronomy 29:14; Ephesians 2:12; Galatians 3:17; Hebrews 8:6ff; Jeremiah 31:31ff; Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25; Deuteronomy 4:13; Exodus 19:5.

#### *The giving of the law*

The Ten Commands and all the ordinances were given through Moses expressly to the nation of Israel. Note that, contrary to the doctrine of those who would try to bind the Old Testament law and especially the seventh-day Sabbath today, the Bible plainly teaches that



the law was given specifically to the nation of Israel, not to any other nation. See Deuteronomy 4:13,14,8; Psalms 147:19; John 1:17; 7:19.

#### *The service of God*

This seems to refer to the worship offered in the Old Testament. As such, it would include the sacrifices, holy days, priesthood, and all that related especially to the tabernacle and temple. See Hebrews 9:1,6,10.

#### *The promises*

God had made great promises to Abraham regarding his descendants. These were included in the “covenants” already listed. Paul here probably emphasized the blessings that these covenants promised to Israel. See Acts 13:32; Ephesians 2:12; Galatians 3:16-18; Luke 1:55; Romans 4:13,16.

#### *Of whom are the fathers*

The fathers were the patriarchs to whom God had especially made promises: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob. The Jews had great servants of God in their ancestry. See Romans 11:28; Acts 3:13; 5:30.

#### *From whom, according to the flesh, Christ came*

The Messiah had been promised to come as a great ruler. He would be a descendant of Abraham through Jacob and specifically through David. This, of course, was fulfilled in Christ. What a great blessing to be used of God to bring the Savior into the world! See Matthew 1:1-16; Romans 1:3; Galatians 3:16; Acts 3:25; Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

All these great blessings God had given to the nation of Israel. However, note that important blessings were missing from the list, though Israel assumed they would be in such a list. These blessings included spiritual favor with God, forgiveness of sin, and eternal life as a promise or guarantee.

Many Jews assumed that God gave all of them these great blessings because they were all in His favor; so, He would grant spiritual fellowship and all the associated blessings to each Jew, simply as a descendant of Abraham. Paul has summarized great blessings they had as Jews, but eternal salvation was not among them. Many of them might be saved, but it would be because of their individual choice to follow the gospel, just like Gentiles could do. Those Jews who did not obey would be lost, just like with Gentiles. Being a Jew in no way assured salvation.

### **Jesus is over all, the eternally blessed God**

In the process of listing these great blessings to Israel, Paul states a fact regarding Jesus that shows His exalted status. He is “over all.” Consider the implications.

Surely, this implies that Jesus possesses Deity. How could He be “over all” without possessing Deity? Further, how could Jesus be (present tense) over all unless He is already reigning as king? Premillennialists claim that Jesus does not yet have full status as King over God’s people, but will come into His kingdom when He comes

again. But what more could He have when He comes again than what He already has? He is “over all.” If He is not king now, He will never be king. To claim He will fully reign as King later is to deny His present exalted position. See Matthew 28:28; Colossians 1:13; etc.

The expression “the eternally blessed God” appears in many translations to apply also to Jesus. If so, then this passage joins the many others that state Jesus’ Deity. However, there are questions of translation on this verse that weaken such an argument. I personally prefer to make the argument for Jesus’ Deity on the basis of other expressions found in Scripture.

**For further discussion of the Deity of Jesus and premillennialism, see our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

***9:6,7 – It is not that God’s word has failed. Not all Israel are of Israel, nor are they children simply because they are descendants of Abraham. Rather, in Isaac shall your seed be called.***

In this context Paul anticipates and responds to arguments and questions Jews would be expected to make regarding what he has taught (see verses 6,14,19,20).

**He affirms that God’s word has not failed.**

The Jews would think that, if Paul’s statements are true and the Jews no longer have a special place in God’s favor, and if in fact Gentiles can have equal favor with Jews, then that would contradict God’s promises. Somehow God’s word had not come true. Paul denies such a conclusion and responds to it from the history of the Jews themselves.

To understand Paul’s explanations, we must understand that many Jews thought they had an unending relationship of special favor and union with God. They did not believe God would ever end any special status they had. And they believed that special status included spiritual favor of God for every Jew, simply because he was a Jew. So, if a person was born a Jew, he was automatically and always pleasing to God. See John 8:33-47; Matthew 3:7-12; Romans 2 (especially verses 1-3,9-13,17-29).

But as Paul’s explanation proceeds, remember that he is claiming that God’s promise to Abraham gave a special place to Israelites in the ***development of God’s plan***, but not any special place in the blessing of ***spiritual salvation*** that God’s plan would bring. The reason God chose Israel in His purpose was, not because the individuals of the nation were so righteous, but to develop His plan for bringing salvation into the world. See Deuteronomy 4:37,38; 9:4,5ff; 7:6-11; 10:12-17.

God had promised Abraham that He would make his descendants a great nation and give them the land of Canaan; these were physical blessings that did not in any way assure God’s spiritual favor to

individual Israelites. God also promised through Abraham's descendants to bring into the world the One who would bless all nations with salvation – Galatians 3:16; Genesis 12:1-3; 22:16-18; 26:4; 28:13,14. This promise has huge spiritual implications, but it does not guarantee salvation to those who were the means of bringing Christ into the world.

To illustrate, consider a postman who delivers someone a check for one million dollars. Should we conclude that the postman himself is rich or will automatically share in the funds, simply because he delivered them? He is neither the giver nor the recipient of the check. He does not benefit from it in any way, simply because he delivers it. So, Israel was used of God to bring Christ into the world, but nothing about that assured they would have any special spiritual favor with God regarding personal salvation. They were neither the giver nor necessarily the recipients of salvation through Christ. They simply brought Him into the world (and then killed Him!). They could benefit from Christ only by meeting the conditions of salvation, just like people of all other nations. The promised blessing was for “all nations.”

**God's promise to Abraham did not require Him to give an exalted position to every physical descendant of Abraham.**

“They are not all Israel who are of Israel” This is Paul's way of stating what we have just reviewed above. But Paul uses “Israel” in two ways (otherwise the statement is evidently self-contradictory). He compares spiritual Israelites (“not all Israel”) to physical Israelites (“who are of Israel”). A physical Israelite is one who is a physical descendant of Jacob by birth. An Israelite spiritually is one who shares in the spiritual character and nature of Abraham and therefore is a spiritual descendant of Abraham (as in chapter 4). Just because one was a physical descendant of Abraham and Jacob (“of Israel”), that did not make him a beneficiary of the spiritual blessings that God offers to those who walk in the faith of Abraham (“not all Israel”). See Romans 2:28,29; 4:12,16; Galatians 6:16; 3:26-29; John 1:47; 8:39ff; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11.

Not only did God not promise to save spiritually every physical descendant of Abraham, but furthermore God did not even use all of Abraham's descendants in fulfilling His promise to Abraham. The Old Testament itself shows that God used the descendants of Isaac, rather than the descendants of Ishmael, to bring to pass the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. Then He chose the descendants of Jacob, rather than those of Esau.

Paul expresses this by saying they are not “all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’” “Abraham's seed” refers to the physical descendants of Abraham. “Children” means beneficiaries of the blessings or heirs of the promise. (This is explained further in the next verse).

Not all the physical descendants of Abraham received the benefit of the blessings promised to Abraham. This is true even of the physical land and nation promises. These blessings came only on the descendants of Isaac, not Ishmael, despite the fact the Ishmael was as much a son of Abraham as Isaac was. The same could be said of Abraham's other children. He had other sons besides even Ishmael and Isaac (sons of Keturah). But all these sons were sent away and did not inherit with Isaac. See Genesis 21:12; 25:1-6; 16:1-6; 21:8-12; Galatians 4:21-31; Hebrews 11:8.

The clear conclusion is, just because one was a physical descendant of Abraham, that did not prove he would receive the blessings God promised to Abraham's descendants. The Jews knew this. It did not bother them a bit that Ishmael's (or Esau's) descendants did not inherit the promises.

But if God could choose to give the blessings only to descendants of Isaac, excluding Abraham's other descendants, then He could likewise exclude descendants of Isaac from receiving some of those blessings. Specifically, regarding the blessing to come on all nations through Abraham's descendants (salvation from sin), God could choose to not give that to certain Israelites, just as He could choose to not give it to certain Ishmaelites. Or more specifically, He could choose to give it to people of all nations based on their obedient faith, and He could exclude all who lack obedient faith, regardless of nationality.

The Jews' own knowledge of the Old Testament should have proved that they had no grounds to object if God chose to give them no special favor regarding the promised blessing to come upon all nations.

***9:8,9 – Not all children of the flesh are children of God, but children of the promise are counted as descendants. God's promise was that He would come at the appointed time and Sarah would have a son.***

"That is" shows that Paul is continuing his explanation of verses 6,7. The blessing was granted on the basis of a promise, not on the basis of mere physical lineage. See Galatians 3:26,29; 4:28; Romans 8:14,16,19; 9:26; Hosea 1:10; Matthew 5:9; John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 6:18; 1 John 3:1; Revelation 21:7.

"Not the children of flesh" means that one did not receive the benefit of the promises simply because he was a fleshly, physical descendant of Abraham. This is conclusively proved by the fact that Ishmael and other sons were physical descendants, but they did not receive the blessing that was promised (see verses 6,7).

"These are not children of God" must mean, in context, that they did not necessarily have a relationship with God such that they received the promised blessing. This applied, as already explained, even regarding the physical blessings of the nation and land promises. How much more

then it must apply to the spiritual blessing promised to come on all nations.

Those who counted as seed were “children of the promise” – i.e., those who received the blessing promised to Abraham’s seed, received it on the basis of promise, not just fleshly lineage. Specifically, God had promised that Sarah would have a son, and the promise would be fulfilled through him.

The point is that God never committed Himself to give blessings to all of Abraham’s descendants, but only to those to whom He made the promise. The promise regarding Isaac shows that Ishmael was not included. The Jews could see that. If so, then the same applies to the Jews regarding the promise to come on all nations through Abraham’s “seed” (salvation from sin). God never promised to give this blessing especially to Jews, let alone to each specific Jew. It was promised to “all nations,” including Jews, but no special privilege was granted to Jews.

Note that nothing here can possibly be used to prove Calvinistic unconditional predestination of men to eternal life or eternal condemnation. Paul is showing that nothing God said ever promised salvation to all Jews. The advantages the Jews had pertained only to physical blessings in this life and to the fact God used them to bring Christ into this world. There is no advantage promised them regarding receiving eternal life or forgiveness of sins. To use the passage to claim that God promised such an advantage is to miss the point entirely. And even Calvinists grant that not all the physical descendants of Abraham or of Isaac will be saved, so how can this passage be talking about predestination to salvation?

***9:10-13 – Likewise, Rebecca the wife of Isaac conceived, but before the children were born God said the elder would serve the younger, and Jacob I loved but Esau I hated. So God’s purpose by election might stand, not of works, but of Him who calls.***

“Not only this” shows that Paul has more evidence to prove his point. Just as Abraham had several sons but the promised blessings were given only to one of them, so Isaac himself had two sons but the blessings went to just one of them. In fact, Esau was the older of the two, yet the blessings were promised to Jacob who was the younger.

This was determined before the children were even born or had done anything good or bad, but was done by the purpose of God according to election, not of works but by the choice of God who called. So, Calvinists love to try to use this passage to prove their view of unconditional election. This view, however, completely misses the point of the passage. Consider:

**The statement “the elder will serve the younger” refers to two *nations* – the nations that would descend from Jacob and Esau – not to the two men themselves!**

Paul cites as evidence the fact that God said to Abraham, even before the boys were born, that the older would serve the younger – Genesis 25:22,23. But this expressly says that the statement refers to two ***nations***. This was fulfilled in the nations that descended from these men – 1 Chronicles 18:12,13; 2 Samuel 8:14; 2 Kings 14:7,22. But this was not promising anything about whether or not these men or their descendants would be eternally saved; it refers to one nation becoming physical servants to another nation. Many righteous people have been servants to other people in this life, but this did not mean they were saved or lost as a result.

So, the “election” or choice here (verse 11) does not refer to the election to eternal life; rather ***it refers to the choice of which group of descendants would receive the nation and land promises and would be the lineage through which Christ was born***. This election was made before Jacob or Esau were born or had done anything good or bad. It was made by the purpose of God, but had nothing to do with the “works” or conduct of the boys. But it was an election in which “the elder would serve the younger” (verse 12), not an election to eternal life! So, God often spoke of Israel as His elect or chosen nation. But that had to do with the promise to Abraham; it never guaranteed eternal life to any specific individual.

**“Loving Jacob and hating Esau” likewise had no reference to eternal destinies.**

The only statement made before their birth was “the elder will serve the younger.” The statement about loving Jacob and hating Esau was made long after both men had died – Malachi 1:2,3. This statement also refers to the nations that would descend from the men, not to the men themselves (see the context of Malachi 1).

“Hate” means a lesser love (Genesis 29:33; Luke 14:26). It has no reference whatever to their salvation! Does the command to hate our families mean we must wish them to be eternally damned? If not, then why does the statement about God’s loving Jacob and hating Esau have anything to do with their eternal destinies?

These statements merely prove that God’s promise to Abraham did not obligate Him to exalt every physical descendant of Abraham. Old Testament history shows that, in fulfilling this promise, God repeatedly made choices between individuals regarding whose descendants He would use in fulfilling the promise. But none of this means that the individuals or nations He used would be eternally saved. It simply means that He used them to accomplish His purposes (like the mailman delivering the mail).

Later, however, Paul does discuss salvation, and there he shows that those who would be saved were those individuals who would choose to serve faithfully (see notes on chap 11).

Again, to use this to prove Calvinistic predestination of individuals to eternal life or eternal death is to completely miss the point. The choices discussed here referred to nations, not individuals. And they were fulfilled in how God used and blessed them in this life; the promises did not in any way determine the salvation of individuals apart from their conduct.

***9:14,15 – So, is God unrighteous? Surely not! As He said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”***

None of what Paul has said in any way indicates unrighteousness or unfairness on God’s part. Perhaps Paul here refers to the fact some Jews might think it was unfair of God to make these promises to them and use them for years, and then drop them. Paul affirms this is not unrighteous. His explanation already should have shown this. His further explanation continues to clarify it.

***The decision as to who will receive mercy is made by the one who shows the mercy, not by the one who receives it (verses 15,16,18).***

Mercy is a favor shown to one who does not deserve it. It follows that the one who wants mercy (the one who “wills” or “runs” – Israel in this case – verse 16) cannot set the conditions under which the benefit will be given. This is determined by the one who extends the mercy. (This is quoted from God’s statement to Moses in Exodus 33:19.)

The application to Israel is that they could not insist (as they apparently thought they could) that God must continue to give them a favorable position, just because He once did so. They had received a favorable position by God’s mercy, but He could withdraw it anytime He so chose.

Mercy is a blessing granted by the goodness of the giver, not the goodness of the receiver. If God chose to grant mercy to someone, that did not mean He was being cruel or mistreating others. When God chose to use Isaac and Jacob, for example, that did not harm Ishmael or Esau. Wherein were they harmed? They were no worse off than millions of other people born into the world, who were not Abraham’s descendants and had no special promises made to them. The fact we are kind to one person does not prove we have been cruel to others.

And what is more, mercy implies that the one who receives the blessing has no special claim on it anyway. That is, he is not receiving it because he is so good, but because of the kindness of the one who bestows the blessing. If so, he has no justifiable complaint if the giver of



the blessing should withdraw it. He did not receive the blessing because he had a right to it or had earned it, anyway.

In particular, the Jews had repeatedly rebelled against God. He had every right to reject them, and often did punish them. So, they had no valid complaint if God finally chose to extend no further mercy. They had no grounds for complaint, either, if He chose to extend mercy to the Gentiles.

For example, suppose as a favor to me my neighbor mows my lawn while I am out of town. If on some other occasion I am out of town again, do I have the right to complain that he is being cruel to me if he does not mow my lawn again? Or could I complain if he mows someone else's lawn? He never owed it to me to mow my lawn. He only did it out of the goodness of his heart. If he then does the same for someone else instead of for me, wherein has he been unfair to me?

**The key word here is the word “will.”**

God gives mercy to whom He “will.” Calvinists assume (without proof) this means that God wills to unconditionally send some folks to heaven and others to hell. Now, God can do whatever He “wills” to do; but where does the context say that is what He wills to do? This passage is not talking about eternal destinies. We have proved conclusively that Paul is talking about the physical blessings God gave to some of Abraham's descendants and to the fact He used them to bring Christ into the world. Nothing here proves that God's choices in these matters would in any way assure eternal salvation to the people of Israel.

However, while eternal salvation is not being discussed here, yet it is true that salvation is also a matter of mercy. It follows that, in salvation too God can show mercy on whom He wills; men cannot dictate the terms of salvation. ***But God's will regarding salvation is revealed elsewhere in the Bible, and on that subject we have seen that His will is to offer salvation to all conditionally and let men choose whether or not to comply (see notes on Romans 8:28-30).*** God's “will” regarding who will or will not be eternal saved is stated elsewhere, but it is not even under discussion here in Romans 9. The basis on which God chose to use Israel cannot be used as evidence regarding the basis on which He has chosen to save men from sin.



**9:16-18 – So it is not of him who wills or of him who runs but of God who shows mercy. Regarding Pharaoh God said He would raise him up that He might show His power and publish His name abroad in all the earth. So, He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He will be hardens.**

**Blessings are determined by the one who shows mercy, not by the one who receives it.**

Verse 16 restates the principle of verse 15. The one who seeks to benefit from God's mercy (he who wills or runs, exerting effort to receive it) has no power to determine the grounds or conditions under which mercy will be granted. God, who gives the mercy, has the right to make these determinations. Again, this refers to God's choice of Israel as the nation He used to develop His plans. It does not refer to the determination of who will or will not receive eternal life at the judgment.

As discussed on verse 11 and verse 15, however, this principle could be applied to eternal salvation (though Paul does not do so here), provided it is done properly. First, it is a "not ... but" phrase, just as verse 11. The intent is not to absolutely deny the first element. Rather, it is de-emphasized in order to emphasize the second element. That is, the verse does not deny that the one who seeks mercy can ever do anything in order to receive it. Rather, it emphasizes that God is the one who has the right to determine under what conditions His mercy is granted. (Remember similar examples of language in John 6:27; 12:44; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 15:10; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Mark 9:37; Matthew 10:20; Acts 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; Genesis 45:8; 1 John 3:18.)

Second, we must ask what God's will is regarding who will be eternally saved by His mercy. If His mercy acts according to His will, then what is His will? We cannot just assume that He arbitrarily and unconditionally selects people to be saved without considering their choice or character. Such a view would flatly contradict numerous Scriptures, even here in Romans (see Scriptures cited on 8:28,29).

Cannot the giver of mercy choose, if He so wills, to grant mercy to all who are willing to meet certain conditions? Verses 15,16 absolutely affirm that God can extend mercy on whatever terms He chooses. Therefore, He does have the right to offer mercy conditionally and then grant mercy to those who meet the conditions. This is exactly what His will says He has done regarding salvation.

Man cannot bind his own will on God, however God is bound by His own promises and covenants. Whenever He makes a promise or a covenant, the fact that He is a faithful God who keeps His word requires Him to keep those promises. So, when we say that God gives a man a choice regarding salvation according to the new covenant, we are simply taking Him at His Word. We are not attempting to force our will upon Him, but we are saying that He has promised to give men a choice in

salvation. Those who deny this are the ones who deny the character and will of God.

### **God raised up Pharaoh to show His power through him.**

Whereas God used Israel in a favorable way in fulfilling His promise to Abraham, He also used Pharaoh in an unfavorable way. He made Pharaoh king of Egypt (raised him up) for the purpose of showing God's greatness to the world. Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt when Israel became a great nation and when they left to go to the promised Canaan. In the Old Testament account, God predicted He would harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 14:4), showing that He had the power to know what would happen. But Pharaoh was cruelly and wickedly mistreating and even killing God's people before God ever made this prediction (see Exodus 1). Further, the accounts state that, in actual fact, God hardened Pharaoh's heart only *after* Pharaoh had already several times hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; Compare Psalm 95:8; Hebrews 3:8).

God used Pharaoh, but for what purpose? He used him that God might show His power and that His name might be declared to the whole earth (by means of the plagues and crossing the Red Sea – see Exodus 9:16). This discusses, not anyone's eternal salvation, but an act by which God brought honor to Himself. Nothing here says God unconditionally caused anyone to do evil or to be lost without choice. Pharaoh became a wicked man by his own choice, so God used him to accomplish His purpose and bring glory to Himself.

### **So, God has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills.**

Johnson on John 12:40 uses an excellent illustration. He explains that this works according to Divine law. It may be compared to a man who refuses to use his muscles: by natural law, he will become weak. Or if a person chooses to remain in the dark and refuses to come to the light, he will soon become blind. If this happens, who makes Him blind? It can be said that he did it, because he refused to allow light into his eyes. Or it can be said that God did it, because God made the law that led to the result. But even so, it happened only because the man chose to so act.

Likewise, God's Divine law decrees that a man who refuses to accept spiritual light will become spiritually blind (ignorant and without understanding). And a man who persists in disobeying God will become hardened in heart. So, when people reject the light and become blind, or when Pharaoh resisted God's law and became hardened, who did it? The sinners did it because they chose to reject God and His laws. But it can also be said that God did it, because He made the laws that made it inevitable that such conduct would produce the end result.

God appealed to Pharaoh repeatedly warning Him to obey and not resist. God neither commanded nor compelled Him to resist, but rather

urged Him to obey. A good man would have submitted and obeyed. But being evil, Pharaoh resisted. Furthermore, God was patient, repeatedly giving Pharaoh opportunities and warnings to repent. Pharaoh chose to rebel. Only after he so rebelled several times does the account say that God hardened his heart. God's law from the beginning has been that those who persist in rebelling against His word will become hardened.

So, in fulfilling His promise to Abraham, God showed mercy to Israel and hardened their enemy, Pharaoh. He used men and nations to accomplish His purpose. But this is not talking about their salvation. He never violated any man's right to choose to obey Him or disobey Him.

God gave Israel an exalted status as a nation to use them for His purposes in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. Having done this, He had the right to withdraw that exalted status, for it never did have anything to do with what they deserved. And above all, nothing here says anything about how God decides whom He will or will not save eternally.

***9:19-21 – Someone might ask why God would find fault since no one was withstanding His will. Paul asked who they would be to his reply against God. The thing formed has no right to ask why its maker made in that way. A potter has a right from a lump of clay to make a vessel of honor or dishonor.***

***Some may object that no one is resisting God's will, so why does He find fault?***

The events Paul has discussed to this point were all matters with which the Jews would agree: Isaac vs. Ishmael, Jacob vs. Esau, Moses vs. Pharaoh. No Jew would disagree or argue with God's choice in these matters. Since the Jews willingly accepted God's decrees in these matters, then why would Paul imply that God found fault with the Jewish nation? They had opposed His acts in none of these examples. This seems to be the point of the question Paul raises. Although another meaning might be that they could not succeed in opposing God even if they tried, so why would He be upset with them, since they had no choice but to accept His will anyway?

Of course, Paul has not claimed that the Jews would object to these examples to this point. Rather, he chose the examples specifically to illustrate the point in a way that they would be compelled to agree. The point on which they would disagree, however – which is Paul's main point in context – is that God now had the right to cease granting the nation of Israel any special place in His plan, just like He had the right to make the other choices he has discussed. If they understood that these other examples harmonized with God's purpose and power, then they ought to have been willing to accept God's power to now cease to give them any special position as a nation. In this matter they were resisting

His will, much like Pharaoh had, and that was exactly why God found fault.

### **The potter and the clay**

Rather than directly answering the question, Paul instead shows the danger of the underlying attitude that the Jews generally had (this ultimately leads to an answer to the question, but not directly). Regardless of what God could or had done, the fact was that the Jews had an attitude problem regarding God's use of their nation. They had continually rebelled against Him, and Paul knew from experience that they would be upset at the concept that God would accept Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews.

This Divine choice was as fair as the other cases Paul had cited, but the Jews objected to it. If God somehow had unfairly harmed the Jews by His choice, they might have had grounds to question His justice. But God's choice in no way unfairly harmed them, just as His other choices had done no harm to Ishmael, Esau, etc. Using one group of people for His purpose does not constitute harming others, and withdrawing His use of them also does not cause them harm. Instead, it simply puts them in the same status they would have been had He not used them. In fact, Paul had already affirmed that God's use of the Jewish nation actually gave them some blessings. See Jesus' illustration of this in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16.

Paul illustrates this with a potter working with clay. This illustration was commonly used in the Old Testament. See Isaiah 29:16; 41:25; 45:9; 64:8; Psalm 2:9; Jeremiah 18:1-12; Lamentations 4:2; compare 2 Timothy 2:20.

The point of the illustration is to affirm God's right to deal with men however He pleases. Men have no right to object to God's use of them, just as the clay has no right to object to what the potter makes from it. The maker has the right to form his creation according to His own will. God used Isaac, and Jacob, and refused to use Ishmael and Esau. Did those men have a right to object to God's use of them? Surely not!

*The application in context is to the nation of Israel.*

A potter can take part of a lump of clay and make with it something that men would view as worthy of honor. He can take another part of the same lump and use it to make something men would think of as common or less worthy of honor. The clay would have no right to object to either choice. ("Dishonor" does not here mean shame or blame. It simply means a lack of such special honor as the other lump received.)

Likewise, God can make of the same lump (Israel) vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. God had exalted Israel in the past to accomplish His will in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. That promise had been completely fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. If God then chose to withdraw Israel's "most-favored-nation" status, they had no right to object (as some apparently were doing).

Note, however, that no sensible potter would deliberately make a vessel of clay for the simple purpose of destroying it. He would destroy it only if, when he started out to make something useful of it, it failed to accomplish his purposes. Likewise, the illustration of the potter and the clay cannot be used to claim that God intended from times eternal to destroy certain individuals in hell regardless of their choice or will.

*To affirm a person has power to do whatever he chooses, does not of itself tell you what he has chosen!*

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 – Paul argued that preachers have the right to marry or to be supported financially. In fact, however, he refused to exercise either of those rights.

Matthew 26:39,53,54 – Jesus had power to call 12 legions of angels. Did He call them?

You may affirm that you have the power to slug me with your fist, but you have not chosen to do so (at least not yet).

So God here affirms His right to make choices however He pleases, but that does not of itself tell us what His choice will be. It surely does not tell us how He decides who will be saved, since that is not even being discussed here.

*This passage applies, not to man's eternal destinies, but to God's right to withdraw Israel's privileged status as a nation.*

In this context, God's choice pertains to how He used the nation of Israel in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. He used them for many years in a way that exalted Him. When the promises had been fulfilled (because Jesus died), there was no longer any reason to continue their exalted status. So God withdrew it. That was His right, just like a potter could make whatever He chose from a lump of clay. But this was not discussing a choice to send anyone to heaven or to hell.

Of course, it is true that, regarding salvation, God does have the right to do whatever He chooses (consistent with His character). But nothing here says anything about what He has chosen or how He will determine who will be saved or lost. That is simply not under discussion.

Later, in 9:24-11:32, however, Paul will discuss God's choice regarding who will or will not be saved. There he shows that God offers mercy to all (11:32). Those who believe and obey will be saved (10:13-17). So, in salvation, God empowers and allows men to choose whether or not to respond to the gospel and be saved, exactly as we already learned from multitudes of other passages (compare 2 Timothy 2:20,21).

God has the right to do whatever He wills with man. He used Israel for His purpose, then He ceased to use them. That was His right. Although Paul is not here discussing the choice of who will go to heaven or to hell, yet God can save us or not save us according to any standard that He chooses. But other passages show that the standard He chose was to offer salvation to all on the basis of conditions and let each man decide whether or not to meet the conditions.

## 9:22-10:21 - The Gospel Offers Salvation, but the Jews Rejected It.

***9:22-24 – Willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, God patiently endured vessels of wrath fitted for destruction in order to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy that He had prepared, to those whom He called of the Jews and also of the Gentiles.***

**God endured with vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.**

God was willing to demonstrate His wrath and power by punishing wicked men. In fact, He fully planned to do so, for He knew these were “vessels of wrath” – i.e., creatures “fitting” to destruction (as in the ASV and KJV; the translation “prepared for destruction” does not mean that God made them for that purpose, but that they had made themselves suitable for destruction). But although (see NASB, ASV footnote) He was willing to destroy them, yet He endured them with much longsuffering.

Here we see the patience of God in dealing with Israel. God had destroyed other nations that were no worse than Israel. So, Israel deserved to be punished long before this. They would have had no complaint had God chosen to destroy them. Instead of complaining against Him for choosing now to no longer use them, they ought to have been grateful for His mercy in sparing them because He still had a purpose to fulfill through them.

This far Paul has been discussing God’s use of Israel as a nation in developing His purpose for man’s salvation. The examples apply only in that realm, not to the eternal destinies of Israelites. Following verse 24, however, it becomes clear that Paul is discussing eternal destinies. He turns from discussing God’s use of Israel in ***developing*** the plan of salvation and begins discussing the actual ***benefits*** of that plan. The question is: at what point does he make this change? I believe (with Vinson), that the change occurs between verses 22 and 23. (However, as discussed earlier, no great violence is done if one views the change as occurring slightly earlier, provided the proper applications are made in light of other teaching).

So, Paul says that Israel was so spiritually corrupt that they actually deserved to be destroyed long ago in the past. But by longsuffering God endured and did not destroy, because He yet had a purpose to accomplish through them. Now as Paul wrote, however, God’s use of Israel had completed its purpose. They had been the means to bring Jesus into the world, and they had crucified Him according to God’s foreknowledge. God no longer needed them for His purpose. Therefore, it was perfectly justifiable for Him to give them no further special place. Israel lost their place, both because God had fulfilled His purpose in

using them, and because by their own wickedness they brought rejection upon themselves.

**God had tolerated Israel in order to bring about the means by which He could bestow riches of glory on those fitted for glory.**

Here Paul turns from discussing the **development** of God's plan and begins discussing the purpose for which God had been working all these years: the **benefits** He sought to give men. Why had He used men and nations throughout history? What did He seek to accomplish? The Jews evidently thought that the end result was to give them special blessings as a nation. But this was just the means to an end.

God had endured with vessels of wrath (verse 22 – the nation of Israel) “that” (for the purpose) He might make known the riches of His glory on vessels of mercy. He had determined to show mercy by giving glory to creatures He had formed. This glory would be rich or abundant. Surely this refers to the blessing of eternal life through Christ (compare 6:23; 8:16-18ff,28-30).

“Which He had prepared beforehand for glory” describes the eternal nature of God's purpose. He had planned from eternity to give glory to men of a certain kind of character, and He prepared this glory for them by developing this plan through history (see 8:28-30). We see also God's love and mercy that He worked so diligently through the years to make all this possible for man.

Who was it that would receive this glory? It is those whom God calls. He calls by the gospel, and those who respond by obedient faith receive the glory (compare 8:28-30,26-25 – see notes there). God planned from eternity to give glory to a certain kind of people, He developed His plan using Abraham and his descendants, then He called by the gospel those who should receive the glory.

**Not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles**

This is the clincher – the key point toward which Paul has inevitably proceeded by careful, compelling logic. God had used Israel to develop His plan. But who would receive the **benefit** of that plan – the glory to which it called men? Paul's answer is that it was not just Jews alone who would receive that glory, but also Gentiles!

Note that Jews were not excluded from the benefit. They could receive it as well as Gentiles on the same conditions. But neither did it exclude the Gentiles, nor did it require special conditions of the Gentiles. Both Jews and Gentiles were accepted on the same conditions, and those conditions did not include keeping the Old Testament law. The Jews had no disadvantage in receiving the glory, but neither were they assured of receiving it simply because they were Jews. God's use of them during the Old Testament was not the final goal of His plan but only a means He used to achieve that goal. This in sum is Paul's point.



***Verses 22-24 summarize the theme of 9:6-24. God used Israel, enduring their sin and rebellion, in order that He might develop the gospel, bring it into effect, and give all men the opportunity to be saved by the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile.***

(For other passages showing Gentiles could be saved the same as Jews note 1:16; 2:9,10; 3:9,29; 9:24,30,31; 10:12.)

***9:25,26 – In Hosea God said He would call as His people and beloved those who were not His people or beloved. Those who were not His people will be called sons of God.***

Paul has argued that, in using Israel to develop His plan for man's salvation, God was righteous and true to His promises. He has also stated that the ultimate benefit of God's plan was to offer salvation from sin to all men, Jew and Gentile, on the same basis. He now proceeds to support this conclusion by citing Old Testament passages that the Jews themselves must accept as true, since they come from their own law.

His first passage is Hosea 2:23: "I will call them My people who were not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved." Those who did not have the benefits of God's favor would receive that benefit. This is fulfilled in the Gentiles receiving forgiveness under the gospel (compare Ephesians 2:1-22; 1 Peter 2:10). This does not specifically mention the Gentiles, but it shows that God would make a change in whom He would accept as His people. Some who were not His people would become His people. This is exactly what Paul was teaching, but the Jews were rejecting it as unfair. (It appears that, in Hosea, the original application was that Israel would be called back from bondage and become God's people. But Paul here shows that the same principle applies to the Gentiles.)

Likewise, Hosea 1:10 states that some, who were not God's people, would be called the sons of God. This says essentially the same as the previously quoted passage. Again, the context in Hosea refers more directly to the salvation of erring Israel, but it could include the Gentiles. And, as already explained, it surely shows that God had the right and the intent to change whom He considered to be His people. If He changed whom He considered to be His people, what right did Israel have to object to whatever changes He chose to make?

"Sons of the living God" – compare 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Romans 8:14-16 (see notes there); Galatians 3:26,27. In Romans 9:8 Paul had shown that not all physical descendants of Abraham were used in the development of God's plan. Here he shows that, also in a spiritual sense, people whom God considered His spiritual children would include those who had not been called His people. He would make a change so that, new people, different from those formerly His people, would be considered His sons. Surely He has the right to make such changes, so how could Israel object?



***9:27,28 – Isaiah had said concerning Israel that, if Israel numbered like the sand of the sea, only a remnant would be saved, for the Lord would execute judgment on earth, finishing it and cutting it short.***

Isaiah 10:22 stated that, though Israel was numbered like the sands of the sea, only a remnant would be saved. So not only did the Old Testament confirm that God could make changes in whom He would reckon to be His people, but the Old Testament showed further that He would not save the whole nation of Israel. Rather, those whom He would accept into His spiritual favor would include only a remnant of Israel (compare again 9:6-8). This is discussed further in chapter 11.

This Old Testament statement stands in clear contradiction to the theories of the Jews that all Jews – and only Jews – must be included among those who receive God's favor and fellowship. God had never intended or expected, let alone promised, that all Israelites would receive His spiritual favor. He knew and predicted all along that many of them would fall by the wayside and be rejected. Only a minority (remnant) of Israel would ultimately receive His favor.

This is exactly what we see happened when Jesus came and the gospel was preached. Many Jews did accept and obey. But the significant majority did not – not then and not since then. Most have rejected Christ and still reject Him, just as Isaiah prophesied. Only a remnant was saved.

Isaiah 10:23 then adds that God would finish His work, cut it short in righteousness, and make short work on the earth. This assures that God would indeed keep the promise of the previous verse. The matter would be finished and fulfilled. Making it short work implies that it would be done with finality. The end would involve a complete end.

***9:29-31 – Isaiah also said they would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah had not God left them a seed. So, the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness yet obtained it; but Israel who followed a law of righteousness did not arrive at the law.***

**Israel would be like Sodom and Gomorrah except that God left a seed.**

Besides the statement quoted in verses 27,28, Paul quotes another pertinent statement made in Isaiah 1:9. He said that Israel would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah except that God had left them a seed. Here again, as in the previous quotation, Paul demonstrates that only a small portion (a “seed”) of the descendants of Abraham will be found acceptable to God.

The original application seems to be to the restoration of Israel from captivity. But Paul applies the principle to the number of those who receive the blessings of the gospel. The Jews must at least admit from

the quotation that God has not always found them all to be acceptable. Even when He used the nation to accomplish His purposes, still only a minority had been acceptable. In fact, were it not for His mercy in sparing a seed of offspring by which to continue the nation, the whole nation would have been rejected and destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. So how could they object if Paul claimed that to be the case also in the first century?

“Lord of Sabaoth” means master or ruler of hosts (compare James 5:4). This could mean ruler of the whole earth, or it could include the hosts dwelling in heaven.

### **Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to the righteousness of faith.**

Having established God’s use of Israel in the Old Testament and the fact that Gentiles could receive the blessings of the gospel along with Jews under the New Testament, Paul makes a summary statement of the conclusion this leads to. “What shall we say then” shows that he is reaching a conclusion from his previous points. What do these Old Testament prophecies teach us?

The Old Testament showed that Gentiles could become pleasing to God and that only a remnant of Jews would ultimately be acceptable. The Gentiles had generally not been seeking God’s plan to make men righteous. Because of ignorance and indifference, they had given up on God, so He gave up on them (as in chapter 1). They had generally been heathen idol worshipers, unconcerned about the true God.

But despite this indifference, they attained the righteousness which comes by faith when it was made available to them in the gospel. Many of them (not all, of course) were receptive to the gospel, believed in Jesus, and were saved by grace. Paul had often witnessed this result in his own teaching efforts (compare 10:20).

“Righteousness of faith” is the theme of Romans. It is the righteousness that comes by means of forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus on the basis of the gospel. As we have repeatedly discussed throughout the book, this faith must be an obedient faith.

### **But Israel did not attain righteousness, despite the fact they pursued the law of righteousness.**

In contrast to the Gentiles (verse 30), the Jews had been following after righteousness even before Christ came. They realized they needed to be right before God (or at least they so professed), but they sought to achieve this on the basis of the Old Law (see verse 32). They thought that, by properly pursuing the teachings of the Old Testament, they could achieve righteousness.

Nevertheless, they did not attain to the law of righteousness. Paul has already explained why this was so (see on 3:20-28; 10:1-5; etc.). They sought to be justified or stand righteous on the basis of a system that

provided no ultimate forgiveness of sins. The only way to be righteous under that law was to live a lifetime without violating it. None of them did that; they all sinned. Therefore, they did not attain to righteousness. Yet, because of their stubborn prejudices, that Paul has been discussing at length, they generally rejected the gospel when it came (see notes on verses 32,33 as Paul continues the point).

***9:32,33 – Because Israel sought righteousness by works, rather than by faith, they stumbled at the stone of stumbling. As prophesied, God laid in Zion a stone of stumbling and rock of offense, and those who believe on Him will not be put to shame.***

**Israel did not attain righteousness, because they sought it on the basis works of the law, not by faith.**

Paul continues by explaining why Israel did not attain righteousness, though they sought it (in contrast to the Gentiles who attained it though they did not seek it – verses 30,31). Why was this so? Here Paul gives a key answer to the problem of the Jews and a key point in understanding the thrust of the book of Romans.

The Jews generally refused to seek righteousness by means of believing in the sacrifice of Jesus to forgive their sins. Instead, they sought to be justified by works of the law. This clearly refers to the Old Testament law, since that was the law they had and they surely did not seek righteousness according to any other law. (The ASV, NASB, etc., do not include “of law”; but whether or not those words are in the original, the concept is clearly implied by the context and by the whole point of the book of Romans.) But, as on verse 31 above, no one attained or “arrived at” that law (see ASV, NASB, KJV). They did not succeed in reaching it (ESV). That is, everyone violated it, as explained in chapter 3. When they violated it, they could never become righteous by it.

**Their persistence in holding to the law led the Jews to reject Christ and His gospel.**

The Jews therefore could not be made righteous by the law, since they violated it and it could not then forgive them. The only way to be saved by forgiveness would be to accept the gospel of Christ, but the Jews stumbled at that. They refused to believe in Jesus, and therefore could not achieve the righteousness offered by the gospel, since that requires faith. This left them with no means of righteousness at all!

The Jews’ rejection of Jesus is described as stumbling at the stone of stumbling. This fulfills the prophecies of Isaiah 28:16; 8:14 (compare 1 Peter 2:5-8; Acts 4:11; 1 Corinthians 1:23; Ephesians 2:20; Matthew 21:42; Psalms 118:22f). Christ was the foundation of the gospel, like the chief cornerstone was the most important stone in the foundation of a building (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Matthew 16:18). He came to save men from sin, but many people (especially Jews) instead rejected

Him. This is compared to stumbling over that cornerstone, instead of appreciating it and relying on it. One must believe in Him to be saved. The Jews generally did not believe, so they were put to shame.

Note that people had their choice whether or not to believe in Jesus and accept His forgiveness: “whoever” believes on Him will not be put to shame. The ones who received the benefits of the gospel were not determined by some unconditional decree of God apart from the character or choice of the people. Rather, God offered the means of salvation in Christ’s death and proclaimed the conditions of forgiveness in the gospel. Then the people had to choose to believe it or not. The Jews stumbled at the stone of stumbling by their own choice to reject the gospel. This led to their shame, instead of the glory they expected to receive through the Messiah.

# Romans 10

***10:1-3 – Paul prayed that Israel might be saved since he knew they had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, they sought to establish their own righteousness and did not submit to God’s righteousness.***

## **Paul prayed for the salvation of Israel.**

In chapter 10 Paul continues his discussion of the condition of Jews generally under the gospel. Specifically, he enlarges on his point from 9:30-33 that the Jews had rejected the gospel plan of justification because they were unwilling to believe in Jesus. He explains further their error, then gives a brief summary of the gospel conditions of justification.

As in 9:1-5, Paul reaffirmed that he truly wanted Israel to be saved. It was his heart’s desire and his prayer to God. He had said they had rejected salvation, but he did not speak from callous indifference to them. He held no grudge against them for their persecution of him.

A gospel teacher must point out the sins of those whom he teaches, but he should grieve to know their sins. He should never rejoice in the errors of those whom he must rebuke, but should desire and pray for their salvation. Is that the attitude we have when we see sin around us, or do we glory in being able to prove we are better than others?

By stating his desire for Israel’s salvation, Paul plainly acknowledged their condition: they were lost, else why would they need to be saved? Paul here plainly stated this conclusion that follows from all he has said. They had all sinned, so they all needed forgiveness. This forgiveness is available only through Jesus, but they rejected Jesus. Therefore, they were still lost in sin.

Such is the case of all who will not obey the gospel of Christ. Instead of denying this, covering it up, or apologizing for believing it to be so, we must plainly lead sinners to see their condition. Nevertheless, note that Paul has not charged harshly into this conclusion. He has carefully and reasonably led them to this point by first presenting the evidence for his case.

Note further that he did not seek for God to save them while they continued in their unbelief. His prayer was that they might repent and meet the gospel conditions. It is likewise good for us to pray for the lost. But our prayer must not be for God to accept them while they remain

impenitent in sin. Rather, we should pray that they might learn the truth, repent, obey, and thus be saved.

See also how Paul's prayer for them contradicts Calvinistic predestination. If God has from eternity unalterably decreed who will be saved and who will be lost, then what good would it do to pray for the lost to be saved? In fact, would we not be contradicting God's decree if we did pray for their salvation? Should we not rather accept the fact that God has decreed them to be lost and even praise Him for His sovereign choice? Paul's prayer clearly shows that man can choose to change his character and conduct and thereby change his destiny. The destiny of man is not unalterable so long as he lives.

### **Israel had zeal for God but lacked knowledge.**

Paul recognized the good qualities the Jews possessed. Though lost, they were not "totally depraved" as Calvinism teaches. They had a zeal for God. They were concerned about His service. They sought to be righteous before Him (9:31; compare Acts 22:3). We should not overlook the good qualities of those we teach. The fact they are wrong in some areas does not mean they are totally wrong. We should not seek to convert them by criticizing and condemning everything they say or do. We should acknowledge good qualities where we find them.

The Jews' problem was, not lack of zeal, but lack of knowledge. They did not know the true way to be made righteous before God. Paul proceeds to explain through the chapter the main points of the gospel that they needed but failed to understand. However, the Jew's ignorance was generally not caused by lack of opportunity. Most of them had heard about Christ and the gospel. Their own Scriptures testified of Him. But like Paul before his conversion, they had rejected that knowledge. Theirs was a case of willful ignorance. Christ and the gospel did not fit their preconceived ideas, so the Jews rejected the evidence. Consider, as a demonstration, the response given to the gospel as it was preached to Jews by Jesus Himself, by Paul, etc.

Religious people today need to learn that religious zeal alone is not sufficient to save. Many people think that all people will be saved, so long as they have some faith in God. They say, "We all worship and serve the same God. It does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere." There are many sincere people today who have zeal for God, like these Jews did. But like them, they also remain unsaved because they do not know and/or have not obeyed the true gospel.

In many cases these people have had the opportunity to learn the truth, but like the Jews they stubbornly refuse to consider the evidence because they are so wedded to their past beliefs. And like the Jews, they remain in sin. Religious zeal and sincerity are good, but not sufficient. We must know and follow the truth (John 8:31,32).

## **They sought their own way to be righteous instead of God's way.**

Verse 3 tells us in what area the Jews lacked knowledge. They were ignorant of God's righteousness (compare 1:17; 3:21; especially Philippians 3:9). As in 1:17, this does not refer to the fact that God is righteous. The Jews knew that and would have disputed with anyone who denied it. Rather, it refers to God's way of making men righteous: "the righteousness which is from God by faith." This is the righteousness that the Gentiles had arrived at but the Jews had not (9:30-33).

The Jews sought their own righteousness. As in 9:31,32, they sought to be declared righteous by the law that they had. But the only way to be right by that law was to live without ever sinning (compare 10:5). Had they achieved that, it would have been "their own righteousness": righteousness that they achieved by their own effort, rather than by forgiveness. They sought that righteousness, but never achieved it, because they all sinned (chapter 3). As a result, they refused to submit to God's way of making them righteous: they rejected forgiveness by the blood of Christ under the gospel.

Once again we are shown clearly the difference between being justified by works of law (a lifetime of sinless living) vs. justification by means of forgiveness through obedient faith in Jesus. The Jews had religious zeal, but wanted to establish their righteousness their own way, which was never the way God ultimately planned to save sinners. After man sinned, that way was barred. But the Jews continued to trust it, and so rejected God's way. One main point of the law was to show people that they will never be saved by sinlessly keeping law (3:20). Note that the problem was not that the Jews could not have been saved under the gospel. They were not predestined to be lost. It was a matter of choice. They refused to submit.

Anytime men seek to follow any plan of justification other than the true gospel, they are "seeking to establish their own righteousness and refusing to submit to God's righteousness." Like the Jews, many today do this by trusting in their own works to save them apart from forgiveness by the gospel. Others do it by following other human plans of salvation, whether Mormonism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.

Still others commit this error by teaching that we are saved by "faith only," so obedience is not essential to salvation. We have repeatedly learned in this book that, in order to save, faith must meet conditions of obedience, including confession (verses 9,10) and baptism (6:3,4). We must then continue in faithful living (see introductory notes for more passages).

Salvation by "faith only" may be the other extreme from the Jews' approach, but it is just as erroneous. It is still not God's way of making men righteous, therefore those who follow it have sought to establish their own way of righteousness and are not submitting to God's way.

They may be full of zeal and sincerity, but they still lack knowledge of the true way of salvation. As with Paul and the Jews, our heart's desire and prayer to God is that they may be saved by the true gospel of Jesus.

***10:4,5 – Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to all who believe. Moses wrote that the man who does righteousness of the law shall live thereby.***

### **Christ is the end of the law.**

Verse 3 had said that the Jews refused to submit themselves to God's righteousness but sought to establish their own. They sought righteousness on the basis of the law. In verse 4 Paul shows that the Jews, had they really believed and understood their own law, would have accepted Christ, since the law was designed to lead men to Christ. Instead of killing Christ and then continuing to reject His gospel even after the resurrection, they should have realized that the law came to lead them to Christ.

"End," both in English and in Greek, can refer to the goal or aim or purpose for which something exists, or it can refer to the termination of a thing by which it ceases to exist or to have power. But sometimes it carries both meanings simultaneously. Compare: "Indianapolis is the end of our journey." It is our goal or destination, and when we arrive there our journey will cease.

So, Jesus is the "end" of the law in both these senses. The goal or destination for which the law existed was to bring us to Christ, as explained in Galatians 3:23-26 (compare Romans 3:20ff). The law continually gave people reason to believe in and accept Jesus when He came. But when He came, the law had accomplished its aim and fulfilled its purpose, so it ceased to remain in power (again as in Galatians 3:23-26). The law ceased to be binding, because it had accomplished its intended goal.

"For righteousness to everyone who believes" describes the reason why the law led people to Jesus. Through Jesus, everyone who believes can be made righteous, as has been repeatedly discussed in the book. This then helps us understand the purpose of the law. It was not given to justify men from sin, because it could do that only if men kept it sinlessly (see verse 5), which none did. Its real purpose was to convince people that they need Jesus, so they would accept His gospel and be made truly righteous.

(Note: that which is "for everyone who believes" is ***righteousness***. The passage does not say that the ***law*** ends for everyone who believes. Christ is the end of the law – its goal and its termination – regardless of whether or not men believe it. What the verse says is that through Christ men are made righteous if they believe.)

"End" (τελος) – "1) end 1a) termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be (always of the end of some act or state, but not



of the end of a period of time) 1b) the end 1b1) the last in any succession or series 1b2) eternal 1c) that by which a thing is finished, its close, issue 1d) the end to which all things relate, the aim, purpose 2) toll, custom (i.e. indirect tax on goods)” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **The law granted righteousness only to those who practiced it.**

Paul now further explains the difference between the righteousness that the Jews sought (verse 3) and the righteousness that Jesus provides (verse 4). He shows that these two ways to become righteous are mutually exclusive. As a result, when the Jews sought to be made righteous under the law, they could not have the righteousness that Christ provides. The only way to be righteous under Christ is to realize that we will never become righteous by the law.

Moses himself said, regarding righteousness under the law, that one received life under the law by doing the commands (Leviticus 18:5; compare Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 20:11,13,21). This is exactly what we have discussed repeatedly and is explained in passages like Galatians 3:10 (compare Deuteronomy 27:26). The only way to stand justified before God under the law was to never violate the law, hence a sinless life. See also Acts 13:39. (This quotation once again shows that the law being referred to here must be the Old Testament law as spoken by Moses.)

Note how this contrasts to the righteousness of faith, as quoted in 1:17: “The just shall live by faith.” So the law says we have life before God by doing the commands without fail. The gospel says we have life by faith. But Paul showed in 3:9-23 and subsequent verses that no one perfectly kept the law. It necessarily follows that the law could not make anyone righteous. Instead of stubbornly holding to the law, the Jews should have appreciated the fact that the law led them to accept Christ.

Note that the Old Testament did teach the need for trust and belief in God – Genesis 15:6; Psalms 40:4; 71:5; 4:5; 9:10; 13:5; 21:7; 22:4,5; 25:2; Proverbs 22:19; etc. And those who lived faithfully under the Old Testament will be saved on the basis of their faith – see Hebrews 11. Yet the fact remains that the law they lived under did not itself provide a real means of forgiveness, no matter how much faith they had. Their forgiveness must come through the death of Jesus, which removed their law and became the sacrifice of the New Testament. But it also went back to cover those who trusted in God under the Old Testament – Hebrews 9:15.

***10:6,7 – The righteousness based on faith does not ask who will ascend into heaven to bring Christ down or who will descend into the abyss to bring Christ up from the dead.***

In contrast to the righteousness of the law, which required a sinless life (verse 5), Paul now gives a brief description of what is taught by the righteousness of faith as taught in the gospel.

In verses 6,7 Paul cites Moses' statements from Deuteronomy 30:12-14. Moses used the statements to teach that the commandment he had revealed was available to them. They could know and understand the teaching without having to do extremely difficult or impossible things, such as go into heaven or descend into the abyss (compare Luke 8:31; Revelation 17:8; 20:1). The law was available, but still the people were condemned because they did not keep it.

In verses 6-8 Paul alludes to statements by Moses, but his intent is not to quote the passages or explain Moses' application. Rather, he borrows the idea and applies it to the righteousness of faith. Just as the commandment of the law was available without extreme hardship, so under the gospel righteousness is available and attainable. Men don't have to do impossible things to be justified. On the basis of what God has provided, we can fully believe and be saved. We do not need someone to go to heaven and bring Christ down for us to see and believe. We do not need someone to go to the abode of the dead and bring Jesus back from the dead for us to see and believe that He was raised from the dead. We already have all we need in the gospel (John 20:30,31; Luke 16:19-31).

Note: If in the first century, justification from sin was available through faith in Christ, what need do we have for additional revelation today? Why would we need more evidence or more signs to produce faith, so long as we have the gospel? Those who expect or desire further revelation or further signs today are like the unbelieving Jews who would not accept the signs revealed by Jesus and His apostles, but still asked for more signs.

***10:8-10 – The righteousness of faith says the word of faith is in your mouth and in your heart, that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes to righteousness and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.***

***The word is near you.***

In the comparison to the old law in verses 6,7, Paul has said that the righteousness of faith is available to man. He continues in verse 8 by saying that it is near, in your mouth and heart. He again applies this to the message of faith. Just as the command was available to Israel in Moses' day, so the word that produces faith is available today (see verses 14-17).

The gospel message of salvation was easily available to men. But that message produces faith in receptive hearts, and that faith in turn leads to justification. So, men had God's **command** available to them under the law, but **righteousness** was not really available since no one kept the law. By way of contrast, under the gospel righteousness itself is available to all on the basis of faith. The Jews should have appreciated their need for the gospel, instead of rejecting it.

Do we appreciate the fact that righteousness is truly available to us today? Do we think that serving God faithfully and receiving eternal life is nearly impossible today? Do we observe all the sin and error around us to the point that we become so discouraged we think we cannot make it to heaven ourselves? Salvation is not easy, but it is available to those who are committed to seeking it at all costs. But remember that it does not require sinless perfection. It does require forgiveness.

Having introduced the fact that justification by faith is available, Paul gives a brief overview through verses 9-15 of justification by faith. Verses 9,10 emphasize two conditions of the gospel.

### **Believe in your heart.**

Besides confession, Paul lists faith as a prerequisite to salvation. Faith, of course, is the condition emphasized throughout Romans because it is so basic. But it must lead to and necessarily include the other specific conditions in order to be true saving faith. See also Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16.

This faith must reside in one's heart. This implies that it must be sincerely meant in the inner man, not just an outward show. The words confessed are meaningless sounds unless the confessor sincerely believes them in his heart to be true.

And specifically, we are told that we must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is essential to our salvation just as surely as is Jesus' death. The crucifixion would be empty without the resurrection. So, God requires that we must believe in the resurrection to be saved. Consider the implications of this for many people today who claim to be followers of Jesus but who doubt or deny that He literally arose from the dead as a historical fact. See Romans 1:4; 6:4-13; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:1-26; Luke 24:44-46; John 20:24-31; Acts 2:23-36; 17:30,31; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Peter 1:3,4; 3:21; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Ephesians 1:19,20; Colossians 2:12,13.

### **Confess with your mouth Christ as Lord.**

To be saved from sin, not only must one have faith in his heart, but one must also be willing to openly state his willingness to follow Jesus as His Lord. Many other passages describe the need for confessing Christ

or give examples of it. See Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

In these passages people confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, etc. The essence of confession is a statement that we accept as true all that the Bible says about Jesus and all that He claimed for Himself. In particular, verse 9 emphasizes confessing Him as Lord: Master, Ruler, the one whom we must follow and obey. This must be understood in what we say; but other passages regarding confession show that confession can be worded in various ways, some of which do not directly use the word "Lord." The variety in the wording of Bible examples of confession shows that we are not required to quote some specific formula. The point is that the confessor and those who hear should recognize that we accept Jesus to be who the Bible says He is.

Note that the passage expressly states that confession is essential in order to receive salvation, and Paul is here discussing what is involved in justification by faith (verses 1-8). Yet confession is plainly stated in verses 9,10 to be something separate from faith itself. We are told that we must have faith in our hearts, but confession is something done with our **mouths**. By definition, this makes confession an outward action of obedience, yet it is clearly stated to be essential to salvation. Furthermore, confessing Jesus as "Lord" necessarily involves recognizing Him as one we must obey. That people can believe in Jesus and yet refuse to confess is clear from John 12:42,43; therefore, faith and confession are separate conditions both of which are required for salvation.

It follows that here, in the very midst of Paul's discussion of justification by faith, we have another absolute proof that justification by faith includes and requires obedience and specifically even includes outward acts of observable conduct as conditions of salvation. If this is so, then on what Scriptural grounds can anyone possibly deny that outward acts of obedience are essential to salvation under the gospel?

Specifically, if the outward act of confession is essential to salvation, why should anyone deny that the act of baptism is also essential, as stated in Romans 6:3,4 and elsewhere (see notes there)? Nothing about the concept of justification by faith eliminates the need for obedience, specifically confession and baptism. On the contrary, saving faith is always obedient faith, and without obedience it is a dead faith that cannot save. See our introductory notes for lists of other passages showing that obedience is required under the gospel.

Note that verses 9,10 are not intended to be a complete, detailed discussion of all that is involved in justification by faith. If they were, why would we need the rest of the book of Romans, let alone other New Testament books? Paul is here giving just some of the principles involved in justification by faith. To understand the whole, we must also take other passages.

That this is true is clear from the following points: (1) Surely the resurrection is not the only thing we must believe. There is much more involved in saving faith, yet only the resurrection is mentioned specifically here. Compare Hebrews 11:6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; etc. (2) Confession involves more than just the fact Jesus is Lord. It also must imply that He is our Savior, Son of God, etc. (3) Neither repentance nor baptism is specifically mentioned in the chapter, and yet other passages show they are essential to salvation.

**For further discussion of the role of obedience (and baptism specifically) in our salvation, see articles on this subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

Note that confession must continue in a person's daily life. This is emphasized in other passages. But verses 9,10 refer to the confession one must do to be saved initially (this is clear from the expressions "you will be saved," "unto salvation," and from the context which is surely discussing initial justification, especially of the Jews who were unsaved – compare verses 1-3,11-17). In this sense confession may be compared to faith, love for God, and even repentance. These must exist before baptism in order for one to be truly forgiven of past sins and become a child of God. But they must also continue in order for the Christian to grow and remain in God's favor.

"Confess" (ομολογεω) – "1) to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent 2) to concede 2a) not to refuse, to promise 2b) not to deny 2b1) to confess 2b2) declare 2b3) to confess, i.e. to admit or declare one's self guilty of what one is accused of 3) to profess 3a) to declare openly, speak out freely 3b) to profess one's self the worshipper of one 4) to praise, celebrate" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"...1. to commit oneself to do someth. for someone, *promise, assure* ... 2. to share a common view or be of common mind about a matter, *agree* ... 3. to concede that something is factual or true, *grant, admit, confess* ... 4. to acknowledge someth., ordinarily in public, *acknowledge, claim, profess, praise*..." – Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich.

**10:11-13 – Whoever believes on Him will not be disappointed, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord is Lord of all, rich to all who call upon Him, for whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

**Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame**

This Old Testament quotation is from Isaiah 28:16. Paul quoted it earlier in Romans 9:33 (see notes there). The passage confirms from Old Testament Scripture that, when the Messiah came, faith in Him would

be required. This in turn confirms the emphasis given on faith in verses 9,10 and throughout Romans.

One who believes or trusts in Jesus will not be put to shame (“disappointed” – NASB) or let down (as sometimes we are when we put our trust in people). He will not be sorry or given cause to be ashamed of the fact that he put his trust in Jesus. In the judgment we can stand confident, if we trust Jesus now. Conversely, if we fail to believe in Him, we will be put to shame (Philippians 3:18,19; Revelation 16:15; 3:18; 1 John 2:28). So, the Old Testament predicts that salvation under the gospel would be based on faith.

But the point of special interest is the word “whoever” or “he that.” This would include any person. So, by implication, Jew or Gentile could believe in Him; and whatever race or nationality he was, he would not be put to shame. This is the application Paul makes in the following verses.

Note: What does “put to shame” mean? Is it saying that Christians should not be ashamed to confess Jesus (verses 9,10)? Rather, Paul refers to the need for unbelievers to believe and confess Christ. If they do, they will never have reason to be ashamed of their faith. The context refers to the salvation of unbelievers (see on verses 9,10). Nothing in the context implies that Christians were neglecting to confess Christ. They had confessed Him so well that verses 16-19 show that the Jews had heard of Him. When Paul quoted this statement in 9:33, he applied it to unbelieving Jews, who needed to believe in Jesus. The word appears to refer to people who are ashamed for something they have done in the past, rather than to people who are ashamed to do a thing.

“Ashamed” (καταισχυνω) – “1) to dishonour, disgrace 2) to put to shame, make ashamed 2a) to be ashamed, blush with shame 2b) one is said to be put to shame who suffers a repulse, or whom some hope has deceived” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The Lord is over all and rich toward all who call on Him.**

That is, there is no distinction on basis of nationality as regards their relationship to their Lord Jesus (see the last part of this verse). This is the very point Paul has been making throughout the book (see 9:24 and the references there). Under the gospel, both Jew and Gentile have equal access on the same grounds and conditions to God’s favor and blessings. The Jews no longer have any special access to God’s blessings.

The Jews never were favored in the sense that they would automatically be saved eternally just because they were Jews. But they were favored in that God chose them to be the tool He used to develop His plan for man’s salvation. Many of them had been more receptive to God’s will than had the Gentiles, so more of them were spiritually acceptable to God; but that was their choice, not because God chose to save them all regardless of their conduct.

The same Lord is over all and is rich toward all who call on Him. This explains the sense in which the gospel makes no distinction on the basis of nationality. God (specifically Jesus) is Lord of all men, Jew and Gentile, because He created them all. He loves and is concerned for them all, and chooses to deal with them all on the same basis. His universal lordship demands that He richly provide salvation for all.

Note that Calvinism denies all this by saying that God calls only certain ones, and will save only certain ones, regardless of the character or will of men. This flatly contradicts the point of verses 9-21 that all men can be saved and man must choose to accept God's terms of salvation. If God is Lord of all, it is only reasonable that He offer salvation to all on the same basis (compare notes on 8:28-30). Compare Acts 10:34-36 where a similar expression is used to make the same point.

Note that, here and in verse 13, "Lord" refers to Jesus. He is the Lord we must confess (verse 9). He is the One whom all must believe, call on, and hear about (see notes on verses 9-15). In particular, He is the One the Jews, whom Paul is here discussing (chapter 9-11), would not believe or call upon (compare 9:30-33). The connection between 9:33 and 10:11 is that Jesus is the tried cornerstone in whom the Jews refused to believe. Jews would believe and call on the God of the Old Testament, but they were unwilling to believe in and call upon Jesus. Yet, here Paul affirms that He is "Lord of all," the Lord on whom they must believe and call as taught in Old Testament prophecy.

In using the terms "Lord of all" (verse 12) and "the Lord" (verse 13), Paul is using unique Old Testament names for the one true God, Jehovah (Joel 2:32, the Old Testament passage quoted in verse 13, contains "Jehovah" in the original language, but it is translated "Lord" in verse 13). So Paul is arguing that Jews must accept Jesus, not just as their great King, but also as Deity: the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the ruler of all mankind, not just of the Jews.

He is rich toward all who call upon him. "Rich" (compare 9:23) refers to the fullness of the blessings that the Lord provides: the riches of His mercy that offers every spiritual blessing now and the hope of eternal glory after death. These riches are for "all": Jew and Gentile.

**For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."**

Here Paul quotes another Old Testament passage (Joel 2:32) to prove the point he has just made in verse 12 – that all men, Jew or Gentile, may call upon the Lord and be saved. The passages say "whoever" calls upon Him will be saved. Any man can meet the conditions and, if he does, he will receive the blessing. There is no limit regarding race or nationality or any other limit other than a heart willing to believe God's will and obey.

Again, this fully contradicts Calvinism, since this demonstrates that God gives each man free will to choose his own destiny. The passage lays

the choice of who will be saved squarely up to each individual to choose whether or not he will call upon the Lord to save him. God wills to save all and offers salvation to all. But man must choose to call upon the Lord.

Since the goal of calling on the name of the Lord is salvation, the application is clearly to unsaved people, urging them to appeal to God for forgiveness. What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? It means to appeal to God to give blessings He has promised: to appeal to His authority or will in accordance with whatever conditions He has stated. When God states the conditions on which He offers someone any blessing, then one calls upon the Lord to receive that blessing by meeting the stipulated conditions, whatever they may be. In this way, one calls or appeals to God to give him the promised blessing. Compare Isaiah 55:6-9; Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21; Isaiah 58:6-9. For the Christian, this calling may include many things, among them prayer (1 Kings 18:24ff; Psalms 4:1,3; 86:1-10; 102:1,2; 2 Timothy 2:22). But for the non-Christian appealing for salvation, the conditions are different.

When an alien sinner seeks to appeal to God for forgiveness, how does he call on the name of the Lord? He does so by meeting whatever conditions God specifies in His word. What conditions are required? Note that verses 14-16 clearly show that the conditions require more than just believing. One calls on the name of the Lord **after** he believes. Calling is a separate act from believing, just like believing is separate from hearing. Here again is proof positive that the sinner is not saved by faith alone!

Other passages show that, to be saved, one must hear and believe the gospel message (verses 14,15,9,10), then repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9), then confess Christ (verses 9,10; Matthew 10:32; Acts 8:37), then be baptized (Romans 6:3,4; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21).

That these conditions constitute calling on the name of the Lord is clear from Acts 2:21,38, where Peter quotes this same Old Testament passage. When asked by the hearers what they must do (to be saved), Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." Here, all the ideas of Romans 10 are tied together. The blessing offered is salvation or remission of sins (Acts 2:38 compare Romans 10:9-13). It is offered to all (Acts 2:38,39 compare Romans 10:11-13). It is offered in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38 compare Romans 10:13). It is offered to those who believe (Acts 2:36 compare Romans 10:9-14), but calling on the Lord is something in addition to believing (Romans 10:14); it requires repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:38). (Romans 10:9,10 shows that confessing Christ is also required, but it is not all that is required, as shown by these other passages. Note Matthew 7:21.)

This is confirmed by Acts 22:16, where Saul was told to be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Again, calling



on the name of the Lord is specifically stated to be something more than believing in Jesus (since Saul already believed). And it is different from prayer (since Saul had been doing that – Acts 9:11). But he still needed to call on the name of the Lord. He did that by obeying the command to be baptized. An alien sinner cannot truly call on the name of the Lord to have his sins washed away without being baptized.

Many advocates of salvation by “faith alone” will tell us that “calling on the name of the Lord” refers to “praying the sinner’s prayer” to be forgiven. True, some passages say a **Christian** may call on the Lord in prayer. But an alien sinner does not call on the name of the Lord for salvation by means of prayer, let alone by “faith only.” This is proved by the following facts:

(1) We have already proved from Romans 10:14-16 that calling on the name of the Lord is something separate from and in addition to faith. Therefore, the alien sinner does not call on the name of the Lord by faith alone. And further, if a person claims to believe in salvation by faith alone, but then he says we must pray for forgiveness, he has contradicted himself. Prayer is not faith but is more than faith, so if one must pray for forgiveness, then he is not saved by faith alone!

(2) No New Testament Scripture anywhere ever tells an **alien sinner** to pray for forgiveness. Such a passage simply does not exist. All passages that refer to praying for forgiveness are talking about people who are already children of God but who sinned as children of God.

(3) Matthew 7:21-23 and Luke 6:46 state that we are not saved simply by confessing Jesus to be Lord; rather, we must obey Him. So, calling on the name of the Lord for salvation requires more than just speech.

(4) Saul, in Acts 9:9,11 prayed for three days after coming to believe in Jesus. But he still had his sins. He was not forgiven by faith alone or by prayer. He had to be baptized to call on the name of the Lord to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

(5) As shown above, Acts 2:21,38 confirms that calling on the name of the Lord requires repenting and being baptized.

So any man, Jew or Gentile, can call on the Lord for salvation. But he does this after he has heard the gospel and believed in Jesus (verses 14-16). He does it by repenting of sins, confessing Jesus, and being baptized for remission of sins. This is God’s plan of salvation for “whoever” would be saved – no exceptions.

**For further discussion of the role of faith and baptism in salvation, see our articles on our Bible Instruction web site. Included are articles about the importance of baptism, alien sinners praying for forgiveness, and salvation by faith alone vs. obedient faith. All these can be found at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

Note that the original passage as quoted in from Joel 2:32 says men must call upon the name of the Lord. But the original Hebrew says the name of Jehovah, so man must call upon the name of Jehovah. But Paul here applies it to calling on Jesus, therefore to call upon Jesus is to call upon Jehovah. This is one of the many evidences implying that, not only does Jesus possess Deity, but He is also called Jehovah.

***10:14,15 – How can one call on Him without believing, and how can one believe without hearing, and how can one hear without a preacher, and how can one preach without being sent? So it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things.***

Here Paul gives a series of rhetorical questions that are clearly answered from things discussed in context and from the readers' knowledge. All questions receive the same answer. The questions are intended to prove, especially to the unbelieving Jews, that they cannot be saved without faith (compare 9:32), and they cannot be saved without the gospel.

**“How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?”**

Paul has just proved from the Jews' Scriptures that they had to appeal (call upon) Jesus for salvation. But how can one truly call upon Jesus for salvation, if one has no faith in Jesus? The answer is obvious: He cannot! It is an impossibility (and this is the answer to all the rest of the questions in the series as well). This is confirmed by many other passages showing that faith is required to salvation, as has been shown repeatedly throughout the book (see the introduction for passages).

So, if one must call upon Jesus to be saved, as promised in the Old Testament, then one must believe to be saved. The unbelieving Jews needed to understand this. They did not believe, so they were not saved.

And note again that believing and calling are two separate conditions, just like hearing and believing are two separate requirements. But calling on the Lord is essential to salvation; therefore, we are not saved by faith only!

**“How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?”**

Again, the necessarily implied answer is that they cannot. It is impossible to believe in something about which you know nothing. So, you cannot believe in Christ apart from the gospel message. Many other passages show that hearing the gospel is essential to salvation, just as surely as is believing it. Note verse 17.

The conclusion is that no man can be saved without hearing the gospel. And once again we have a direct contradiction to the Calvinistic theory that faith is a direct gift that comes to the sinner by direct action of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the sinner apart from the word. This

passage, like the others listed below, show that it is just as impossible to believe apart from hearing the gospel as it is to call upon the Lord and be saved apart from believing. See further notes on verse 17 below.

See also John 6:44,45; 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Romans 1:16; 10:13,14,17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Revelation 3:20.

### **“How shall they hear without a preacher.”**

This question must be answered the same as the others in the sequence: They cannot hear without a preacher. It is impossible. This not only affirms that men cannot believe without hearing, but it affirms that the hearing must come from human vessels: preachers (compare 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; 4:7). It does not come by direct action of the Holy Spirit apart from gospel preaching.

But what “preacher” does this refer to? Does this mean that people can be saved only if they are instructed by a teacher who is living on earth and personally speaks to them? Absolutely not! Today we have the Bible which any man can read, understand, and thereby come to salvation. But when we study the Scriptures, we are being taught by “preachers”: the men who by inspiration wrote the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:15-17; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Isaiah 55:11; Psalm 119:104,105,130; 1 Timothy 2:4)

The fact we need a preacher so we can hear the gospel refers to the inspired men who wrote the Scriptures by the guidance of the Holy Spirit: the first-century apostles and prophets. It has no reference to modern-day preachers, for we can surely learn the truth without them. But none of us could know the truth were it not for the inspired men who wrote the Bible.

Yet, it is significant that we can learn the truth only through the message delivered by human agents. God’s plan of justification by the blood of Jesus according to the gospel was never revealed directly to any unconverted sinner apart from instruction by an inspired teacher, not even in the first century; it came only through inspired men. Angels, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Himself were involved in giving people such as Saul, Cornelius, and the Ethiopian treasurer opportunities to learn the truth. But in every case an inspired preacher had to teach the sinner. None of them ever learned the truth directly from the Spirit, from Jesus, or from an angel (Acts 8:26ff; 9:6ff; 11:14).

### **“How shall they preach unless they are sent?”**

Again, it is impossible. The gospel messengers had to be sent by Jesus and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to take the message to the lost sinners (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 14:47; Acts 1:8).

But this refers to the inspired preachers sent in the first century to carry the gospel message to the lost and to record it in Scripture. It has no reference to men today who preach the gospel. People miss the point

of the passage when they use this to claim that modern preachers must be called and chosen by a denomination or by some missionary organization. We surely can learn the truth without such preachers, and men can go and preach the gospel without such organizations.

Faithful churches should send and support men to preach the gospel, but this is not the point referred to here. In fact, every Christian is responsible to teach the gospel to the extent of his ability (see Acts 8:1,4; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; Hebrews 3:12-14; 5:12-14; 10:24; James 5:19,20; 1 Peter 3:15).

### **“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace”**

This quotation from Isaiah 52:7 ties to the theme of Romans. Romans shows that all men need the gospel to be justified. No one can be saved without faith, and he cannot believe without the message revealed by inspired men. Therefore, the message of glad tidings of good things – the gospel of peace – is a great blessing. And the sending of those inspired men who revealed the gospel was a beautiful thing.

This is poetically expressed here by describing the beauty of their feet. In Isaiah’s day, modern communication did not exist, so important messages were sent by means of runners who would personally carry them to the people addressed. One who carried good news by means of his feet was received with joy. Probably this is the origin of the reference here to the beauty of the feet.

***10:16,17 – They did not all listen to the message, as Isaiah said, “Who has believed our report?” So faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.***

### **They have not all obeyed the gospel.**

Paul has shown that salvation is truly available to all by obedience to the gospel (calling on the name of the Lord), whereas those who cling to the Old Testament law have no means of being justified. He has shown further that, though God used the Jewish nation to develop His plan, yet in general the Jews rejected the benefits of the plan, because they refused to believe in Christ and clung instead to the Old Testament law (9:1-10:3). Now, in verses 16-21, he quotes Old Testament prophecy confirming that this would be the case.

Isaiah had asked the question: “Lord who has believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1). The message was truly good news for all mankind (verse 15, compare Isaiah 52:7). But it will not save those who do not believe, and many Jews would not believe (verse 16, compare Isaiah 53:1; compare John 12:37,38). Paul has demonstrated by the Old Testament itself that, when Christ came, the Jewish people in general would not receive Him.

So Paul concludes that they have not all obeyed the gospel. The responsibility for their condemnation does not lie with God or with the

gospel; it lay with the Jews themselves, for they were unwilling to meet the conditions. All can be saved by the gospel, but only if they believe and obey. The Jews refused, so they will not be saved. Note again, how this thoroughly contradicts Calvinism: the Jews had the power to choose and they chose error instead of truth.

**Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

This conclusion follows, not so much from verse 16, as from verses 13-15. Paul had showed that it is impossible for men to believe without hearing, and it is impossible for men to hear except by the preaching of the gospel. Now he reaches the conclusion that faith comes by hearing the gospel. See notes on verse 14 for the discussion there on the importance of hearing the gospel.

Note further, how the parallel of verse 17 to verses 14,15 shows that the “preaching” and “sending” of verses 14,15 refers to the same thing as the “word of God” (verse 17). It is the message that God sent inspired men to preach. Whether it is heard in spoken form or in written form, either way we must learn the truth from the message God inspired men to write. There is no other way to be saved. Compare Acts 14:1.

***10:18,19 – Did Israel hear? Yes, the words went throughout all the earth. Did they know? Moses said God would provoke Israel to jealousy with that which is not a nation, angering them with a nation void of understanding.***

**But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed.**

Hearing the gospel is essential to believing, so one can be saved (verses 14-17). But the Jews did not all believe (verse 16). Could it be that they did not believe because they did not hear? Was their unbelief excusable on the ground that they had no opportunity to know better? Paul answers that indeed they did hear. Their problem was not a lack of opportunity to know the truth. Paul illustrates this also by an Old Testament quotation.

“Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” This is quoted from Psalms 19:4. That passage refers to the knowledge men have of God’s existence and power as demonstrated by the universe He has made. Paul does not say the passage was a prophecy regarding the Jews’ reaction to the gospel. He simply borrows the idea and applies it to them (much as in verses 6-8).

The point is that the message of the gospel had been preached to the Jews by the Christians in the first century, especially by the inspired apostles and prophets. Paul himself had done much of it. See Colossians 1:6,23; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Romans 1:8. So, the gospel message was heard just as universally among the Jews as the message of God’s existence was made known by the universe. There was no excuse whatever for the Jews. They did not lack opportunity to know and

believe. Their ignorance was willful. They heard yet refused to believe, because they were committed to seeking a different way of justification (verses 2,3).

**Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.”**

Paul continues showing that Israel heard and knew the gospel message (compare verses 18,19). Did they hear? Did they know? Yes, they did. He repeats the kind of approach he had used in 9:24-33. The Old Testament itself showed that the Gentiles would be accepted and the Jews would reject God’s will.

The first passage cited is from Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21. This is part of the song Moses taught the people showing what their future would be if they rejected God’s commands. It is amazing that the Jews could not bring themselves to believe that God could reject them, considering the plain prophecies that they would reject Him and He would punish them.

Specifically, God predicted that He would arouse Israel to jealousy by dealing with other nations, just as they had aroused Him to jealousy by their disobedience. This appears to refer to God’s use of other nations to punish Israel for their sins, but Paul here applies the principle to God’s acceptance of Gentiles under the gospel. While the passage does not specify when and how God would provoke them to jealousy and anger by another nation, yet it shows that God would deal with other nations because of Israel’s sins. This illustrates what God did in the New Testament, and should leave the Jews unsurprised at the results of the gospel.

The Jews had been God’s nation, and in their view other nations (Gentiles) were no nation– they were surely not God’s nation. The Gentiles were void of understanding and knowledge of God, hence foolish. But God would bless them in a way that would cause Israel to be jealous and angry. This is exactly what happened when the gospel was preached to Gentiles and many of them accepted it. There was no excuse for the Jews who rejected the gospel and as a result lost God’s favor. He had warned them about this repeatedly.

***10:20,21 – Isaiah boldly said that God was found of those who did not seek Him, but He said to Israel that He spread out His hands to a disobedient and contrary people all day long.***

**I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.**

Paul continues quoting Old Testament passages that illustrate his point. He says Isaiah boldly said that God would be manifest to and be found by those who did not seek or ask for Him (Isaiah 65:1). This is quoted from an entire chapter that expresses God’s condemnation of

Israel (verse 21 below continues quoting from Isaiah 65:2). God would punish Israel, but a remnant would remain.

Verse 20, quoted from Isaiah 65:1, repeats that God would extend mercy to those who had not formerly been His people. He would reveal Himself to those who formerly had no interest in knowing about Him. The rest of Isaiah 65:1 shows this as well, as God calls out to a nation that was not called by His name, yet he makes Himself known to them.

This is indeed very bold and clear. Any Jew should understand that God intended to offer blessings to the Gentiles and that this would result from the sins of the Jews. They should not have been surprised if God did this under the gospel.

**All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.**

This continues quoting from Isaiah 65:2. Paul says this refers to the nation of Israel. Whereas God would make Himself known to the Gentiles (verse 20, compare Isaiah 65:1), the Jews, to whom He had been appealing for a long time, would be contrary and disobedient. God turned to the Gentiles partly because of the rebellion of the Jews. He had stretched out His hands to Israel for years, imploring them to obey Him and receive His blessings. But throughout their history, they had disobeyed and rebelled. Never was this true more so than in their attitude toward Jesus and His apostles and prophets.

So, the Jews had no one to blame but themselves for their fall from God's favor. And they should not have been surprised by God's rejection of them as a nation or by His offer of salvation to Gentiles. The Jews' own Scriptures had prophesied it. Compare Acts 13:45; 18:5,6.



# Romans 11

## Chapter 11 - Israel Yet Had Hope for the Future.

In chapter 11, Paul continues discussing the role of fleshly Israel in God's plan to save men by the gospel (chapters 9-11). He has discussed God's ***past*** dealings with fleshly Israel. They no longer have the special place in God's purpose that they once did, and God had a right to so decide.

Though God had used Israel to develop His plan and to bring Jesus into the world, yet they still could not be saved by Jesus unless they believed in Him. In general they had refused to believe (9:30-33), so they still stood in need of salvation (10:1-15). They were a disobedient people despite having advantages in knowing the truth (10:16-21). There was no excuse for them.

In chapter 11 Paul begins a discussion of Israel's ***present*** alternatives and opportunities. He answers questions that would arise regarding whether or not they are beyond hope, and uses the fall of Israel as a warning to the Gentiles to remain faithful.

***11:1 – So, did God reject His people? Definitely not. Paul himself was an Israelite of the seed of Abraham and the tribe of Benjamin.***

A natural Jewish response to all Paul has said would be to ask if God has cast off His people. They had been God's covenant nation under the Old Law. Is Paul saying they now no longer have any place in God's plan? Have they been so utterly rejected that there is no hope for any of them to please God?

The question does not use the word "all," yet it is clearly implied. Has God cast off ***all*** His people? This is clear because chapter 9,10 have shown that Israel generally has been rejected. Furthermore, we will see that Paul's response to the question shows that ***not all*** have been cast away (verses 1-10). There is still a remnant in God's favor.

Paul's initial response was: "Certainly not!" ("God forbid" – ASV). No, God has not summarily rejected all Israelites. The proof Paul offered was that he himself was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, and he obviously considered himself to be in favor with God. He was even an apostle. So he could not possibly be understood to mean that the case for all Jews was hopeless.

"Cast off" (αποθεω) means "to thrust away, push away, repel ... i.e., to repudiate, reject, refuse" (Thayer). See Acts 7:27,39; 13:46; 1 Timothy



1:19 (compare Jeremiah 2:36,37; 4:30; 6:19; Psalm 93:14). See Jeremiah 31:37.

The idea, as used here, seems to be a full, complete, immutable rejection. It carries the idea of considering a thing worthless as a whole, so everything is rejected. It is like throwing a whole article in the garbage in contrast to salvaging part of it and throwing away the rest.

***11:2-4 – God had not cast off the people which He had foreknown. Elijah illustrated this when he accused Israel of having killed the prophets and destroyed God’s altars, leaving only Elijah whom they sought to kill. But God responded that He had seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal.***

### **God foreknew Israel.**

Paul offers a further proof that God did not cast away all Israelites based on the fact that God foreknew them (compare 8:29,30). As already discussed, God foreknew there would be different kinds of people. Some people would be willing to serve Him faithfully, so God foreordained that this kind of person would be saved. But it has been repeatedly shown that such people are found in all nations, including Jews, but not just Jews (10:9-15; 9:24ff; 1:16; etc.). If God had wholesale cast off all Jews, then that would mean He cast off some of those who were the kind He foreknew and foreordained to save. That would contradict His own intent.

Whiteside, Vincent, Lard and others think the “foreknowing” refers to the fact that, before the New Testament came into effect while the Old Testament still was in effect, God accepted (“knew”) into His spiritual fellowship people among the Jews who served Him faithfully (the remnant). Surely, then He would still be willing to accept under the gospel those Jews who served Him faithfully. He would not summarily reject them all, so we should expect that there would still be a remnant. That may be true, but the above explanation seems more reasonable to me in this context.

This helps confirm that chapter 9 was not discussing a choice whether or not to save Israel eternally. They had never been God’s people in the sense that all of them would be saved spiritually. They were His people in that He used them to develop His purposes. Now Paul shows that the fact they have ceased to be His special people likewise does not mean they are all spiritually lost. The spiritual salvation of individual Jews was not determined either by their being chosen as a nation or by their being rejected as a nation. God was using the nation to make salvation available to all men. But whether or not any individual Jew would be saved would depend on what choices he personally made in his own life.

## God's remnant in the time of Elijah

Paul uses the case of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10 to illustrate his point. Most Israelites in Elijah's day had rejected God. They had killed many of the prophets and had torn down the altars of worship to the true God. Elijah thought he was the only faithful man left, and he was about to be killed (so, by implication, no one would be left).

God responded to Elijah that He still had seven thousand men who were faithful to Him (they had not served Baal). Elijah was not the only faithful one, as he thought. The point is that the faithful in that day were a remnant. Not all were rejected, despite the fact that the majority were unfaithful.

***11:5,6 – So there was a remnant according to grace in Paul's day. But if it is by grace, it is not of works; otherwise grace is not grace.***

### So a faithful remnant existed in Paul's day.

Paul applies the case of Elijah (verses 2-4) to teach that the same was true of Israel in his day. There was still a remnant according to the election of grace. A faithful few were still pleasing to God, of which Paul himself was one. There were others, but they were a minority of the Jews. The Jewish nation would no longer be used by God, because His plan through them had been fulfilled. That did not mean all of them would be lost, but it was an individual matter who would be saved or lost. God would neither save nor reject the whole nation spiritually.

"According to the election of grace" shows that those who were spiritually acceptable would be chosen, not because of physical birth into a nation, but by God's plan to save men through Jesus' blood, as has been discussed throughout the letter.

"Remnant" (λειμμα) means "that which is left ... Romans 11:5 ... While in one sense there has been and is a considerable number, yet, compared with the whole nation, past and present, the remnant is small..." (Vine). The word here is a related but different word from that used in 9:27. The idea is a small part which survives the general destruction of the whole.

Old Testament references to the "remnant" or "residue" are as follows:

Miscellaneous references: 1 Kings 14:10; Ezekiel 23:25; Joshua 23:12; 2 Samuel 21:2; Jeremiah 39:9; Hab. 2:8; Isaiah 14:22; 16:14; 17:3; Zephaniah 1:4; Isaiah 14:30; 15:9; Jeremiah 11:23; 25:20; 47:4,5; Ezekiel 25:16; Amos 1:8; 9:12.

Prophecies of the New Testament: Micah 5:3; Isaiah 1:9 (compare Romans 9:29); Joel 2:32 (compare Acts 2:16-21); Isaiah 20:20-22 (compare Romans 9:27); 11:11,16 (second time); Jeremiah 23:3; 44:12,14,28; Micah 4:7; 5:7,8; 7:18; Zephaniah 3:13.

Physical return of a remnant from captivity: Zephaniah 2:9; Ezekiel 14:22; 2 Kings 19:4,30,31; 21:14; 2 Chronicles 30:6; 34:9; Nehemiah 1:3; Isaiah 37:4,31,32; Ezra 3:8; 9:13,14; Isaiah 46:3; Jeremiah 6:9; 31:7; 40:11,15; 41:16; 42:2,15,19; 43:5; Ezekiel 5:10; 6:8; 11:13; Amos 5:15; Micah 2:12; Zephaniah 2:7; Haggai 1:12,14; Zechariah 8:6,12.

Many passages in the last two categories are used with dual applications (physical and spiritual).

See notes on 8:33,29,30 regarding “election.” Those whom God elects or chooses to be His spiritual people are those who respond in faith and obedience to His gracious offer of forgiveness. Nothing here or elsewhere says the election is unconditional having nothing to do with the character or will of the people.

Those who are faithful to God today are still a remnant. True servants of God have always been in the minority. Many people are not willing to accept this, and it surely is difficult for the faithful. Nevertheless, it is what the Bible teaches. See Jesus’ statement in Matthew 7:13,14. On the other hand, in Elijah’s day there were many more faithful people than he thought there were. Likewise, it is often possible that we are unaware of others who are pleasing to God. We should stand faithfully no matter what the circumstances are, and God will determine who is and is not pleasing to Him.

### **The election is based on grace, not works.**

This is almost a parenthetical comment on the “election of grace” in verse 5. The Jews, who would be part of the remnant that God accepts under the gospel, would be saved by grace, not works. This emphasizes that salvation is not **merited** by man, but is given us by **unmerited** favor (grace). Yet some take these passages out of context, ignore the teaching of other passages, and conclude that **no works** are required at all to receive the benefits of God’s grace. See notes on Romans 3:20ff and chapter 4, where we have discussed this at length.

Remember:

(1) Many passages elsewhere (including this very context in chapter 6 & 10) show that men must meet conditions to receive God’s grace. These conditions are often referred to as obedience or works (Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6).

(2) If such passages as this teach no works or obedience of any kind are necessary, then even faith is not necessary, for it is a work and a command (John 6:28,29; 1 John 3:23). Likewise, love is not necessary, for it is the greatest command (Matthew 22:36ff). Repentance is not necessary, for it is a command (Acts 17:30). And confession is not necessary for it is something a person does with his mouth (Romans 10:9,10).

To be consistent, those who would use verses such as this to try to eliminate the necessity of baptism, would end up eliminating all conditions, even those they believe are necessary! By whatever means they prove these conditions are necessary, the same approach would prove that baptism is necessary (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21). After baptism, a faithful life is also necessary.

(3) In the context of Romans, “works” refers to a system of justification, like the Old Law, whereby one had to earn salvation by living a sinless life: **perfect** obedience in which forgiveness and grace were not needed because no sins were committed. Compare 10:5.

(4) This meaning is especially clear in the contrast of the immediate passage. Grace is unmerited favor. The works considered here must be works of **merit**: works which earn or deserve salvation without grace. Paul is clearly contrasting grace and works. Grace means unmerited, therefore the works he contrasts to it must be meritorious works.

The only kind of works that could **earn** salvation would be sinless lawkeeping for a whole lifetime, for if one ever sins then he has earned death (Romans 6:23) and cannot earn eternal life no matter what he does. But no one but Jesus lived a whole sinless life (3:23). So, no one will ever be saved by perfect meritorious obedience. We need grace to forgive our sins.

This does not mean, however, that we are free to keep sinning and expect God’s grace to cover the sins (see chapter 6). Such a practice nullifies grace, for God will not offer grace under such conditions. Grace is conditional, but meeting the conditions does not merit the favor. The very fact we admit we need God’s forgiveness proves we know we cannot earn salvation. So, salvation must be an undeserved favor (grace) for we have sinned and need forgiveness.

(5) To illustrate, are the physical blessings of life given by God’s grace: food, air, water, etc.? Surely they are. But does grace eliminate the need for us to work to receive these physical blessings?

(6) This question may help. Suppose Jesus had never died (to make possible God’s grace), but a man met all the conditions of the gospel anyway. Would he be saved? No, because he sinned and, without the grace extended by Jesus’ death, no form of obedience could save him. So, meeting the conditions of the gospel does not earn salvation.

However, Christ has died and made grace possible. Now if I meet the conditions of the gospel, have I earned salvation? No more so than otherwise! Salvation is an unmerited blessing, but it is conditional. I cannot receive it unless I meet the conditions, but when I meet the conditions it is no less a gift by grace.

**11:7,8 – So, what Israel sought for they did not obtain, but the elect obtained it and the rest were hardened. As written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear.**

**So Israel failed to obtain what they sought; only the elect (remnant) obtained it.**

Here Paul restates the conclusion of his thoughts throughout chapter 9-11 in a way that responds to the question of verse 1 (compare 9:31). Israel had sought to have a relationship with God such that they might receive His blessings especially in the coming of the Messiah. Yet even though the Messiah did come through Israel, Israel as a whole did not receive the relationship with God they sought because they did not believe in Christ.

But that does not mean everyone was cast off (verse 1). Some did obtain the blessings: the elect (verse 5) – those chosen in accord with the principles and conditions of the gospel. This would include both Jews and Gentiles, but refers here especially to the remnant of Israel (verse 5). The rest of the Jews (those not part of the elect remnant) were hardened. They were unreceptive and often antagonistic to the cause of Christ, even persecuting His followers.

So, although Israel in general was rejected, that does not mean every individual was cast off (verse 1). Some received the gospel and thereby obtained the blessings for which their anticipated Messiah really came.

**Israel in general was blinded, having eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear.**

As in 10:16-21, Paul quotes another Old Testament passage showing that the Jews would harden their hearts and reject the gospel. They would have a spirit of stupor so their eyes would not see and their ears would not hear. See Isaiah 29:10; Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 6:9,10; Compare Matthew 13:10-17; John 12:37-43; Acts 28:25-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Jeremiah 5:21; 6:10; Ezekiel 12:2; Isaiah 43:8.

This reference seems to be either a paraphrase or else a combination of Isaiah 29:10; Deuteronomy 29:4; and/or Ezekiel 12:2. The purpose is to show from the Jews' own Scriptures that they would be so blind that they would reject the truth when it came. Further, the Jews themselves were to blame for their state. They could have accepted and obeyed the truth, but they refused.

How did God give them this spirit of stupor? The verses above (and others) show that the gospel is designed to have different effects on different people. See Matthew 13:14,15. God deals with men in such a way that their reaction to His message will depend on the state of their heart. People will be drawn to the truth if they have honest, humble hearts truly wanting above all to please God. People with selfish, self-

willed, or proud hearts will turn from the truth, as did Pharaoh (9:15-18).

God designed His word to have these different effects, but the choice and determination is still up to the people to decide which heart they will have. Nothing here proves unconditional condemnation. The history of the spread of the gospel demonstrates these opposite effects. Even the verses listed above show that it was the Jews' own attitude that caused their problem. Many other verses in Romans show the same (9:30-33; 10:1-3,10-21; 11:17-24).

***11:9,10 – David said their table would be a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense. Their eyes would be darkened so they did not see, and their back always bowed down.***

David also predicted those who would stumble. Psalms 69:22,23 spoke against Jesus' opponents, showing that their eyes would be darkened so they did not see (as in verse 8 above). Their backs would be bowed as one carrying an unbearable burden. Compare Acts 13:46.

A person's "table" is his place of nourishment, where he receives what he needs to live. But the table of Jesus' enemies would become a snare, a trap, and a stumbling block. That which was intended to nourish them, instead became a trap that ensnared them and caused them to stumble.

This could refer to the Old Law, which should have nourished and strengthened the Jews to know God's will and accept Jesus when He came. But instead, they became so attached to their law they would not let it go and so rejected Jesus. Or perhaps the reference is to their desire for the Messiah, who ought to have blessed and strengthened them. But they rejected Him when He came, so that which should have blessed them became instead a snare and stumbling block to them (1 Peter 2:1-10).

Again, Paul does not quote the Old Testament passages word-for-word but paraphrases the meaning.

***11:11,12 – Did they stumble so that they might fall? Surely not. But through their fall salvation came to the Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy. If their fall led to riches, how much more their fullness?***

***Israel's stumble would not necessarily lead to total rejection of every Israelite.***

Verse 11 uses the word "fall" twice, clearly with two different significations. First Paul denies that they should fall, then he describes the benefits that would come from their fall. Surely he is using the word in two different senses.

The sense of the verses requires that "stumble" must refer to the same thing as "fall" in the latter part of the verse (using different Greek

words). Stumble means to commit a sin. NASB & NIV translate the second “fall” as “transgression.” But “fall” in the first occurrence is contrasted to “stumble” and means a rejection, complete ruin, a more serious falling away than either “stumble” or “fall” in the second occurrence. McGarvey points out, for example, that this word is used for those who fall in battle – that is, they are slain.

“That” can imply intent or purpose on the part of Israel, or it can have a weaker sense referring to a result or effect that occurs regardless of the intent of the subject. In this latter sense it sometimes refers (Hebraistically) to an effect attributed to God (see Thayer and Arndt and Gingrich).

The latter meaning of “that” applies here since: (1) Surely Israel did not deliberately intend to fall from God. (2) The last part of the verse and following context is discussing consequences God brought because of Israel’s rejection of Jesus, even though Israel did not intend or purpose to achieve those effects.

This would mean that Paul’s question here is similar to verse 1. Does it necessarily follow that Israel would be totally and completely lost (first use of “fall”) simply because they stumbled at Jesus – i.e., they sinned in rejecting and killing Him (compare 9:32,33)? Will this transgression (second use of “fall”) mean their total and irrevocable rejection?

The answer is: God forbid! Certainly not! In using Israel for His purpose, God had not intended their ultimate total rejection, though He knew they would sin by killing Jesus. (Doubtless many Jews will be lost, but not just because they killed Jesus or initially rejected Him. It will be because they persist in unbelief and will not repent.)

What then was the effect of their sin? By their fall (transgression), salvation came to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy. God knew Israel would sin, because He knew they were self-righteous, stubborn people who rejected all His prophets (compare Deuteronomy 32:20ff). They would surely reject Jesus and fulfill God’s purpose so Jesus could die for man’s sin. But God did not intend that the result of this would be that all Israelites would be spiritually hopeless. On the contrary, He hoped that the results would provoke some of them to jealousy, thereby eventually encouraging them to repent and be saved!

**The Jews’ rejection of Jesus resulted in the Gentiles having the opportunity to be saved.**

This is true in several senses.

(1) One benefit to the Gentiles was that the Jewish rejection of Jesus led to Jesus’ death for the salvation of all men, including Gentiles.

(2) Another benefit to the Gentiles was that, because of Jewish rejection of Jesus, the Old Law was removed (Ephesians 2:14; etc.). Gentiles during the Old Testament period generally rejected God, so He generally left them alone (see chapter 1) and dealt with the Jews developing His plans. But this separate treatment was temporary. God



knew that later many Gentiles would be willing to accept Him, but this would require Him to institute a different system from the Old Testament (because of its special treatment of the Jews). Since Jews in Jesus' day were so corrupt, God used them to bring about the elimination of the Old Testament itself by Jesus' death.

(3) Jewish rejection of the gospel also often led to Gentiles' being given the opportunity to hear the gospel. In each locality, the gospel was almost always preached first to the Jews. Then it would be preached to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected it (Acts 13:44-48).

"To provoke them to jealousy" (compare 10:19; 11:14) refers to a common result when the Gentiles accepted the gospel. The Jews responded with antagonism and jealousy. Paul's hope was that this would eventually lead some Jews to consider the truth and accept it (see verse 14). Indirectly, then, the Jewish rejection of Jesus would lead to their benefit as well.

**Consider then the good that might come if the Jews would accept the gospel.**

Compare verses 14,15. Paul persists in hoping that some Jews will return to the Lord. He here refers to this as their "fullness" in contrast to their fall ("transgression" – same as the second occurrence in verse 11) and their "loss" (ASV; compare "failure" in NKJV & NASB). Marshall says this means their decrease, defeat, or defect. The Jewish sin brought rich blessings to the world and especially to the Gentiles. If God could use their sin to produce such beneficial results, think how much good He could do if they would repent!

"Fullness" can refer either to: (1) fulfillment, the obeying of God's will (NASB), or to (2) completeness, especially of numbers as is spoken of regarding the Gentiles in verse 25. The passage is not teaching that all Jews will someday accept Christ and be saved (as some speculate) any more than the "fullness of the Gentiles" (verse 25) means all Gentiles will someday be saved. Note verse 14: save "**some**" of them, not all of them.

If the latter meaning is correct, "fullness" would simply refer to the full number of those who can be reached by the gospel, the remnant (verse 5). Of those Jews who initially rejected Christ, some had since been converted (as on Pentecost and following). Others would yet be converted until their number reached its "fullness": the complete number of those who could be saved by the gospel consistent with their character and will.

Further, Paul's statements are **conditional** as to what he **hoped** for Israel's future. None are absolute statements of the future. Note verse 14: **if** by any means I **may** save some.

Or the passage may refer simply to the fullness of the blessings the Jews would receive in Christ if they obey, as in Ephesians 1:23; 4:13; 3:19; Romans 15:29. The parallel in verse 15 seems to support this view. "Fullness" = "life from the dead" = blessings of salvation.



Whiteside and Vinson believe the “fullness” is the completeness of their sin and rejection of the gospel. This is grammatically possible but does not seem to fit the context (especially verse 15), which seems to be showing that some Jews will be saved.

***11:13,14 – As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul spoke to the Gentiles to glorify his ministry in order to provoke the Jews to jealousy and perhaps save some of them.***

**Paul’s statements magnified his work of preaching to Gentiles.**

Paul then spoke directly to Gentiles concerning their blessings in the gospel and the attitude they should have toward Jews. In this way Paul emphasized the value and importance of his own labors, for he was an apostle especially sent to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17; Romans 15:16; Galatians 1:16; 2:7-9; Ephesians 3:1,8; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 4:17).

As Paul described the plan of God for Gentiles, he demonstrated the value of his own preaching. He also answered critics in the church who felt the Gentiles should be required to obey the Old Law and become Jews in order to become Christians.

**He hoped to lead some Jews to consider the gospel and be saved.**

One reason Paul emphasized his preaching to the Gentiles (verse 13) was, not that he did not care if Jews were saved, but that he hoped the salvation of the Gentiles would provoke the Jews to jealousy and lead some of them to be saved (compare verses 11,12).

Sadly, some people initially reject the gospel because it does not fit their preconceived ideas. Sometimes such people will not seriously consider the truth until they see it being lived by others. Then they see the blessings others have and may be led to seek the same blessings (jealousy in a good sense). Or they may be jealous in the sense that they are determined to prove them wrong and, in their efforts to do so, may prove themselves wrong. This is what Paul hoped would happen to the Jews.

Note that the verse clearly states that Paul was not anticipating conversion of all the Jews, but only “some of them.” It is a misuse of verses 12,25,26, etc. to conclude (as some people do) that Paul is saying all Jews would be saved. Salvation is individual. Each person must decide for himself.

Note that salvation is also conditional: “***if*** by any means I ***may*** save...” There is no absolute prediction of wholesale conversions. Paul only hopes for the conversion of “some” of them, and even that is conditional and uncertain.

**11:15,16 – If the casting away of Israel led to the reconciling of the world, then their acceptance would be life from the dead. If the firstfruit is holy, so is the lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.**

### **Acceptance of the Jews would be life from the dead.**

Verses 11,12 showed that the casting away (different word from verse 1) of the Jews resulted in the world being reconciled. That is, because the Jews sinned, opportunity for salvation came to many Gentiles (see notes on verses 11,12). This does not mean everyone in the world will be saved, but the offer of salvation was made to all, and many did accept.

If such benefits could come from the Jews' rejection, think what good could come if the Jews would obey the truth and be received back by God. It would be like life from the dead – a spiritual resurrection (compare Ephesians 2; Luke 15:24,32; etc.).

Note that this no more predicts the salvation of all Jews than the “reconciling of the world” resulted in the salvation of everyone in the world. In fact, Paul is not really **predicting** the salvation of Jews, but simply expressing his hope (verse 14).

The point still seems to be a reassurance to Jews that not all individuals among them are hopelessly lost. Some (the remnant) may still be saved, and Paul himself hopes for that. Further, he wants Gentiles to know that Jews can still be saved, so Gentiles should not be proud as if they are superior to Jews (the way Jews had been toward Gentiles). All should hope for Jews to be saved.

Note the parallel here to verse 12. If these are truly parallel ideas, then “fullness” in verse 12 must refer to Jews receiving blessings of salvation (“life from the dead”).

### **Illustrations of the firstfruits and olive tree.**

Verses 16-24 use two illustrations to show the relationship between Jews and Gentiles under the gospel. The “firstfruits” refers to the first crops that, under the Old Testament, were to be offered to God, thereby making the entire crop acceptable to be used by the people. (See Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:9-14.) The root, of course, is the part of the plant from which the rest grows and is provided.

Both illustrations have the same meaning. “The firstfruits” has the same significance as “the root,” and “the lump” has the same significance as “the branches.” The second illustration is explained at length, so if we can understand it, we will understand the first illustration too.

The overall point of the root-branch illustration is clear, but it is unclear what the “root” specifically represents (if it is specific). The good olive tree (root and branches) refers to the people who receive the blessings of God's promises to Abraham (verses 17,22). The branches represent individuals who receive these blessings (verses 17-24). Either

Jews or Gentiles can be in this position. Any person can be a branch in the tree, but branches that cease to believe will be cut off (compare John 15:1-10 and the parable of the vine and branches).

Another olive tree is also discussed, a wild olive (verses 17,24). This represents people who were **not** receiving the blessings of the promises to Abraham. If one of the branches (Jew or Gentile) in that tree begins to believe, he will be grafted into the good olive tree. All this seems clear and, incidentally, thoroughly refutes Calvinism. The concepts of unconditional election and once saved, always saved cannot possibly survive the meaning of this illustration.

But what is the root? I am unsure. Perhaps it doesn't matter specifically, but the way it is mentioned seems to make it significant. In any case, no illustration should be forced beyond God's intent, nor should any conclusion be reached that conflicts with other Bible teachings.

(1) Perhaps it is Jesus, as in the vine and branches (John 15). This is unlikely since unbelieving Jews are branches broken off from the tree (verses 17,20,24). But unbelieving Jews were never branches in Jesus.

(2) Perhaps it is God, Deity in general, not specifically Jesus. This is possible, but does not seem to fit the "firstfruits" (verse 16). Also, how could this, being the root, keep the Gentile branches from glorying over the Jews (verse 18)?

(3) Perhaps it is the first converts to Christianity. These were Jews. This fits "firstfruits," and also gives Gentiles reason not to glory over the Jews since they owe a great debt of gratitude to these first converts. But if this is the meaning, in what sense could the unbelieving Jews who were cut off ever have been branches in that root (verses 17,29,20)?

(4) Perhaps the root is Abraham (and other patriarchs). These men were the firstfruits to receive the blessings of the promises God gave to Abraham and the other patriarchs (verse 16). They were the root from whom all future people could receive these blessings ("in thy seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed").

Abraham is called the father of all who are justified by faith (4:10f). We are his children, heirs according to God's promise to him (Galatians 3:29). Unbelieving Jews thought they would inherit God's favor just because they were Abraham's descendants, but instead they will be cut off (John 8:39,40). Under the Old Testament, Jews received the blessings of the promises only because God was fulfilling the promises made to the fathers. Under the gospel, many of those people were cut off because of unbelief. Instead, many Gentiles will inherit the blessing that God promised would come through Abraham upon all nations. This view seems the most satisfactory. Let us pursue the explanation from this approach (though the applications would be the same from any of these approaches).

“The firstfruit” and “the lump” – Abraham and the patriarchs were the firstfruits: the first to receive the promises given to Abraham. They were set apart as the people peculiarly belonging to God, receiving special blessings from God, used of Him for His purposes. Then the lump would refer to the descendants of the patriarchs, who benefited from the blessings promised by God to Abraham and were used by Him as His special people until Jesus’ death.

The “root” and the “branches” – Likewise, Abraham and the patriarchs were the root out of which grew the nation of Israel (the branches), all of whom received the blessings of the promises to Abraham as described above.

In any case, we will see that the illustrations teach the following:

(1) Faith is the basis of spiritual fellowship with God.

(2) Believers can fail to continue in God’s goodness. If so, they will be cut off.

(3) Unbelievers (or fallen former believers) can believe and be grafted in.

(4) Branches should not glory over those cut off, but be humble realizing they too can become unfaithful and be cut off.

***11:17,18 – If some branches were broken off, and branches from a wild olive tree were grafted in among them to partake of the benefits of the root of the olive tree, then they should not glory over the branches. Remember that the root bore the branches, not the other way around.***

### **Branches broken off and branches grafted in**

This continues the illustration begun in verse 16 (see notes there). The branches broken off represent unbelieving Jews who rejected Christ when He came, so they were cut off. These are the ones Paul has been discussing in the context. As descendants of Abraham, they had been enjoying special blessings as a result of God’s promises (9:4,5). These blessings would have included the land promise and the great nation promise but not yet the promise of salvation, which was the blessing to come upon all nations through Christ.

When the gospel came, the promised blessing of salvation through Christ upon all nations had arrived. At that point, God had fulfilled his purpose for the nation of Israel, so the promise of the great nation and the land promise would cease to have effect. The only part of the promise to Abraham that continued to have effect would be that of salvation to all men through Christ (Christ removed the Old Law and other Old Testament blessings). But this blessing of salvation is available only to those who believe. Most Jews disbelieved, so they were broken off and left with no special blessings before God.

“You” refers to Gentiles (verse 13). They were like a wild olive tree; that is, they had not been receiving any blessings according to the

promises to Abraham before Jesus came. They grew up “wild,” without God’s care and blessings. Yet when Christ came, many of them accepted Him and were “grafted in.” They began receiving the benefits of the greatest of the promises to Abraham: the blessing of salvation to come upon all nations through the Christ. They had not naturally grown up receiving God’s blessings but were grafted in so they began to receive them.

They partook of the root and fatness of the tree in that they received blessings from God according to the promise to Abraham, just as did those who had grown up part of the tree.

### **Gentiles should not boast against the branches that were broken off.**

The Gentile converts, who received these blessings (verse 17), are then warned not to become proud and exalt themselves over the rejected Jews. Don’t become self-righteous or indifferent to the salvation of the Jews. Such attitudes as these had been displayed by the Jews toward the Gentiles in the past. Paul does not want Gentiles to develop the same haughty attitude toward Jews as a result of what he has said.

He gives one reason why this should be so: the root bore them, not vice-versa. These Gentile converts were receiving blessings brought to them through the Jews according to the promises made to the Jewish patriarchs. So, the Gentiles in a sense owed their salvation to blessings received through the Jews, not vice-versa.

***11:19-21 – Gentiles might say that branches were broken off so they might be grafted in. But they were broken off because of their unbelief and Gentiles stand because they have faith. So they should not be conceited but realize that if God did not spare natural branches, He would not spare them.***

### **Branches were broken off for their unbelief.**

Gentiles might still feel reason to exalt themselves over the Jews because, though salvation had come through the Jews, yet many Jews had been rejected whereas Gentiles were being accepted. So why could the Gentiles not exalt themselves?

The answer is that the Gentiles were saved on the basis of faith. By God’s goodness and grace they received the blessings, not because they deserved it. The Jews sinned, it is true, but the Gentiles were also sinners. The Gentiles received undeserved favor because of faith, but the Jews did not believe and so were broken off. But neither deserved God’s favor so neither had grounds to glory.

## **If God did not spare unbelieving Jews, He would likewise not spare unbelieving Gentiles.**

The Gentiles should not be proud but have fear (last part of verse 20) because they too could be cut off. If the natural branches (i.e., the descendants of Abraham) were cut off, why should the branches that were grafted in think they could not be cut off? They could be rejected as easily as the Jews, if they became unfaithful.

Pride often leads to self-dependence and thereby to sin (1 Corinthians 10:12). The Jews had been guilty of this (10:1-3; 9:32). If the Gentiles became proud, the same thing would happen to them.

***11:22-24 – Behold the goodness and severity of God. God is severe towards those who fall, but good toward those who continue in His goodness, else they will be cut off. Those who have been cut off but do not continue in unbelief, can be grafted in again. Surely God can do this if He could graft in those which came from the wild olive tree.***

### **The goodness and severity of God**

God's treatment of the Jews and Gentiles illustrates both His goodness and His severity. The Jews, who were cut off because of unbelief, experienced God's severity. The Gentiles, who were grafted in because of their faith, experienced His goodness. Having seen His severity to the unbelieving Jews, the Gentile converts should learn that they must continue to be faithful in order to continue to receive His goodness. If they fell away, they too would be cut off.

Men today likewise need to realize these two sides of God's character. We need to appreciate His love, grace, mercy, and goodness. He sent His only Son to die for us (Romans 5:6-8; John 3:16; 1 John 4:18ff). He gives us every good and perfect gift (James 1:17) and every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). He offers us forgiveness of sins and hope of eternal life despite our repeated sins. He waits in patience hoping men will repent and return to Him (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Many forget this goodness and view God as an ogre who is just looking for opportunities to curse man. They forget the goodness they have received from Him.

On the other hand we should also remember God's severity. Some people think only of God's goodness and love. They fail to realize His justice and righteousness that demand that He punish sin. He warns us of judgment and punishment if we don't obey (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Romans 2:1-11; Revelation 20; Hebrews 12:29; 10:26-31).

Many become unbalanced and emphasize one side of God's character to the neglect of the other. Both are equally true. Many people complain when preachers emphasize the punishment that God will bring on those who do not obey Him. They say we are guilty of preaching

negativity and fear. Preachers may in fact neglect God's goodness, failing to motivate people by appreciation for God's goodness. But they may also neglect His severity, failing to motivate people by the dangers of punishment for sin. Paul said we should remember both God's goodness and his severity. Both are proper motivations to us to serve Him.

### **Consequences to Calvinism**

Paul clearly states that the Gentiles would be cut off if they did not continue in God's goodness. No statement could more clearly teach that children of God can so sin as to be lost, and this is why we must remain faithful. The foundation of Calvinism is destroyed in this illustration.

First, we were taught that salvation is conditional upon the sinners' choice and conduct – i.e., faith (including obedience). People can choose to believe or not believe (verse 20). Those separated from Christ can choose to become believers and be grafted in (verse 23). Those in God's favor must continue in God's goodness or they will be cut off (verse 22). This destroys the concept of unconditional election, for conditions are clearly stated. It further destroys "once saved always saved," for those who are part of the tree may still be cut off if they don't meet the conditions.

Note that to be cut off clearly means to receive the consequences of unbelief. Just as others have been lost if they are high-minded and trust in themselves, so we must all realize our weaknesses and the danger that we may fall away if we become proud and self-reliant (1 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:1).

### **The Jews could yet be grafted in again.**

Not only could God receive Gentiles into His favor, though they had not been in His favor before, but also Jews, who had been His people but had been cut off because of unbelief, could again become part of His people if they would meet the condition of faith. Note that the decision rested with the people. God was willing and able to accept them. But He was waiting for their choice (compare verse 22). Why so, if Calvinism's unconditional election is valid?

This again answers the question of verses 1,11. God had not completely and irreversibly cast off all Israelites. Some had already accepted the gospel by grace through faith and been saved (grafted in). Others could do so whenever they chose to meet the conditions (compare 9:32,33).

"By nature" the Gentiles were "wild": separate from God's blessings and care (Ephesians 2). But God acted contrary to nature by moving them to another tree, a cultivated olive tree. (This is unnatural, not just because they were grafted from wild to cultivated, but because all grafting is unnatural. Branches by nature stay on the tree on which they originally grew. Jews were born into God's promises to Abraham and



Gentiles were not. To change them, according to the illustration, is unnatural, but God did so anyway to save the Gentiles.)

If God was willing to so act to save the Gentiles, surely He would likewise be able to save fallen Jews. If God could save men who were naturally inclined away from God's service (idol-worshiping Gentiles), then surely those who grew up knowing they ought to serve God (Jews) could also be saved if they will believe.

### **The olive tree and infant baptism**

Some folks try to use the olive tree illustration to prove infant baptism. They say Jews were in God's favor (branches in the tree) from birth, and branches in the New Testament are added to the same tree. So they conclude that, in the New Testament, people can be in God's favor from birth.

This argument is a drowning man grasping for straws! If this "logic" is valid, truly they are correct who say, "You can prove anything by the Bible." There is no semblance of evidence in this argument.

(1) No illustration should be used to prove anything beyond what the writer intended. No illustration ever means that two things are identical in every way, but only in the ways intended. Nothing in this illustration says anything about baptism of infants. To insert it is gross perversion of Scripture.

(2) While both Old Testament Jews and New Testament Christians are described here as receiving God's blessings according to the promise to Abraham, still **different blessings** are under consideration. Under the Old Testament the blessings were the great nation, the land, and the **promise** of the Messiah. All Jews shared in these by birth, but that in no way guaranteed their spiritual salvation. But under the New Testament, the land and great nation are no longer in effect. The promise here is the blessing on all nations, which refers to salvation from sins through Jesus. This is a different aspect of the promise, and there is no reason to believe the conditions to receive it are the same.

(3) The law changed when Jesus died. This is a main point of Romans, yet this infant baptism "argument" completely ignores the point. Why argue for infant **baptism**? If the argument proves anything it proves infant **circumcision**, like some "converted" Jews argued. That is what Jewish babies received, not baptism. Why change and argue for infant **baptism**? The only possible response is that the law changed. But if so, then the conditions of the law also change. The fact babies were **circumcised** under the Old Law proves nothing about who can receive **baptism** under the New Law.

(4) The passage plainly and repeatedly states that **belief** is a required condition to receive the blessings of the gospel. How can babies meet that condition?

(5) Even if you argue that the "tree" is the church and that it began in the Old Testament, you still have all the above problems. The kingdom



(church) of the New Testament is different from the kingdom of the Old Testament; as such, it has different laws. In addition, there is much evidence that **Jesus'** church did not exist before He died; therefore, it cannot be the same as the Old Testament kingdom (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:14-16; 5:23-25). Jesus' church was purchased when He died. He is now its head and it must follow His rules stated in the New Testament, not the Old. The New Testament nowhere teaches infant baptism any more than it does infant circumcision.

(6) Whereas it is true that the Old Testament covenant was entered by physical birth, the New Testament kingdom, the church, is entered by a new birth, a spiritual birth (John 3:3-6). This of itself proves that the conditions of entering the New Testament church are different from the conditions of entering the Old Testament kingdom.

***11:25,26 – We should not be ignorant that a hardening in part had fallen on Israel until the fullness the Gentiles would come in. And in this way all Israel would be saved as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the deliverer who will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.***

### **Blindness in Israel till the fullness of the Gentiles came in**

In verses 25-32, as Paul concludes the discussion of chapters 9-11, he restates and summarizes God's attitude toward Jews. This material is not new, but simply restates the conclusions of these chapters, especially 11:11-24.

Paul wants to be sure the Gentiles understand the mystery he is explaining. This "mystery" is surely the gospel that has been discussed throughout Romans. It was a mystery in that it was unknown and unknowable to men before it was revealed by inspired men in the first century. It is now, however, a **revealed** mystery, no longer unknown or unknowable (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3-9; 1 Corinthians 2:7-16).

Paul has explained how all men, Jew and Gentile, can be saved by faith in Jesus according to the gospel (1:16; chapter 10). He has further explained that many Gentiles had been saved by faith, many Jews were lost because of unbelief, and yet Jews could be saved if they would repent and believe (11:1-24). This is the specific mystery Paul discusses here.

The reason Paul wants to be sure the Gentiles are not ignorant is so they will not be wise in their opinion. If Gentiles come to think that they have a special exalted position above Jews in the gospel (like Jews thought they had under the Law), they might become proud as the Jews had (verses 18,20). The lessons Paul has taught should humble them (verses 11-24):

(1) They were saved by grace through faith despite their sins. They had not earned salvation. They were sinners like the Jews.

(2) They could yet fall and be rejected, especially if they become proud and self-righteous.

(3) The Jews could yet believe and be saved like the Gentiles had. Paul hoped they would do so. The rejection of the Jews was not an act of favoritism toward Gentiles but a consequence of Jewish disbelief.

“Blindness (hardening – ASV) in part has happened to Israel.” Part of the Israelites had been hardened or blinded to the gospel (compare verse 7). Yet Paul still hoped some of them would accept it (verses 14,15,23,24). Their blindness was manifested in unbelief, yet Paul hoped they would turn from the unbelief and be saved.

**“Until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in.”**

This phrase, with the first part of verse 26, has been given all types of explanations, but the views come down to two basic alternatives:

(1) The premillennial view is that Paul is prophesying a time when Gentiles in general will be converted in large numbers. This will be followed by conversion of Jews in large numbers, preceding the end of time. This view could fit the grammar of the passage, but it is not the only view that would fit. And even if this is a prediction of mass conversion, it still would not prove the more basic premillennial theories that the kingdom has not come yet but will be established when Jesus returns, that Jesus will then reign on earth for a literal thousand years, etc. (see Lard).

(2) Another view is that Paul is referring to the fact that the gospel would be fully preached to mankind resulting in the conversion of all the Gentiles and Jews who are spiritually receptive to the truth (hence, the full remnant). This may or may not involve large numbers, but would involve the completeness of those who are of a nature to be converted. All people of this *type* would be included (see verse 26). The “fullness” of the Gentiles, then, would be the full number of those converted when the gospel had been fully preached (compare verse 12). That this second view fits the Scriptures better is shown as follows:

\* It is all that can be stated with certainty from the passage. Any more is at best unfounded speculation.

\* The first view is dangerous in that it is inherent to all kinds of wild, unproved and unprovable theories.

\* No other passage teaches the first view. Why interpret this passage alone to mean something that is not taught elsewhere and is uncertain even here?

\* Multitudes of other passages show that God’s people have always been a remnant, a minority of people in the world (see verses 2-5; Matthew 7:13,14; 20:16; 22:14; Luke 13:23f; Romans 9:27; 2 Peter 2:5,7; etc.). Never have all people of the world – or even a majority of people – been faithful. The nature of man is basically unchanging and the power of the gospel will always be the same. What change would make it reasonable to expect that people in general would be receptive?

\* Even premillennialists do not really believe that absolutely all Gentiles and Jews will be converted. If “fullness” means literally all

humans, must it not include generations past who died in rebellion against God? If it includes them, isn't the consequence universalism, and how do we explain the many passages showing that many (actually a majority) will be lost? But if we grant some Gentiles will be lost, then we must grant the same for some Jews ("fullness ... all"). But if some may be lost, then the language does not mean universal salvation either of Jews or Gentiles; therefore, it must have some other meaning.

\* What purpose would be accomplished by predicting universal conversion of Gentiles and Jews? A simple affirmation that Jews can be saved is all Paul needs in context to make his current point of humbling the Gentiles.

\* The context here favors the meaning of reaching the full number of those Gentiles who are capable of being reached, which in turn would help convert Jews. This has been stated repeatedly (verses 11-15, 16-24; compare verses 27-32 and notes there; compare Acts 15:11). Verses 25-32 seem to be a conclusion of these previous verses, yet nowhere in those verses did Paul state universal salvation. On the contrary, he discussed the salvation of just "some" of them, and even that is not a certainty (verses 12, 14, 15, 23, 24, 31). Romans 9:27 says a "remnant" would be saved (compare 11:5).

The term "fullness of the Gentiles," then, most likely refers to the thorough spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles resulting in an opportunity for them all to be saved such that all who are receptive to truth would be saved (verses 12, 13). That was accomplished in the first century through the work of Paul and others (Colossians 1:6, 23). Paul hoped that one result of this work would be that Jews would be led to open their hearts to the gospel (verse 14).

### **So all Israel will be saved.**

"So" is an adverb of **manner**, not an adverb of **time**. The idea is not that the fullness of the Gentiles will be converted and then ("so") all Israel will be saved. Rather, it means all Israel will be saved "**in this way**" or in this manner. Note the ESV: "in this way all Israel will be saved." (οὕτω – "in the manner spoken of; in the way described; in the way it was done; in this manner; in such a manner; thus, so..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.)

The way or manner is "as it is written," and as described in the following Old Testament quotations, which agree with what Paul has said about the manner in which sins are forgiven under the gospel (verses 16-24; chapter 10; etc.). ("So" and "as" are contrasting terms of comparison.)

"All Israel will be saved" – see notes on "fullness of the Gentiles" in verse 25. This phrase could mean (1) a general conversion of all physical offspring of Jacob, or (2) the gospel is able to save all men, so all Jews who are of a receptive nature will be saved "in this way" when the gospel has been fully preached to all the world.

This second view can fit the grammar in perhaps more than one possible way: (a) “Israel” may mean spiritual Israel, i.e., the remnant of Israelites receptive to the truth (11:5; 9:7) who were therefore true Israelites (9:6; 2:28,29; Galatians 6:16). Or (b) we may recognize that the emphasis is on “so” – the **manner** of Israel’s salvation – not on “all” or even “shall.” In this approach, the phrase is a general statement such that “all” is not intended to mean everyone in a group.

For example, suppose a company brochure describes its retirement program, then concludes: “in this way all employees shall receive their retirement benefits.” The emphasis is on “in this way,” not on “all” or “shall.” In practice, many will receive no retirement benefits at all, either because they quit or die or are fired, etc. An elliptical phrase is implied: the described benefit is available to all employees so “all employees (who receive the benefit) will receive it in this way.”

Another example of similar language is in verse 32: “mercy upon all.” Does this mean that all people in the world will receive God’s mercy and be saved: universal salvation? Surely not. It is upon all in that it is available to all and will be received by all who respond in obedience (see notes on verse 32).

For reasons to accept this meaning of verse 26, instead of the premillennial view, see notes on verse 25.

Some may contend that “all” is indeed emphasized, because it is contrasted to “in part” (verse 25). However, the context shows that the “part” that was hardened included some Paul hoped would eventually be saved. He has described how he hoped the reception of the gospel by Gentiles would lead **“some”** Israelites to be saved (verse 14). Paul has clearly stated that it is only **some** who will be saved, not all. Verses 25,26 appear to be saying the same thing as a form of summary conclusion. If so, then the point is not that numerically all Israelites would be saved. Rather, salvation would be available to all so some would be saved, and all that become saved would be saved “in the manner” he was describing.

In summary, “fullness of Gentiles” means the full number of Gentiles who were willing to open their hearts to the truth when the gospel had been fully preached. Likewise, “all Israel” means all the Israelites who were willing to open their hearts to the truth when given the opportunity. Part of Israel had been hardened; but when many Gentiles had obeyed, Paul hoped the Jews would also listen and so (in this manner) all Israel would have the opportunity to be saved and all (who were receptive) would be saved: the whole remnant, not the whole nation.

### **“As it is written”**

“As it is written” refers to a Scripture that describes the way Israel would be saved. (“As” is contrasted to “so.”) “All Israel would be saved in **this way**. In what way? In the way that was written.

What was written was that a deliverer would come out of Zion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Isaiah 59:20). This deliverer was surely Jesus (see Galatians 1:3,4; Romans 7:24,25; Colossians 1:13,14; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). He delivered men from ungodliness by forgiving sin and teaching people to live apart from sin (verses 26,27).

Note that Israel had to turn away from sin. The redemption works only in harmony with their will and choice. At the time Paul wrote, the Jews in general were turning away from the Deliverer. The manner in which they could all be saved was by turning to the Deliverer in faith and turning away from sin.

***11:27-29 – God’s new covenant was to take away sins. So regarding the gospel the Jews were enemies; yet regarding the election, God still loved them for the sake of the patriarchs. God had not repented of His gifts or calling.***

***Though enemies of the gospel, Israel was beloved for the sake of the fathers.***

Verse 27 adds that the covenant with Israel refers to the time when God would take away their sins. This is a paraphrase or combination of Isaiah 59:21 with Isaiah 27:9 or some other verse. The new covenant would forgive sins. But this was only through the Deliverer whom Israel had rejected. They could, however, be saved, but only in the way (“so”) Paul was prescribing: by repentance and obedient faith.

Verse 28 – “They” surely refers to physical Jews who were rejecting and even persecuting the gospel, Christ, and believers. Anyone who rejects God’s will is an enemy of God (Ephesians 2:11-19; James 4:4; Romans 5:10). Paul had once been such a person; knowing that he had become converted, he still had hope for other such people.

Verse 28 surely refers to the same group of people as verse 26. If so, then it must surely refer to the salvation of Israelites ***in Paul’s day***: those who were enemies at that time. So verse 26 cannot refer to a future generation that would be “saved,” as premillennialists say. But no one supposes that a majority of Jews were saved in Paul’s day. So again we conclude that verse 26 is discussing ***how*** people would be saved; it is not predicting some distant future time when literally every person of Jewish descent would be saved from their sins.

“For your sake” could refer to the fact that the Jews’ opposed the gospel because it included Gentiles. Or perhaps it means that, because of Jewish opposition, the Gentiles received opportunities to learn the gospel (verse 11). Either view harmonizes with Paul’s point.

“Concerning the election” does not mean the Jews themselves were saved, any more than “concerning the gospel” means they received the benefits of the gospel. If they were saved, that would mean God saved them while they were enemies of the gospel! Election to salvation is the

result of accepting the gospel, not rejecting it (Romans 1:16; 10:9-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). Furthermore, people are saved for what they have done, not what their fathers did (9:5).

Most likely then, the “election” here refers to the fact God chose the Israelite nation to bring about the fulfillment of God’s plan to Abraham, including the land and nation promise, but especially bringing Jesus into the world as a blessing on all nations, etc. as discussed in 9:6-22 (see especially verse 11; compare Deuteronomy 7:7,8; 10:15). They were loved and privileged to have this role in the election, not because they were such righteous people themselves, but because of God’s promises to their ancestors. God was able to use them for this purpose despite (and to some extent because of) their rejection of the gospel.

### **God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable.**

Again, as with the “election” in verse 28, the reference to “gifts and calling” here does not mean that all physical Israelites would personally receive the blessing of salvation from sin. Rather, it means that God blessed and called Israel to be the means He would use to accomplish His purpose to bring Jesus into the world, etc., as discussed above (see chapter 9). (For the “gifts,” see 9:3-5; 3:1,2. For the “calling,” compare 9:7,11.)

Despite the fact Jews became enemies of the gospel, God has not repented or changed His mind about the fact that He used the Jews for this purpose, blessing them as He had. His purpose through them was accomplished, so He was not sorry He used them.

Both Jew and Gentile needed to understand that God had no intention of going back on any promise He had ever made to the Jews. He had not cast them off (verse 1) nor completely rejected them (verse 11). They should not think He was unfair because He received Gentiles equally with Jews. Nor should Gentiles become proud and exalt themselves above Jews, thinking God was sorry He had ever called the Jews or that He no longer loved them or that He now preferred Gentiles over Jews.

God had chosen and blessed Israel for a purpose. That purpose was fulfilled, so now He no longer needed a special place for them in His purpose. They were now accepted or rejected spiritually on the same basis as Gentiles. God still loves Jews as He loves all men. In a sense He still has a loving care for them because of the role they had in His purpose and because of their ancestors. Many Jews were rejected regarding salvation, not because of any hatred God had toward them, but because of their own rejection of the gospel.

**11:30,31 – As you were in time past disobedient to God but their disobedience gave you an opportunity to obtain mercy, so these have been disobedient and the mercy shown to you may give them opportunity to obtain mercy.**

Paul continues speaking to “you” – i.e., the Gentiles. He reminds them that they were once sinners too, but were forgiven by God’s mercy. They should surely not feel superior to Jews but hope for their salvation too.

“Through their disobedience” returns to Paul’s point that the Jews’ disobedience made salvation available to Gentiles (verses 11,12,15). Paul is still discussing the theme of verse 11: blessings on Gentiles as a result of Israel’s rejection of Jesus. Note that he still hoped the conversion of Gentiles would eventually lead to conversion of Jews in his day. Surely this makes it unreasonable to claim that verses 25,26 are predicting large-scale conversions of Jews thousands of years later. By failing to recognize that these verses are limited to the issues under consideration in the context, commentators end up giving wild speculations without foundation.

Note further that the mercy on the Gentiles did not mean all or even a majority of them were saved. Why then conclude that verses 31 or 26 meant a majority of Jews would be saved? God’s mercy was offered to all, but those who obtained the benefits were those who met the conditions.

Verse 31 – Again Paul returns to discuss the Jews (“they”) and expresses his hope for their salvation (mercy). This simply repeats the point made in verses 12,14,15,23,24,26; compare verses 5-7. If God had shown mercy to the Gentiles after their disobedience, He would surely likewise forgive any Israelite who would repent and turn from disobedience. He hoped the Gentiles’ reception of the gospel would help bring this about (verses 13,14,25,26).

Gentiles should not be high-minded toward Jews. Both groups had been disobedient and God extended mercy to both. Paul hoped the response of each group would work for the salvation of people in the other group. Again, nothing says **all** or even a majority of either group would be saved. Further, He does not say absolutely that this conversion would occur, but only that they “may” obtain mercy. And finally, he refers to their salvation in his own day, not some future date generations later. See notes on verse 14 for further discussion.

Verses 30,31 form a fitting summary of chapter 11 and Paul’s hope for Jewish salvation. It is a fitting conclusion to chapter 9-11.



**11:32,33 – So God concluded that all were disobedient in order that He might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge of God. His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past tracing out.**

**God committed all under disobedience, so mercy is extended to all**

Paul here draws to a close the doctrinal portion of the book. He concludes with a summary statement of the theme of the book. As in chapter 1-3, Gentiles were in sin without the law of Moses, and Jews were in sin under the law of Moses. As a result, all need the gospel. Compare Galatians 3:22,23; Romans 3:9,20 (compare verses 9-23).

This does not state that God made anyone sin nor that He gave a law humanly impossible to follow so people **had** to sin. But all men did sin, both Jew and Gentile (verses 30,31). When men sinned, God bound them to their sins; i.e., He held them accountable and guilty (2 Peter 2:9). He laid it to their charge (Romans 3:9) and revealed to them their sinfulness (3:20). They were bondservants of sin, because their human ability could do nothing to remove the guilt they had incurred (6:16-23; compare Galatians 3). God apparently even withheld the sending of His Son till man had thoroughly proved that he will never save himself by his own human ability but must have a Savior.

Yet God's purpose was not to leave man hopeless but to show man his need for mercy. God proved man would never be saved without mercy, then He extended that mercy through Jesus' death. This is the lesson to be learned from the experience of both Jews and Gentiles.

Jews had the law and Gentiles did not. But both were sinners and could be saved only if God extended them mercy. They needed a system whereby sins could be completely and permanently forgiven. The law did not offer this, but the gospel did (1:16). When God had proved His point, He sent Jesus and the gospel. This is a simple but full summary of the theme of the book.

"Mercy upon all" does not mean all will be saved, but the opportunity of salvation is made available to all. (Compare "all Israel" in verse 26).

**God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond our understanding.**

Paul has concluded his doctrinal defense of the gospel as God's plan to save all men, Jew and Gentile. He closes by breaking forth into praise for God's great wisdom is designing this plan for man's salvation. It reveals the depth of God's rich wisdom and knowledge.

God's judgments and ways are past finding out in that man could never have enough intelligence to invent an effective plan of salvation (Jeremiah 10:23; 1 Corinthians 2:6-26; Ephesians 3:3-7). In fact, some



aspects of the things He did we cannot understand why He did so, even after He chose to do them. Most likely some things are not even revealed because we could never understand them (Deuteronomy 29:29). (We can understand what **we** are required to do to be saved, but not why **God** has done as He has.)

Suppose the gospel had never been revealed, but we had to devise a plan to do the same things the gospel does. Would we find that difficult to do? Would we be successful?

God's plan must justify men who, by their own actions, deserved condemnation. It must offer salvation to all men regardless of background or circumstances. It must cross barriers of sex, age, nationality, race, educational status, wealth, etc. It must save men of all centuries. It must reconcile men who have traditionally been enemies (for example, Jews and Gentiles). It must motivate all such people to see they need to respond to God by their own choice, not violating man's free will. It must separate those whose hearts are open to serve God from those who are hardened in sin. It must motivate men, after conversion, to continue to live an entire lifetime of self-sacrifice, yet provide forgiveness when they fall. And all this must be done consistent with God's own character of perfect righteousness and justice.

Today we have the advantage of having seen the plan God sent. But suppose it had not been revealed and we had to try to solve these problems ourselves. Where would we be? Paul's impulsive praise to God is based on his appreciation of God's wisdom in giving a gospel which perfectly meets all these needs. And amazingly, to meet these needs, God had to be willing to sacrifice the life of His own Son to bear the punishment which was due to the sinners. Surely we ought to join Paul in one vast word of praise to God!

And if our wisdom is so limited in comparison to God's, how foolish we would be to follow some plan of human devising, other than God's plan. Why should we trust human instructions and practice humanly devised commands not found in God's word? It is for exactly these reasons that God forbade us to follow such: Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19.

***11:34-36 – Who has known the mind of the Lord or been His counselor? Who would be recompensed for having first given to God? Of Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever and ever.***

**Who has known God's mind, counseled Him, or repaid Him?**

This is essentially a quote of Isaiah 40:13 (compare verse 14; 1 Corinthians 2:16). The obvious answer to these questions is: **no one**! No one can know God's mind except as He reveals it. No one did know His

will until He did reveal it. No one could advise Him and no one can make improvements in His work. Instead we should recognize His greatness and praise Him for it.

Yet there are some who, perhaps not realizing the consequences of their actions, act as if they can improve on God's plan.

In prayer, though we may request what we believe we need, we must realize He knows our needs better than we do. We must so trust Him that we accept the answer He gives and not array our wisdom against His.

In serving Him, we must obey His will instead of excusing our disobedience. His way is best. Cease finding fault with His requirements, cease looking for loopholes in His law, cease following human wisdom. God does not need our counsel or wisdom. Instead of complaining about His requirements, let us become servants that obey, knowing He knows better than we do.

Verse 35 is nearly a quote of Job 41:11 (compare Job 35:7). (See the NIV). Who has ever done such a favor to God that God became indebted to repay him? As in verse 34, the answer is **no one**! All men are indebted to God. God cannot be indebted to men. All good gifts are from Him to us. We can do no more than serve Him and try to return a small part of what He has given us. He gives first, not us. We are indebted to Him, not the other way around (James 1:17; Acts 17:25,28; compare Matthew 18:21ff)).

Especially regarding salvation, we are so indebted to God that we could never earn the gift of eternal life. We owed the debt of eternal punishment, a debt none wants to pay. We could escape it only by God's mercy in sending His own Son to suffer in our place. We can never repay such a debt, let alone indebt God to us. This is why salvation must always be a matter of grace, not of debt (Romans 4:4). Nevertheless, He requires us to live a lifetime of service to Him in order that He grant us eternal life. All who appreciate what He has done will gladly offer this service to Him.

### **So all ought to serve and glorify Him.**

Verse 36 continues Paul's expression of God's greatness and confirms that He is in debt to no one. Rather than our giving God anything He needs, God has given us all that we need. All things are of Him – i.e., all good things come from Him (see under verse 35; compare 1 Corinthians 8:6; 11:12).

All things are “through Him” – i.e. they are created by Him, sustained by Him, and by His power and goodness we enjoy them (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 2:10).

All things are “unto Him” – they were created for the purpose of serving Him, accomplishing His will, and pleasing Him.

This being true, surely all ought to see that we are indebted to serve Him and meet His conditions of forgiveness. Only in this way do we receive His blessings and serve the purpose for which He made us.

Paul concludes with a doxology of praise to God. Let us all join in the chorus!

This concludes the first major section of the book, chapters 1-11. It consisted of doctrinal discussion defending Paul's thesis that salvation is by the gospel, not the Law of Moses. A new section of practical applications begins in chapter 12.

# **Part 2: Practical Applications of the Gospel – Chapter 12-16**

## **Romans 12**

### **Chapter 12 – General Practical Admonitions**

Paul has completed the doctrinal presentation explaining concepts about the gospel. In chapter 12-16 he turns to practical applications. How should those who have been saved by the gospel conduct themselves? They have ceased serving sin and become servants of righteousness; they are walking in newness of life (chapter 6). How ought they to walk?

Paul's points in this chapter appear to be miscellaneous thoughts which are only loosely connected, but all relate to a general theme of the consequences of the gospel in our lives.

***12:1,2 – Paul urges us by the mercies of God to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our spiritual service. Do not be fashioned according to this world but be transformed by the renewing of the mind to prove what is the good, acceptable, perfect will of God.***

“Therefore” shows that verses 1,2 are transitional moving from the propositions of chap 1-11 to the specific applications of chapter 12-16.

Paul begins by a fundamental appeal for Christians to be thoroughly dedicated to God's will. He bases this appeal on our appreciation for the

mercy and goodness of God. If we appreciate all God has done in making salvation possible for us as described in the letter to this point, then we ought to present our bodies to His service, etc. (Compare 2:4; 11:22.)

Paul uses humble entreaty rather than authoritative command. Both have their place in teaching, but neither is most effective if used exclusively without the other.

### **Present your bodies a living sacrifice.**

A sacrifice is an offering, a gift, something of value given to please someone else or to accomplish some goal which is of greater value than the thing given up. The sacrifice we offer is our own bodies given in service to God. Our bodies are merely instruments to be used to accomplish God's purpose for our lives. Our highest goal should be to please God. This is the purpose of life (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 6:33; 16:24; Romans 6:12-19; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15; Galatians 2:20). We ought, therefore, to sacrifice our own will and use our bodies to do His will.

"Living" sacrifice emphasizes that we need not die in God's service in order to serve Him. It may contrast to animal sacrifices which were slain as offerings to God. We were dead in sin, separated from God, but Christ redeemed us and made us alive in God, so we ought to live our lives to do His work (see references above plus 8:11; Ephesians 2:1-22).

Some people claim to love God so much they would even die for Him, but they are not willing to live for Him. A living sacrifice requires a day-to-day, moment-by-moment effort to live as He wants us to live. This requires making specific sacrifices (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5). But more than that it makes one's whole life a sacrifice. A lack of appreciation for this is a serious hindrance to the work of those who profess to be God's church today. Satan's workers (Communists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses) are often far more dedicated than we are. How can we expect to defeat Satan in such a case? We must make God's work our highest priority in our time, effort, money, and abilities.

Further, if one's body is a gift to God, what right do we have to abuse or destroy it for self-pleasure in things that do not contribute to His service? Old Testament sacrifices required giving the best one had, not something abused, maimed, or ruined. What kind of giver destroys a possession in his own pleasures and then presents it as a gift to someone else?

So, if one's body is a gift to God which we intend to use for His work, shouldn't good stewardship teach us to care for it? There may be areas of judgment in this as in many other aspects of serving God, but are we not expected to use good judgment? And are we truly using the body as a living sacrifice to God when we indulge personal desires that obviously harm the body, shorten life, and cause sickness but have no value in His service?

*Holy*

(ἁγιος) = “2. set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively His ... 3. of sacrifices and offerings, prepared for God with solemn rite, pure, clean...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. So, one’s body is a sacrifice of dedication to God. It should be sanctified. Other passages regarding holy lives include: 1 Peter 2:5,9; Colossians 1:22; Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; 1 Peter 1:15,16; John 17:17; Romans 6:19,22; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Corinthians 7:1.

#### *Acceptable*

(εὐαρεστος) = “well-pleasing, acceptable” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. The purpose of our life of sacrifice is to please God by serving Him. We are here, not to do our own will, but to do His will. See verses above plus Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 4:1; Romans 15:2; Hebrews 13:16.

#### *Which is your reasonable (spiritual – ASV) service.*

“Reasonable” (λογικος) = “...rational ... agreeing to reason, following reason, reasonable; ... the worship which is rendered by the reason or soul...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. It is unclear whether this means serving God is a sensible thing to do or that it is spiritual in nature, coming from the inner man. Both ideas are true. Surely it is only reasonable for God to make such demands of us, considering all Paul has described that God has done for us.

### **Do not be conformed to this world.**

Since our bodies belong to God, we should not emphasize physical or material things as more important than service to God. Our manner of life should not be patterned after the ideas of the world – i.e., people who are not serving God. We should not practice things worldly people do that are forbidden, nor should we allow even harmless acts to lead us to neglect God’s work. See 1 Peter 1:14,15; Matthew 13:22; Galatians 1:4; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17.

Yet the world’s influence has made its mark among God’s people. See 1 Samuel 8. We seek the benefits of serving God without making the sacrifice. We seek to serve two masters, holding to the hope of eternal life while still holding to the pleasures of the world and being accepted by worldlings (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Matthew 6:19ff). Christians should be true non-conformists. We do not seek to be different for the sake of being different; but we seek to be all that God wants us to be, and that makes us different (Matthew 7:13,14).

### **Be transformed by renewing our minds.**

Not conformed but transformed. We are not made like the world but different from the world and different from what we were when we were in the world. A Christian is a changed person. Change is the essence of the gospel. This change must begin in the ***mind*** and then manifest itself in the life.

“Transform” (μεταμορφωω) = “...to change into another form ... to transfigure, transform ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. The word is used to describe Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2; compare 2

Corinthians 3:18). Compare this to the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The idea is not the change of a few minor characteristics. It refers to a fundamental transformation of the kind of person we are. This is what must happen in the life of a Christian, but it does not happen overnight nor without effort.

“By the renewing of your mind.” This is the root from which all change occurs. Change must come from within because all service from God must come from within. Serving God is not a matter of mere externals (though it must affect the externals). The heart is always the determining factor in man’s character. People are what they have chosen to be. In this sense man determines his own fate. See Proverbs 4:23; 23:7; Matthew 15:18,19; Titus 3:5; Colossians 3:1,2; Matthew 16:23ff; Philippians 2:5ff.

This renewal is a continual or gradual process that requires studying the Bible and then applying that teaching so one’s life changes daily and gradually to be what God wants: See 2 Corinthians 4:16; Colossians 3:1,2,10; Philippians 4:8; Psalm 1:1,2; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:3-11; Hebrews 5:12-16; Galatians 5:19-24; etc. No man can change his life if he continues to think the same old worldly thoughts, nor if he meditates on worldly things (evil entertainment, dirty jokes, pornography, etc.)

I have heard that some psychiatrists say a man can change his life within 60-90 days after he makes up his mind he really is determined to do so. The main problem we have in changing to be what God wants is that we fail to make up our minds! This is a lack of repentance. Transformation of life begins with repentance or transformation of mind.

“Prove” (δοκιμαζω) = “1. to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing be genuine or not) ... Romans 12:2 ... 2. to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Compare Ephesians 5:10. The language could mean that, as we follow God’s will in our lives, we can properly come to judge or appreciate the true value of it. Or it could mean that, as we study God’s word and use it to daily change our lives, then we will learn the discernment to properly apply God’s will to the issues we face in life. Both concepts are Scriptural.

***12:3 – Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think soberly as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith.***

***Don’t think too highly of self.***

Having urged dedication to God’s service in general, Paul then begins some specific admonitions. The first is a warning against pride, haughtiness, high-mindedness. It urges instead humility, lowliness,

meekness. This instruction is addressed to “everyone” and is connected to a discussion of gifts and abilities in God’s service (verses 4-8).

Often those who have greater abilities, or humanly impressive abilities, tend to become self-reliant and exalt themselves above others. This was the problem of those with spiritual gifts in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12; compare 2 Corinthians 12:7). Many passages admonish us to be humble instead of exalting self – Romans 11:20,25; 12:16; Proverbs 3:7; Philippians 2:3-8; Luke 14:7-11; 1 Peter 5:5; Matthew 23:11,12; 20:25-28; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Colossians 3:12,13; Ephesians 4:2,3; James 3:13-18.

We should not satisfy our own pride by seeking people to honor us as more important than others. We should appreciate the abilities others have. We should help people with their true needs regardless of their abilities. We should also recognize our own weaknesses and sins. Regardless of our abilities, we all have sinned and will be saved by God’s grace, not because we have lived sinless lives.

Further, the real honor for our abilities goes to God who gave them to us. The only honor due to a person is if he has used his abilities wisely, but everyone can do that whether his abilities are few or many. So, people should be honored for faithfulness with what they have, not for how much they have (compare Matthew 25:14-30; 2 Corinthians 8:12).

### **Think soberly.**

We should view our abilities realistically and honestly, as described above. The fact one has great ability does not make him any more important than anyone else. And if another has less ability, that is not shameful and makes him no less important. It is wrong either to exalt oneself because of ability or to do nothing because of lack of ability. People who do either one are wrong and need to do some sober thinking.

“Soberly” (σωφρονεω) – “...to be of sound mind ... to exercise self control; ... to put a moderate estimate upon one’s self; think of one’s self soberly ... Romans 12:3...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **God has dealt a measure of faith.**

All Christians have the same faith in the sense that we must believe the one true faith revealed by God (Ephesians 4:4-6; Jude 3). That faith is from God. Perhaps this verse means we should appreciate all who share in this faith.

But faith also may refer to that belief which we have in our hearts. In that sense, some have great faith and others have little faith. In that sense, we should honor people according to the degree of their faith, not according to their abilities. In what sense does God give these measures of faith? Faith comes from hearing the word (Romans 10:17; John 20:30,31; 17:20). The word is designed to appeal to people with good hearts so they believe and obey, but it is also designed to repel those who are not honest and open to accept truth. So, the word is designed to



produce different results depending on the condition of one's heart. So, God deals a measure of faith according to the condition of one's heart.

Again, "faith" is one of the gifts of the Spirit to do miracles (1 Corinthians 12:4-11), and that is dealt to man according to the will of the Spirit. This is a matter of God's choice and is not a reason to honor or exalt any man (that is the point of 1 Corinthians 12). This would tie the context of Romans 12:3-8 to 1 Corinthians 12, where a number of similar points are made (see notes below).

Any of these views of the meaning of "faith" here would harmonize with other Scripture. But the point to be appreciated here is the fact that the gifts are from God. If God is the giver and man simply received them from God, what does man have to be proud of or exalt himself? He should simply use them as God intended.

"Measure" (μετρον) – "...1. an instrument for measuring ... 2. determined extent, portion measured off, measure or limit ... Romans 12:3..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***12:4,5 – Even as we have many members in one body, not all the members have the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ and members one of another.***

This is parallel to the discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, but the same principles apply whether we are discussing spiritual gifts or natural gifts. The illustration is that the human body is made up of different members having different work to do. But all must work, and the fact they have different abilities does not prove one is more important than another.

So in the spiritual body of Christ we need unity among the members. We are one body, thus condemning denominational division; compare Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; John 17:20-23. But those in the body should practice unity, cooperation, care for one another, and appreciation of one another regardless of our different abilities. We all need a humble opinion of ourselves. And we all should work hard and honor all who work hard regardless of their abilities.

This does not teach the "unity in diversity" concept based on compromise, overlooking the fact we hold different beliefs and doctrines. The lesson and the applications made relate to different abilities (see verses 6ff). But all members are part of the one body and follow the guidance of the one head. They do not follow different, contradictory beliefs from different heads. Nor do they justify people who are members of different bodies holding entirely different doctrines.

**12:6-8 – Having different gifts, we should prophesy according to the proportion of our faith, give ourselves to the work of ministry or to teaching or to exhorting, giving liberally, ruling with diligence, or showing mercy with cheerfulness.**

Paul then gives specific examples of various functions of different members of the body. He describes these as “gifts.” All these abilities are given by God’s grace or undeserved favor. While it may be true that we can develop and improve the gifts we have by diligent application, yet God gives us the ability initially, and we could do nothing without His blessing (verse 3), so why should we become proud over them?

### **Differing gifts**

The Greek word for “gifts” is related to “grace.” Elsewhere it is used for salvation (Romans 6:23), natural abilities (1 Corinthians 7:7), non-miraculous answers to prayer (2 Corinthians 1:11), and miraculous powers from the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4,9,28,30,31). Two passages elsewhere itemize specific examples of “gifts”: 1 Corinthians 12:4ff,28ff; 1 Peter 4:10,11. (Compare Ephesians 4:7-13 where a different word for “gifts” is used.)

In this present list, some of the gifts are miraculous, since they are so used elsewhere (prophecy). Others are clearly natural, not miraculous, since all Christians are required to exercise them and they are never used elsewhere for spiritual gifts (giving, mercy, etc.). The lessons are the same in either case.

“Gifts” (χαρίσματα) = “a gift of grace; a favor which one receives without any merit of his own...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Prophecy**

Prophecy is the ability to speak God’s will by direct, miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit. Prophets were not to use their gift for self-exaltation but for the benefit of others and the glory of God (1 Corinthians 12-14).

“In proportion to our faith” – Faith was required to teach God’s word then, even as it is today. The gift was subject to the will of the prophet (1 Corinthians 14:32). One who received a message could choose to keep quiet or to speak. Great faith was required to speak in times of persecution and opposition. This is why speaking in such cases was called “bold,” and why prophets prayed for boldness (Acts 4:29-31; Ephesians 6:18-20).

Some take the “faith” to be the miraculous gift of faith, also useful in exercising other gifts (1 Corinthians 12:9).

Consider some examples where men are called prophets: 2 Peter 1:20,21; Acts 3:22,23; 15:32; 1 Corinthians 12,13,14; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Acts 13:1f; 11:27f; 21:10f.

(προφητεία) – “prophecy, i.e., discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Ministry

“Ministry” is also translated “service” (NASB, ESV). This is related to the verb “to minister” (διακονεω) and the noun “minister” (διακονος). Thayer says the word here refers to the office of deacon, but the word can also be used for service in general (2 Timothy 4:11; Hebrews 1:14; compare Ephesians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 16:15; Revelation 2:19), for teaching (compare 2 Corinthians 5:18; 11:8; 2 Timothy 4:5), for spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:5), or for caring for the needy (Acts 12:25; 6:1; 11:29; 2 Corinthians 9:1,12,13; 8:4; Romans 15:31; compare Luke 10:40).

In this context it is hard to tell whether Paul refers to spiritual ministry (teaching) or physical. The words immediately around it emphasize teaching, but if this word also means teaching then how does it differ from the others? On the other hand, “giving” and “showing mercy” are listed later. Perhaps this term simply refers generally to all the specific forms of service that follow plus any others not specifically mentioned.

(Note: I disagree with Lard who says each person should concentrate exclusively on some one item in this list. On the contrary, several things in the list are required of all Christians. The point instead is that certain people have special abilities in certain areas and should fulfill them diligently, while yet doing what they can in other areas. Even Lard is compelled to grant this for some things in the list.)

(διακονεω) = “service, ministry” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Teaching

“Teach” (verb διδασκω) and “teaching” (noun διδασκαλία) are related to the noun for teacher (διδασκαλος). Teaching may be done by direct inspiration (1 Corinthians 12:28,29; Luke 2:12; John 14:26), but inspiration is not necessary to teaching and usually the element of inspiration is not emphasized one way or the other (James 3:1; Hebrews 5:12; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:2; Romans 2:21; 1 Corinthians 11:14; Titus 2:3; compare Acts 13:1; Ephesians 4:11,12).

In this context the meaning could be uninspired teaching, in contrast to prophecy already mentioned (verse 6). Whiteside suggests “prophecy” is delivering a message received directly from the Spirit but teaching is the miraculous ability to remember a message previously given by inspiration (John 14:26). In any case, we today are not inspired and the lesson is the same for us all: do not use this gift to exalt self but to help others and to honor God, being zealous for the proper goal of helping others learn God’s will.

“Teach” (διδασκω) – “...to teach ... to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses: ... to impart instruction, instil doctrine into one ...; to explain, expound a thing...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Exhortation

“Exhorts” (verb παρακαλεω) and “exhortation” (noun παρακλησις) are related to the noun for one who exhorts (παρακλητος).

Teaching emphasizes imparting knowledge or information so people know the facts of God’s will. Exhorting emphasizes urging or motivating people to obey what they have learned (Acts 4:36; 11:23). This may involve comforting and encouraging those who are discouraged by hardships, persuading and pleading with those who are negligent or entrapped by sin, warning those who are in danger of being led away by sin, etc. Again, the goal is to help others serve God, not to exalt self.

“Exhorts” (παρακαλεω) – “... II. to address, speak to ... which may be done in the way of exhortation, entreaty, comfort, instruction, etc. ... 1. ... to admonish, exhort ... Romans 12:8 ... 2. to beg, entreat, beseech ... 3. to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort ... 5. it combines the ideas of exhorting and comforting and encouraging in Romans 12:8...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Giving

Giving would refer mainly to sharing material blessings (spiritual sharing via teaching has been thoroughly discussed). One can do this as an individual in helping the needy (Luke 10:25ff; James 1:27) or through the church (1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Philippians 4:15ff; 2 Corinthians 11:8,9; etc.).

In general “liberality” means freedom from hypocrisy or hidden, selfish motives. Regarding money it means generously (ESV). The point in context seems to be that one should not give for selfish motives (i.e., for self-exaltation and honor from men like the Pharisees did in Matthew 6:1ff). Rather, we should give generously from sincere concern for those in need.

“Give” (μεταδιδωμι) – “to share a thing with anyone ... to impart: ... he that imparteth of his substance, Romans 12:8 ... Ephesians 4:28 ... Romans 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:8 ... Lk 3:11\*” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Liberality” (απλοτης) – “singleness, simplicity, sincerity, mental honesty; the virtue of one who is free from pretence and dissimulation ... 2 Corinthians 1:12 ... Colossians 3:22; Ephesians 6:5 ... 2 Corinthians 11:3 ... without self-seeking, Romans 12:8 ... liberality, 2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:11,13\*” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Ruling

Several human relations involve exercise of authority with God's approval: elders over the church, husbands over wives, parents over children. The word "rule" is used to describe these relationships (see Thayer below). Paul may have them all in mind here.

One of the great problems facing churches and homes is lack of diligence on the part of those in authority. When elders are not diligent, churches digress doctrinally and members become negligent. In the home, children often become unfaithful because parents are careless in teaching, discipline, and guidance of children. Husbands may become negligent and wives take the leadership instead. Truly those in authority must be diligent in the work and not let authority simply become a matter of pride and exaltation.

"Rule" (προιστημι) – "...a. to be over, to superintend, preside over ... 1 Timothy 5:17 ... 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:4,5,12. b. to be a protector or guardian; to give aid ... Romans 12:8 ... c. to care for, give attention to ... Titus 3:8,14 ...\*" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"Diligence" (σπουδη) – "earnestness, diligence: univ. earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## Mercy

The main idea of "mercy" is a sense of compassion and sympathy for those in unfortunate circumstances so that one acts for their good (Matthew 9:27; 5:7; 23:23; Philippians 2:27; James 3:17; Luke 10:37). This would include areas already discussed, such as teaching and giving; but it would also include works or actions done to help people in physical problems, such as the Samaritan caring for the man on the Jericho road (Luke 10:25-37), caring for the sick and widows and orphans, etc. (Matthew 25:31-41; James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:1-14).

The cheerful giver will give generously, give what is needed when it is needed, and be glad for the opportunity to do good. We need more concern for others and less desire for the praises of men for the good we do. Compare 2 Corinthians 9:7; Acts 20:35; 1 Peter 4:9.

"Mercy" (ελεεω) – "...to succor the afflicted, to bring help to the wretched..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"Cheerfulness" (ιλαροτης) – "cheerfulness, readiness of mind" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. (This is the only place the word is used.)

**12:9 – Love should be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil and cleave to what is good.**

## Unhypocritical love

The next several verses emphasize specific aspects of love for others. First, Paul warns that love should not be hypocritical: not pretended,

feigned, or put on for outward show without an inner motive of real concern for others. “Let love be genuine” – ESV. Compare 2 Corinthians 6:6; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22.

Some examples of hypocritical love are: politicians who kiss babies to get votes, Judas who kissed Jesus to betray Him for money (Matthew 26:48,49,14-16); the Pharisees who gave alms to others or prayed or fasted to receive praises of men (Matthew 6:1-18; 23:1-5; John 12:42f), a person who marries for money or prestige, preachers who preach for wealth or popularity (Romans 6:18; Galatians 1:10), people who make a big show of love in public but won’t do good unless they think other people will honor them for it.

To love means to do what is best for others from a sincere concern for their wellbeing and to obey God knowing that His will is the best thing to do: Romans 13:10; John 14:15; 1 John 5:1-3. Any person has a hypocritical love if he claims to act for the purpose of pleasing God or helping others, but is really acting for self-exaltation, for money, or for other motives.

### **Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.**

There are some things God hates and wants Christians to hate: 1 Thessalonians 5:2f; Hebrews 1:9; Amos 5:15; Psalm 97:10; 45:7; 10:13; 31:6; 119:104,128,163; Proverbs 8:13; 6:16; 13:5; 1 Corinthians 13:6. Some people say Christians should always love and never hate. “Just preach the gospel, but don’t condemn others.”

True, we do not hate the people in the sense of seeking their harm. We love all men in that we want them to receive what is best for them (Matthew 5:43-48; 22:37ff). What we hate is “that which is evil”: the sinful deeds people do. “Hate the sin, but love the sinner.”

In fact, it is not possible to truly love good without hating evil. Christian teaching is both positive and negative: Psalm 119:104,128; 97:10; Proverbs 8:13; 13:5. One who truly loves something must also hate the opposite of what he loves. It is not enough to speak in favor of what is good. We must also speak against evil. Anytime one speaks for a thing, he is automatically speaking against its opposite.

How does a person act if he clings to what is good? He will diligently study to learn what is right, will faithfully practice what he knows to be right, will repent and correct his life to agree with new truth learned, and will diligently teach others what is right.

How will one act who abhors evil? He will study to learn what he should avoid, will refuse to practice evil, will correct his life to remove evil from it, and will diligently teach and encourage those around him to help them avoid the evil.

Lard points out that some Christians, including some preachers, may profess to oppose error, but they do it so weakly that their objections have no effect. Those who truly hate the sin must speak out against it firmly so that all can know the truth and see the need to repent.

## **12:10 – Love one another with tender affection, in honor preferring one another.**

### **Love of the brethren**

Brethren have a special family relationship in Christ. This relationship should be characterized by love, as many passages teach: John 13:34,35; 15:12-17; Ephesians 4:2,31-5:2; Philippians 2:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9,10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 3:8,9; 4:8; 2 Peter 1:7; 1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-18,23; 4:8-5:3; 2 John 5.

How does a person act if he loves his brother? He will act for the best interest of his brother. This means, not that he always does what his brother **wants**, but that he always does what his brother **needs** and what is best for him (Romans 13:10). And remember that the best thing to do is always what God's word reveals, not what our own opinions prefer (1 John 5:2,3).

"Kindly affectioned" (φιλοστοργος) emphasizes love as in a family. Love for brethren is not just αγαπη or active good will – the love we should have even for our enemies. Love for brethren also involves a sense of family closeness: a kind, loving patience with one another. Yet a feud within a family can also be the most bitter form of enmity. So we are admonished to avoid such bitterness and learn to truly love one another and work for what is best for one another. Overcome strife, grudges, and feuds.

### **Giving preference to one another**

Translations: "in honor preferring one to another" (KJV, ASV), "giving preference to one another in honor" (NASB), "honor one another above yourselves" (NIV), "outdo one another in showing honor" (ESV, RSV).

No doubt it is good for Christians to prefer one another in business dealings and in personal associations, and those ideas would be included in the general concept of brotherly love and tender affection. However, that does not appear to be the main point here, as is sometimes thought.

This expression tells us to prefer one another in matters of "honor." In regard to honor and recognition, we should take the lead by showing honor to others, rather than seeking it for ourselves. Rather than being jealous or upset if other Christians are honored, we should set a good example by offering praise for our brethren when they deserve it. We should ungrudgingly seek for others to receive glory. This is a quality of humility, meekness, and lack of pride which all Christians should possess. (See notes on verse 3; compare Philippians 2:3,4.)

"Preferring" (προηγεομαι) – "to go before and show the way, to go before and lead, to go before as leader, ... one going before another as an example of deference" ... Romans 12:10" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.



***12:11 – Do not be lazy in showing diligence, be fervent in spirit serving the Lord.***

This passage emphasizes the need for diligence and zeal in serving God. A similar point is made in 12:1,2 and many other Scriptures. See Matthew 6:19-33; 16:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; 15:58; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 5:14,15; Galatians 2:20; Luke 14:25-33; Acts 18:25.

“Business” (KJV) refers to the Lord’s business, not primarily daily financial concerns, as shown by the last part of the verse and by other translations. “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (NIV).

Zeal without knowledge can be destructive (10:1-3), but knowledge without zeal is just as harmful. Many members of “sound congregations” are “lagging in diligence.” The Lord’s work will prosper when, and only when, His people practice the zeal described here.

We need service that is fervent (“burning” – Marshall), not slothful or lazy. It must come from the spirit or heart (verse 2; compare John 4:24). This is a command like baptism, communion, etc.

Does this describe the service you and I offer to God? If all members had the diligence described here, would we need to continually admonish members to come to all the assemblies and Bible classes, study their Bibles, pray, teach their children and neighbors? Would we have to beg people to teach Bible classes? Would our contribution be higher?

In fact, why do we need to be commanded to have zeal? Shouldn’t it be a natural expression of our appreciation for all God has done for us (see verse 12).

Too many Christians are like leaky tires: they only serve if you keep pumping them up! And they usually fail at the most critical times. But no one will continue to use tires that have to be pumped up every few days. We either patch them so they stay up or we get new ones that stay pumped up.

If all God’s servants were as zealous and you, how well would His work have been accomplished. How do we compare to Abraham, Noah, Moses, Paul, Jesus, Dorcas, Mary, Ruth, and other great servants who are upheld in the Bible as our examples?

***12:12 – Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.***

***Rejoicing in hope***

Christians truly look forward to a great hope reserved for us in heaven (compare 5:2; 8:17-25, see especially notes on 8:24,25; Hebrews 3:6). This hope should cause great joy (rejoicing) in a Christian’s life, a joy none other can have. Too often we fail to appreciate it, and as a result fail to live fervently (verse 11).



Hope gives joy, and hope motivates faithfulness. When we lose sight of our hope, we lose our joy and soon lose our zeal. We forget the joy we had when we first were forgiven. We need to remember these joys, especially in times of discouragement and hardship (as in the next phrase).

For other passages about the Christian's hope see Acts 24:15; Ephesians 2:12; 4:4; Romans 15:13; 1 Corinthians 15:19; Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:2; 2:11-14; 3:7; Hebrews 6:18,19; 10:23; 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3,4,13,21.

Many passages likewise discuss the rejoicing or joy Christians should have: Matthew 13:44; 25:21,23; Luke 6:23; 10:20; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 13:52; 16:34; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 2:17; 3:1; 4:4; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:6,8; 4:13.

### **Patient in tribulation**

Our hope should lead us to continue to be faithful despite hardships. God has also given other blessings to help us endure patiently, including prayer (see the last part of the verse), His word, and the examples of other Christians. God provides all we need to endure patiently.

Verses 14-21 of this chapter tell how to treat people who may cause us tribulation. Here we are admonished to remain faithful in persecution.

Many Scriptures admonish us that we will suffer hardship and should do so patiently: Matthew 5:10-12; 13:21; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 8:17-39; 2 Corinthians 1:4-10; 4:17; 7:4; 2 Timothy 3:12; Hebrews 10:32-36; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1,15-19; 5:10.

“Tribulation” (θλίψις) – “1) a pressing, pressing together, pressure 2) metaph. oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Continuing steadfastly in prayer**

Diligent regular prayer should characterize every true Christian. It will surely help us in times of tribulation. Those who have true zeal will remember to pray (verse 11).

When are good times to pray? In persecution, temptation, hardship; when sorrowing or happy; when thankful for blessings; when weak; when facing important work for the Lord; when standing against sin; when needing forgiveness, etc. In short, **anytime** is a good time to pray.

How steadfast are we in prayer? If our children follow our example, will they please God in prayer?

Many other passages show the importance of prayer: Acts 2:42; 6:4; Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 1:3; 4:2,3; 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

## **12:13 – Contributing to the needs of saints, practicing hospitality.**

### **Distributing to the needs of the saints**

“Distribute” (NKJV, KJV, κοινωungsverbal) is translated: “communicate” (ASV), “share” (NIV), “contribute” (NASB, ESV).

Christians should share in the hardships of other Christians as in a family (verse 10). This especially applies toward those who suffer persecution (verse 12), but would apply also at any time when brethren are truly unable to meet their own needs.

This does not mean we should support one who can meet needs that are his responsibility but is simply lazy or negligent (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But when a brother, due to circumstances beyond his control, has a problem he is truly unable to solve, other Christians should share in that need. This includes physical needs but may also include a need for help in doing work, care for children, medical care, finding a job, or even emotional needs such as sympathy, encouragement, etc.

Other passages about sharing are: 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8&9, Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-5:11; 11:27ff; Galatians 6:2-6; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27; 2:15f; Luke 10:25-35; 1 John 3:17,18; Matt 25:35ff; Luke 3:11; 14:12-14.

### **Given to hospitality**

“Hospitality” (φιλοξενία) literally means love of strangers. From that it came to mean generosity to guests. It involves an interest and concern for helping even people we don’t know well.

This is related to the first part of the verse. It would include helping Christians who are fleeing or suffering from persecution (taking them into our homes), Christians who are traveling (such as preachers), helping new converts, people who are new in the community, etc. We should try to get to know them, invite them for a meal, etc.

The emphasis in hospitality is in helping **needs**, not just doing what people want done or what we enjoy for our own pleasure (having friends over for parties, etc.). It also emphasizes using one’s home to help the needs of people.

Others passages are 1 Peter 4:9; Matthew 25:34-36,40; Hebrews 13:1,2; Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:9,10.

## **12:14 – Bless those who persecute you, do not curse them.**

All Christians will suffer persecution (see notes on verse 12). Those who oppose the gospel will often seek to harm those who support it. They may try to stop the teaching of truth that reminds them of their sin. This may be done by threats of financial loss (job or property), social loss (ridicule, lies, ostracism), or physical loss (health or life). This happened to Jesus, the apostles, early Christians, and Old Testament prophets. It

will happen to Christians in every age, though the degree of persecution and methods used may vary.

The natural reaction of people who are mistreated is to fight back. We seek to hurt those who hurt us. We may curse them, calling for some harm or evil to befall them. We may be tempted to retaliate. Verses 17-21 show that Christians should never return evil for evil. That would violate the principle of love, which seeks the good of all (Romans 13:8-12). See Matthew 7:12; 5:43-47; Luke 6:27-29; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 3:9.

The emphasis here is on speech. We should not curse or express the desire for harm to occur to those who harm us. Instead we should bless them, expressing the desire for good to happen to them, pray for them, etc. This is surely one of the hardest commands in the Bible to fulfill, yet it is a command. Jesus' meekness toward His enemies is a perfect example we should imitate.

Nothing here says it is wrong to warn men that their actions are sinful or that God will punish them if they do not repent. Nor is it wrong to flee from persecution or to appeal to governing authorities to protect us. Jesus, Paul, and others often did all of these (see John 18:19-23; Acts 23:12-30; 22:23-29; 16:35-39; 25:7-12; etc.).

Note: If we are forbidden to curse our enemies, then whom could we rightly curse? Obviously, no one (James 3:9-12).

***12:15 – Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.***

Christians should be sympathetic people, compassionate, sharing one another's problems and joys like a family. This may also be true to a lesser extent toward non-Christians; however, there is a special joy we have when our family members prosper and a special sorrow when they suffer. And we will often disagree with people of the world about what kinds of things should cause us joy and what should cause us sorrow. Job 30:25; Hebrews 13:3; Psalm 35:13,14.

All people experience times of joy and times of sorrow, especially those who face persecution (verse 14). When people experience good things, those who love them are happy for them. Too often, instead, people have envy and hard feelings because other people experience good things, especially when we consider those people to be enemies (see Proverbs 24:17,18). Such envy and hard feelings would constitute sorrowing when they rejoice, rather than rejoicing when they rejoice.

Again, when people have sorrow, heartache, and grief because they or their loved ones suffer harm, we should love them enough to truly have compassion and offer sympathy or help (John 11:35; Luke 10:33). When people lack love or hold inward grudges, they will be glad (or indifferent) when hardship strikes others.

What attitude do we have? The principle of this verse can serve as a measuring stick to evaluate our love.

**12:16 – Have the same mind toward one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.**

**Be of the same mind toward one another.**

This expression could refer to doctrinal unity. Other passages clearly require that: Galatians 1:8,9; Matthew 15:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:25; Galatians 5:19-21; John 17:20,21; Luke 11:17; Romans 14:19; 16:17; Titus 3:10; Proverbs 26:21; 6:16-19; Ephesians 4:3-6.

The context here and elsewhere where the phrase is used, however, seems to discuss primarily our attitude toward one another: mutual love and concern for the wellbeing of one another, rather than doctrinal agreement. Perhaps both ideas are included here.

We should not allow pride (see the last part of the verse) to lead to strife, division, faction over human ambitions, personalities, achievements, etc. Personal desires and loyalties should not lead to wrong attitudes toward one another (1 Corinthians 1-4). Such attitude problems often accompany doctrinal differences; but they also often lead to problems where there is no doctrinal difference, or they may bring about doctrinal differences which would not occur were it not for the underlying attitude problems.

See also 15:5,6; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2ff; 4:2; 1 Peter 3:8,9.

**Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble (NKJV).**

Other translations are:

“Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate” (KJV)

“Set not you mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly” (ASV)

“Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly” (NASB)

“Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.” (ESV, RSV)

“Don’t be proud, but we willing to associate with people of low position” (NIV)

See 12:3; 11:20; 1 Timothy 6:17; 1 Peter 1:17.

This returns to the point of verse 3. Pride often causes disunity (see the first part of this verse). People seek to be exalted above others. They want authority, honor, or possessions more than others have. So, they tend to associate with people who have advantages or whom they think will give them advantages, but ignore people who are less favorably situated.

The verse says humility would teach us not to seek positions or companions so they can exalt us or feed our ego. Instead we should seek to do God’s work, glorify Him, and help everyone around us in the best way to please God. This will lead us not to honor or favor any class of people, but to seek to help the greatest number of people to achieve the

greatest good for the Lord. Generally, this means more contact with humble people, because often they are the ones who are more likely to be receptive to God's will and more likely to need our concern (1 Corinthians 1:26ff; James 2:1-13; Luke 18:18-30).

Christians should definitely never show favoritism in doing good works, being benevolent, teaching God's word, rebuking sin, etc.

"Associate" (συναπαγω) is also translated "condescend" (KJV, ASV). The original word does not, however, carry the English idea of one who has a higher status choosing to lower himself for those of lower status. We should not assume to begin with that we have a higher status than others. This is the whole point. Some people think they are too good to do certain jobs or associate with certain people. Instead, we should associate with all kinds of people and not be proud.

Note that the word "things" or "men" (depending on translation) is not in the original but is supplied by the translators. We must decide from context which is meant.

### **Do not be wise in your own opinion.**

This refers back to the problem of pride as discussed in verse 3 (see notes there). Compare 11:25; Proverbs 3:7.

Christians should not be conceited or haughty thinking themselves more exalted than others. We should appreciate that our abilities are given us by God, recognize and admit our weaknesses, and strive to be concerned and helpful toward all, appreciating their good qualities.

***12:17,18 – Do not render to anyone evil for evil. Take thought for honorable things in the sight of all men. To the extent possible within you, be at peace with all.***

### **Repay no one evil for evil.**

This verse begins a series of instructions regarding treatment of those who wrong us (verses 17-21). Paul has already taught in verse 14 that our speech should not return evil for evil (see notes on verse 14). Here he shows that this principle applies to all aspects of our conduct. The principle is easy to state but very hard to accomplish.

Note some parallel passages: Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; Matthew 5:38-48; 7:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 2:18,21-23; 3:1-6,9; 1 Corinthians 6:7; Luke 6:27-38.

The "golden rule" teaches us to treat other people as we *want* them to treat us. The rule of love for neighbor teaches us to do good to all (Romans 13:8-10). There is no exception for people who have mistreated us.

This is one of Jesus' hardest teachings to apply. Some people do to others whatever they can get away with, selfishly seeking personal gain regardless of who is hurt. Most people can see that approach is error.

But some follow the rule: Do to others like they do to you. This principle would lead us to treat others well if they are treating us well,

but if they do evil to us then we are justified in doing evil to them. We must “get even,” “even the score,” etc. Yet God says this rule also is evil. Two wrongs do not make a right. This is a form of vengeance discussed throughout this context.

Christians are never justified in seeking to harm others no matter how they have treated us. We must always seek to do them good. Of course, good is defined in the Bible, not in our own human opinion. Sometimes Bible principles may require us to do something that people or human reasoning suggests is not good (such as spanking a child or rebuking a sinner, even the one who sinned against us). Yet by God’s standards, His word reveals what is good regardless of what people think about it. Whatever is done must be done from a good motive, not of vengeance because our pride is wounded.

There are many applications (note: “**no man**”). On the job we may have a grudge against another employee and seek to get him in trouble. We may feel justified in not working hard because the boss has not treated us right. In the home, a wife or child may feel justified in disobeying the husband or parents because they think they have been mistreated. Parents or husbands may cruelly misuse their authority because the child or wife hurt them in some way (see Colossians 3:19). In the church, members may become bitter for some harm done (real or imagined), and may fail to act in love. Perhaps discipline or firm teaching is needed, but it may be done with a vengeful attitude because of wrong conduct.

Further teaching is given in verses 18-21.

**Have regard for good things in the sight of all men (NKJV).**

Other translations: “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (KJV). “Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men” (ASV). “Respect what is right in the sight of all men” (NASB). “...give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all” (ESV). (Compare 2 Corinthians 8:21).

Christians must be concerned about our influence, specifically the impression we leave on others (“in the sight of all men”) as to whether we are morally upright and honorable people. Many passages emphasize the need for good influence and good reputation, not acting so that others may justly criticize us (1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:13-16; 18:6,7; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-33).

This does not mean man’s opinion of us is the standard of right or wrong. Some people will find fault simply because they oppose the truth of God’s word. We could not please them no matter what we do unless we compromise God’s will. But often other people recognize in us things that are contrary to the character of Christians or things we do for

personal pleasure that hurt other people's service to God. This is what is here being rebuked.

"Honest" (KJV) today implies especially financial uprightness, paying one's debts, etc. Surely that is included in the word, but the applications are much broader. A person violates this verse if he refuses to pay his debts or if he deceives or embezzles others in business. This is sinful and hinders the teaching of the gospel.

But much more is involved. Honesty involves many aspects of life. We must have a reputation for speaking truth and dealing fairly and justly with others in all aspects of life. And even more than honesty, the word involves moral uprightness in general. This ties in with the context. We should treat other people honorably and uprightly no matter how they treat us. Our reputation as Christians will be harmed if we mistreat them, no matter how they have treated us.

"Good" or "honorable" (καλός) – "... (acc. to context) ... beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, admirable ... beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy; morally good, noble ... Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21; 1 Timothy 2:3..."  
– Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

Christians by nature should be peace-loving people. This ties in with the context. Love for others is what teaches us to live peaceably (verses 9,10). This is essential in order to treat others right (verse 17). In context, the emphasis is on seeking peace even with those who mistreat us. If we avoid vengeance and retaliation, peace may eventually result.

However, it is not always possible to have peace with all men, no matter how hard we try. In fact, Christians are not likely to have peace for long at a time with people who are not serving God. Neither Jesus nor His apostles had it for long. We should surely never compromise truth to achieve it: Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:51-53; James 3:17; etc.

The lesson is that there should be peace "if it is possible, as much as depends on us." **We** must not be the cause of strife. If we teach truth and others oppose it, they are fighting against God. This is not our fault.

But if we speak error or doctrines not found in the faith, or if we fail to speak in love and retaliate or insist on our personal preferences, then **we** are the cause of strife. We can also be guilty of failing to produce peace if we neglect to teach the truth. God's word is the greatest producer of peace there is. If we keep silent, we may cause a false sense of peace in error, or we may fail to bring about peace on the basis of God's word.

Many passages show that Christians should desire to have peace with others: Matthew 5:9; James 3:13-18; Romans 14:19; Genesis 13:8; Proverbs 20:3; Psalm 133:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-6;



Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Mark 9:50; Hebrews 12:11. This applies toward “all men.”

**12:19-21 – Do not take personal vengeance but give place to God’s wrath, for vengeance belongs to God; He will recompense. Overcome evil with good by giving food or drink to an enemy who is in need, thereby heaping coals of fire on his head.**

**Avenge not yourselves, for vengeance belongs to the Lord.**

“Avenge” (εκδικεω) basically means to punish someone in response to his wrongdoing. The context is discussing evils we suffer because people wrong us, especially if they persecute us for doing good. This verse teaches we should not personally execute punishment on those who do evil to us: “avenge not **yourselves**.”

We should not return evil (verse 17) or speak evil (verse 14) upon those who do evil to us. They may **deserve** to be punished and may in fact eventually **be** punished, but **we** are not to take it upon ourselves to do it. Yet most people want to do so. We think **we** must get even. We are not willing to leave such matters in God’s hand.

This does not mean we have no recourse when we are wronged. If a non-Christian wrongs us, we may pursue the matter before civil authorities: Romans 13:1-7; Luke 18:1-8; Acts 16:35-39; 21:32-36; 22:22-29; 23:10,12-35; 24:17-21; 25:1-12. If a Christian sins against us, we may take the matter to the church (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 6:1-11). If we are wronged in some other circumstance, there may be other people in authority who can deal with the matter, such as supervisors at work who can deal with other employees who mistreat us, etc. This is not taking personal vengeance. And even in these cases our motive must not be to hurt the person but to protect our own life and property and reputation, and to lead the person in sin to repent. In any case, we are forbidden to personally seek to punish the evildoer. Because we have been wronged, we are likely to be unfair or biased in our judgments and responses.

The issue is **who** takes the vengeance. It should be **God**, not **us**. We should give place to His wrath, for vengeance belongs to Him and His will repay (Deuteronomy 32:35). He ordained the vengeance of civil government (13:1-6) and church discipline. Above all, He will repay at the final judgment if men do not repent beforehand. Men may escape all forms of earthly punishment, but they will not escape the final one (Hebrews 10:30; Luke 18:7,8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Christians must learn to be satisfied with God’s justice. Yet often we insist on personally taking vengeance. That is what God here forbids.



**Care for your enemy if he is hungry or thirsty; in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.**

This passage is **not** saying we should aid and care for false teachers or other sinners in a way that supports or encourages their sin. The point is specific: rather than harming those who harm us, we should help them when they are in need even as we would help anyone else whom we found to be needy. The fact they have wronged us does not mean we should refuse to do for them what we would do for other people who face the same hardships.

This goes a step further than verse 17. Verse 17 said we should not harm them. Now we are told to do them **good**. We must not even be neutral or indifferent to their wellbeing, but must actively work for their good (in Biblical terms). Specific examples are listed – see notes on verse 21.

“Heaping coals of fire” – The acts described are not literal coals of fire. The reference must be to the burning pain of conscience one ought to feel when he is treated well by someone whom he has wronged. If one receives evil for evil, he may conclude (foolishly) that the other person deserved the wrong he did to them. But if good is returned instead, this makes it even more obvious that the original mistreatment was unjust. This knowledge must pain anyone except those who are most hardened.

Yet, even so the purpose is not so much to try to get even with the person as to hope that his conscience will lead him to repent. Then we have done him the greatest good.

Compare Proverbs 25:21,22; Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27; Exodus 23:4,5; 2 Kings 6:22f; 2 Chronicles 28:15; Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34.

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

When has a person been **overcome** by evil? A good man may be mistreated, persecuted, and reviled. His possessions may be taken, his reputation destroyed, and his health ruined. But if he remains faithful to God, he is the victor (Romans 8:31-39). He has not been overcome by evil. Jesus and His apostles were treated in all these ways, but were not defeated.

A man is overcome by evil when, and only when, he himself responds by **doing** evil. When I allow the evil done to me to make **me** evil, then I have been overcome by evil. Specifically, if I return evil for evil by avenging myself, then I become evil like the person who did me evil. The evil he did to me does not justify my evil to him. I have been overcome by evil.

The solution is to overcome evil with good. No matter how badly I have been treated, I must continue to do good. In that way I overcome evil.

Examples of overcoming evil with good would include:

\* Working diligently on my job despite mistreatment by my employer

- \* Obeying civil law even when the rulers are corrupt
- \* Obeying parents who are cruel and unfair
- \* Making decisions in love and providing for a wife who is disobedient or submitting to a husband who has acted unlovingly
- \* Teaching the gospel to an enemy
- \* Forgiving one who sins against us and repents
- \* Returning property that belongs to one who has cheated or stolen from us
- \* Helping someone who needs food, clothing, medical care, etc., even if he has harmed us
- \* Praying for those who have mistreated us

See Genesis 45:15; Numbers 12:13; 1 Samuel 24:5-12,17; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Genesis 31:38-42; Romans 5:5-8; 1 Samuel 25:32,33.

# Romans 13

## 13:1-7 – Attitude and Conduct toward Civil Government

***13:1,2 – Every soul should be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but from God, and the powers that exist are ordained by God. So, whoever resists the power withstands God’s ordinance and shall receive judgment.***

### Governing authorities

In this section Paul discusses the need for submission to “governing authorities” (NKJV, NASB, ESV). These are called “higher powers” (KJV, ASV) or “rulers” (verse 3). Their work is to take vengeance on those who do evil (verses 3,4) and reward those who do good (verse 3). We pay them tribute (verse 6). This can only refer to human civil government.

This section shows that all people should be subject to these authorities. God commands us to obey them, just as He commands wives to obey their husbands and children to obey parents. To disobey rulers is to sin against God. See also Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17 and other passages listed below. Compare passages on other forms of human authority.

Sometimes people today object to this submission because of corruption and similar difficulties within civil government. Some may think they would be untrue to the authority of Jesus as king if they submit to earthly rulers. Some claim that Jesus taught “civil disobedience”: that He was a rebel against “the establishment.” But people in the first century would have had all the same reasons we have for disobeying the government, and maybe more reasons. Jews strongly resented Roman rule, because it was a foreign power that had subjugated Palestine. Many thought the Messiah should lead a rebellion against Roman rule (John 6:15). (Luke 23:2)

Yet Jesus taught submission to civil law, just as Paul did here. He specifically said that His disciples can and should obey both “Caesar” and God (Matthew 22:15-22). In the presence of the Roman ruler, whom He knew would unjustly condemn Him to death, He said His kingdom was spiritual, not earthly, and therefore no essential conflict existed

(John 18:36). Paul likewise had been mistreated at times by Roman authorities, yet he here taught to obey the law.

### Appointed by God

Rulers have authority because God gave it to them (John 19:11; Daniel 2:21; 4:17). Verses 4,6 also show that rulers are ministers of God. This does not mean rulers may do whatever they please, claiming God gave them the authority to do so. As with husbands and parents, when God gives authority He also gives instructions regarding how that authority should be used. Rulers sometimes misuse their authority, just like men sometimes abuse anything else God has given. When they do, God will hold them accountable.

Nothing here teaches that God justifies corruption, bribery, stealing, lying, drunkenness, murder, adultery, or any other sins committed by rulers or by those who work for rulers. Such conduct is sinful for rulers just as it would be for husbands, parents, or anyone else. Nor does God condone rulers who make sinful or unjust laws. God ordained civil law and therefore His law is higher. Rulers must answer to Him for their misconduct. And faithful men of God often rebuked rulers for sinful conduct. See 2 Samuel 12:1-15; Matthew 14:1-4; Acts 24:25. (Compare 1 Kings 13:1-9; Acts 22:24-29; Esther 7; Daniel 4)

The fact civil government commands a thing does not always mean we may do it (Acts 5:29). If it is contrary to the Bible for us to do it, we must obey God instead of civil rulers. The fact rulers forbid a thing does not automatically mean we must cease it. If God commands us to do it, we must do it despite the rulers. If civil law permits a thing, that does not mean God permits it (such as divorce, gambling, abortion, drinking, pornography, adultery, homosexuality, etc.) If it violates God's law, we must avoid it regardless of what the civil law permits.

This does not mean we may disobey rulers anytime *they* sin. Rather, we can and **must** disobey when they demand that *we* sin. As long as we can obey civil law without disobeying God's law, then we must do so. (See Daniel 3 & 6.)

The main lesson here, however, is for citizens. The fact the power of rulers is given them by God ought to teach us to respect their authority and submit.

### Resisting authority

Since government is ordained by God, its power comes from Him. If we resist that power, we are rebelling against God and will stand condemned. There are two senses in which we stand condemned. (1) The rulers themselves have power to punish us. And, (2) the laws of God condemn us, for we have disobeyed God's command to obey the rulers.

Example: Suppose a parent tells a child to obey his schoolteacher. If the child disobeys the teacher, he has also disobeyed the parent who told him to obey the teacher! He is subject to be punished, not just by

the teacher, but also by the parent. “If you get a whipping at school, you get another one at home.” In the same way, when we disobey civil law, we also disobey God who told us to obey civil law.

One way that citizens sometimes resist the government is by physical violence or revolution, seeking to overthrow the existing rulers. Such acts surely constitute resistance to the government, and are thereby forbidden by this passage. However, we also resist the government anytime we choose to disobey the laws of government.

***13:3,4 – Rulers are a terror, not to good works, but to evil. If we do good we need not fear the rulers, but will be praised by them. Rulers are a minister of God to us for good. But if we do evil, we should be afraid because they bear not the sword in vain. They are avengers of wrath for those who do evil.***

**Rulers are a terror to evil works, not good works.**

These verses discuss the proper purposes of government. Though rulers may not always do as is here described, this is what God **ordained** them to do. Rulers and citizens both need to understand the principles discussed here.

Civil government exists to punish the evildoer (be a terror to evil) and reward (praise) those who do good. To do otherwise is a perversion of governmental power. See also 1 Peter 2:14. Government ought not terrorize those who do good. Good people should have no reason to fear the government, but should be praised by it. Those who do evil, however, have reason to be afraid.

This shows how citizens may have a good relationship with the government: do what is good! Of all people, therefore, Christians ought to be the least concerned about being punished by rulers, because they ought always to do good. If everyone were Christians, there would be little need for government to enforce laws. They might need to make traffic laws, etc., but there would be no need for police, judges, prisons, etc., because the laws would be obeyed. When a man acts in such a way that he is worried about being caught by the police, he needs to consider whether he is living faithfully as a Christian.

Rulers also should realize they are responsible to God for how they treat citizens. They should not act to please themselves or an inner circle of cronies. In a democracy or republic, citizens often think that the government should serve primarily to please the people. But this is also incorrect. The primary concern of rulers should be to please God who ordained them to power. Specifically, they must act to punish those who do evil and to praise, not terrorize, those who do good.

***The primary purpose for which government exists is to protect good citizens from evildoers.*** This is the bottom line of the purpose for government. By punishing the evildoer and praising those

who do good, government encourages righteousness and protects good people from those who are not righteous.

Often, however, rulers fail to make laws against sinful and oppressive acts, or they fail to enforce the laws. Laws sometimes even benefit evildoers at the expense of the righteous. Worse yet, laws may hinder good people from practicing righteousness or may even punish them for doing so. Laws may be enforced unjustly, favoring certain classes or privileged individuals. All these constitute sinful abuse of power by rulers. As already shown, this does not excuse citizens from obeying the rulers, but it does show that God will hold rulers accountable for how they use their power.

### **God's minister to you for good.**

This continues the thought of verse 3 and emphasizes that government is a servant (minister) of God for the **benefit of the citizens**, especially the good citizens. As servants of God, rulers must obey His will, not their own. The ultimate benefit of this will be for "you" – i.e., Christians.

As already mentioned, Christians ought to be praised by government and protected from evildoers. When rulers fail to serve that purpose, they disobey God, no longer act by God's authority, and no longer deserve to be in power. This does not mean citizens have the right to revolt and rebel any more than misuse of power by a husband justifies a wife in rebelling (see Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:1-6). But it does show government is accountable to God and must act according to His authority.

### **An avenger of wrath**

Verse 4 primarily explains how government ought to treat those who do evil. Evildoers ought to fear the government, because it has the God-given power to execute vengeance on them. This power is symbolized by the sword, and rulers are serving God when they so act because they are protecting the people who serve God.

Romans 12:19 showed that we should not take personal vengeance on people who wrong us, but should let God take care of it. Here we learn one way God does this: through His ordained ministers, the civil rulers. This is why it is proper for Christians to appeal to rulers to protect us from harm (Esther 4:8-16; Acts 22:24-29; 23:12-33; 25:10-12; see notes on Romans 12:19).

To avenge means to punish people for evil (see 12:19). Government is responsible to mete out punishment justly on God's behalf. When evil runs rampant and unpunished, government has failed.

The "sword" was an instrument of authority worn by the soldiers (policemen) of that day, even as police in our day wear modern weapons (guns, etc.). As such, the sword was a symbol of civil authority. Paul said

they did not wear these symbols without reason. They were not just symbols, but had a purpose: to punish evildoers.

People who do good need have no fear, but those who do evil have every reason to fear. A policeman ought to be a Christian's friend. If we are deliberately hiding from them or seeking to evade their jurisdiction, we ought to question whether it is because the police are misusing their authority or because we are disobeying God-ordained authority.

***13:5-7 – So, we should be subject, not just because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For this reason, we also pay taxes because they are servants of God attending upon His purposes. Render to everyone what is due: tribute, custom, fear, or honor.***

### **Be subject because of wrath and also for conscience' sake.**

These verses summarize verses 1-4 again stating we must obey (be subject to) the rulers. Two reasons are given: (1) because of wrath, and (2) for conscience' sake.

#### *Wrath*

This refers back to verse 4: rulers are an avenger of wrath. They have the power to punish evil: fines, imprisonment, etc. Some people think this is all there is: if you get caught, the rulers punish you, and that's the end of it. The only penalty is whatever consequences come upon you at the hand of the rulers. But if that were all, there would be no reason to obey if you thought you would not get caught. So, God offers a second reason to obey.

#### *Conscience*

We obey not just because of what government can do to evildoers. "Wrath" here pertains to punishment inflicted by the rulers. "Conscience" refers to our standing before God. Conscience is that part of the mind that tells us whether we are doing what is right or wrong, especially as guided by God's law (Titus 1:15; Hebrews 13:18; Acts 24:16; Romans 14:14,23; 1 Timothy 4:1,2).

The point is that God's law instructs us to obey civil rulers. So, we cannot have a pure conscience toward God if we are disobeying the rulers. 1 Peter 2:13-15,17 says we must obey rulers for "the Lord's sake" for "this is the will of God" – i.e., because He commanded it. This is equivalent to "for conscience' sake" (compare 1 Peter 2:19). One who violates civil law is also violating Divine law. God commands civil obedience, not "civil disobedience" (unless the civil law must be disobeyed in order to be obedient to Divine law).

Specific examples of laws we must obey, but which some people (even "religious" people) justify disobeying would include: traffic laws, building codes, drug laws (marijuana), riots & looting, and taxes (especially income tax).

## Paying taxes

Another application of these principles is that, since government is doing a work ordained by God, it is only right and fitting that Christians pay taxes to support government. Other passages showing we should pay taxes are: Matthew 22:16-22; compare 17:24-27; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-26.

“For because of this” implies that people should pay taxes because of what has already been said. Rulers are servants of God punishing evildoers for the protection of those who do right. They do a work that God has ordained, so good people should be willing to support it. Further, if we don’t pay taxes, we are disobeying the law so, as already stated, we are subject to the wrath of the rulers and are violating our consciences before God.

Some people object to paying taxes when rulers use the taxes to support sinful or immoral acts (such as abortion, pornography, etc.). However, rulers supported evil things in the days of Paul and Jesus too. The Roman government was exceedingly corrupt and often even persecuted Christians. However, Paul and Jesus still said to pay taxes. We are supporting the government because God said to and because it does a work for God, not because of the evil it may do. God knew government would sometimes do evil, but still said to pay the taxes.

## Render to all their due.

As Paul comes to the end of his discussion of civil rulers, he generalizes the principle of verse 6 and makes a transition to more general topics. He has said to pay taxes to support the government for the good it does. He proceeds to show we should give what is due to **all**. The immediate application is to rulers, but the principle applies in general.

He lists several specific areas in which people should be given what is due them:

“Taxes” (φορος), or “tribute” (ASV), refers mainly to money paid by an occupied country to the government that has subjugated it, especially a tax on property (like real estate or property taxes). Citizens naturally resent all taxes, especially tribute to a foreign power. This is why the Jews thought they might trap Jesus by questioning him about tribute (Matthew 22:16-22; Luke 20:19-26; 23:2). Even so, the foreign power renders a useful service in maintaining order in society and is therefore worthy of support. “Render unto Caesar...”

“Custom” (τελος) was, according to Barnes, probably a tax on imported or exported merchandise. This would show that we should pay taxes regardless of the form or manner in which it is levied. (Matthew 17:25; compare 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27)

“Fear” refers to the respect we ought to give to those in authority, especially civil rulers, because of the power they have, the punishment



they can render, and the fact they are working for God (compare verses 3,4).

Again, nothing here means we should ignore government corruption or personal immorality in the lives of rulers. Sin must be rebuked wherever it is found (see examples cited previously). Yet we must respect the fact these people have real power from God and must continue to obey them despite their corruption, unless they command us to sin.

“Honor” involves a sense of appreciation for the value of the work they do. Their work serves a necessary purpose which benefits God’s people. This deserves our appreciation.

Though the application here immediately is to rulers, the same principle validly applies to all who do service and render useful work on our behalf. We should value that work and show appreciation for it. The verse begins by telling us to render to **all** their due. We may owe money or service to various people for various reasons. We may have incurred debts in various ways. This may include borrowing something or buying something on time payment. For whatever reason we owe a debt to anyone, we must be responsible to pay it.

**Please see our appendix for further information about specific questions relating to civil government and the Christian.**

## **13:8-14 – Love for Others and Proper Conduct in Jesus**

***13:8-10 – Owe no debt except to love others, since loving a neighbor leads to fulfillment of the law. The commands do not commit adultery, kill, steal, covet, etc. are summed up in the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Love does not harm a neighbor, so love fulfills the law.***

### **Owe no man.**

One may owe many things besides money. The word generally refers to something we are obligated to do for others. The passage shows that we should fulfill the obligations we have.

Some obligations I can fulfill so that they are relieved and I no longer am subject to those obligations at all. If this is a future obligation, then I must fulfill it at the appointed time. If I promise to do something for someone, I must work to fulfill that obligation at the appointed time. We should not leave obligations unfulfilled, but accomplish what we committed ourselves to do and so relieve ourselves of the debt.

We may, for example, promise to pay someone in the future for a service or product given us today. If so, we do not “owe” that person, in the sense used here, until the time comes we promised to pay. If we fail to pay at the appointed time, then we have failed to meet our obligations. But we are not obligated to pay before the appointed time. If we do pay at the appointed time, we have fulfilled our obligations.

So, the passage is not forbidding all borrowing or making of debts. Other passages describe doing such things (Matthew 5:42; Luke 11:5; Nehemiah 5:10; Deuteronomy 15:8; Psalms 37:26; 112:5). But we should never make an obligation that we have no intention of fulfilling. Nor may we try to “beat a debt” and get out of paying what we are able to pay. Nor should we spend our resources on our own desires and then, when the time comes to pay, claim that we cannot pay because are not able. If we make the obligation, we are responsible to make arrangements to fulfill it when the time comes. See Psalm 37:21.

“Owe” (οφείλω) – “to owe money, be in debt for ... absol. to be a debtor, be bound ... foll. by an inf. to be under obligation, bound by duty or necessity, to do something; it behoves one; one ought...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Except to love one another**

Here is an exception to the general rule that we should not owe obligations we cannot fulfill. Unlike the debts previously mentioned, this is one that we can never fulfill so as to release ourselves from it. By its nature, this debt will continue all our lives. We must continually act according to the obligation love imposes, and no matter how much love we show, we will never “retire the debt.”

This obligation is a fulfillment of the command to love our neighbor. We may love our neighbor today and so “fulfill” the law, but we will be obligated to do so again tomorrow. It is a universal and unending debt. See also Matthew 22:34-40; 7:12; Galatians 5:14.

From here, Paul proceeds to show that love will lead to fulfilling all God’s laws, not just the law to pay our debts. Love is active goodwill toward others. It is a commitment to the wellbeing of others that leads us to want them to receive what is best for them. The purpose of God’s law is to define what is best (2 Timothy 3:16,17). So, one who loves is one who will always do for others that which God’s will says should be done (see verses 8-10; 1 John 5:1-3; compare 1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

It appears clear that Paul has left the discussion specifically of civil rulers, as verse 7 seemed to emphasize. He has generalized this to a discussion of how we should treat our “neighbor” in general, not just civil rulers.

## Love for a neighbor leads to obeying other commands.

Paul here lists several specific examples of commands that love will lead us to obey. They are stated as in the Ten Commands, but all illustrate the principle of love as applied in all Divine law.

In particular, Paul shows that these rules are part of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. Note how this demonstrates the proper use of the Old Testament today. Paul has argued at length that we are not under the Old Law (7:1ff; etc.), but here he proceeds to quote the Old Law. We can do the same because the Old helps us understand the New. But we must make sure that the laws we view as binding today are included as part of the New Testament. The fact they were in the Old Testament does not, in and of itself, prove they are law today.

**“Adultery”** is sexual unfaithfulness involving people at least one of whom is married to someone else. It is based on selfishness and harms everyone involved: those who commit the sexual act and their companions. It is unfaithfulness to one’s marriage companion, it damages the marriage relationship, and is a sin against God. Its nature is such that it gives the companion the only Scriptural grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:9). All this makes it a very unloving thing to do. One who loves his neighbor will avoid it at all costs.

See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23.

**“Killing”** refers to murder, taking the life of another human being. People are in God’s image, therefore killing a man (male or female, regardless of age or physical condition) is sinful, whereas killing a plant or animal is not (Genesis 9:2-6). Others have as much right to live as we do. So, killing another is not doing good, but is unloving. We would not want others to do it to us, so we ought not do it to anyone else. Here is another command that love teaches us to obey.

See Genesis 9:2-6; Matthew 15:19,20; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Romans 13:8-10; Exodus 23:7; 20:13; Proverbs 6:16,17; Deuteronomy 27:25.

**“Stealing”** is taking what belongs to others without their permission. **“Coveting”** is greed or love of money, which leads us to desire to take what belongs to others or to otherwise act sinfully (such as envy, selfishness, cheating in business, etc.). Anytime we take what belongs to another against his will and without being willing to return fair value, we are either stealing or being dishonest as a result of covetousness. Again, we would not want others to do this to us, so it would be unloving for us to do it to them.

Likewise, many other commands are summed up in the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus taught the same in Matthew 22:26-40. Likewise, 1 John 5:2,3 shows that we will obey God’s

commands if we love Him and others as we should. This is why love for neighbor is such a foundational principle of the gospel.

(Some translations include here the prohibition against bearing false witness. Others do not include it.)

### **Love fulfills Divine law.**

The points Paul has made beginning in verse 8 are here summarized. Love teaches us not to harm others (compare 12:17-21). Love, by definition, seeks the wellbeing of others. It desires them to receive what is best for them, not what harms them. This is why, as in verse 9, love leads us to fulfill other specific commands.

This is a fundamentally important principle. The proper motive for our service to God and others must be love. If our motives are wrong, we are wrong even when our outward acts are right. God wants service that comes from the heart, not just outward motions. Many Scriptures so teach: Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 6:27,28,31-33; 10:25-37; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8,13. On the other hand, if we have the proper motive of a true and Scriptural love, it will in turn lead us to act properly. See John 14:15,21-24,31; Galatians 5:6; Hebrews 10:24; 1 John 2:3-6,15-17; 5:2,3; 2 John 5,6; Revelation 3:19.

Does this mean all we need is good motives and that is the only law to obey? If our attitudes are good can we make up our own laws, regardless of God's, and do as we think is best? This is the teaching of situation ethics. This passage does not say love is the **only** law, but that it is the **basic** law. It leads us to obey the other laws. That of itself proves we must obey the other laws, not disregard them. To ignore them and make up our own laws according to what we think is best would not be true love!

Love motivates, but other laws are essential to **define** how we **express** our motive of love. God knows what is best and He often does not think as we do (Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah 55:8,9; Luke 16:15). If we love Him, we will do what He says is best regardless of what we think would be best. Situation ethics makes every man's opinion as good a standard as God's word.

Remember, love of neighbor is only the **second**-greatest command. The greatest command is to love **God**, and that command requires us to **obey His other commands** (see the verses listed above).

**13:11,12 – It is time to awake from sleep because salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over and the day is at hand, so cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.**

### **Time to awake out of sleep**

Paul urges us to realize the importance of practicing what he has just said ("this"), especially considering the limited time we have. Some

postpone doing God's will and correcting their lives. Paul says we don't have much time, so should make correction **now**.

"Awake out of sleep" means a spiritual awakening to awareness and activity. People who sleep are inactive or unaware and unconcerned about their surroundings. To awaken them is to make them aware of their circumstances so they can be actively involved in events around them. Compare 1 Corinthians 15:34; Ephesians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:6. This context is a warning to realize the short time we have to accomplish God's work.

The time has come to cease being indifferent to our duties to God. Other passages also emphasize this time element: James 5:8; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:9,11; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 1:3; 22:10. Other passages warn of the shortness of life and the uncertainty of when death may come (2 Corinthians 6:2; James 4:14,15). We don't have much time left to work for God, so we need to be at it.

"Salvation is nearer" surely refers to eternal, final salvation. All who believe and obey the first principles of the gospel receive salvation in the sense of forgiveness of past sins. This puts them into God's favor, yet this state can be lost by apostasy. If we remain faithful, however, we will receive at the judgment an eternal, unending state of Divine favor (1 John 2:25; James 1:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7). This is the salvation referred to here.

As time continues to pass, all of us are nearer the end of life than when we first believed (whether that was yesterday or fifty years ago). This nearness to the end of life should awaken us to the shortness of life and the need to live so as to ensure salvation instead of endangering it.

### **Cast off the works of darkness.**

This is equivalent to the previous verse.

"The night" represents life on earth with its sin and ignorance; "the day" represents eternity with God and the true knowledge and holiness that characterizes it. This life and things pertaining to it are passing quickly. Eternity draws closer with every breath (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

The "works of darkness" are evils that characterize this life but do not characterize "the day": worldliness and sins that result from misuse of, or improper emphasis on, the things of this life (as described in the next verse and discussed in context). Compare chapter 8; Ephesians 5:11. These should be put away because this life is temporary.

We should put on the armor of light. To prepare for eternity and avoid the sins of this world, we must use the tools God has given to protect us against the temptations of this life. This is armor of light in that it enables to walk in the light and eventually to receive the light of eternal life. Compare 2 Corinthians 6:7; 10:4; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

As a result, we can avoid sin and overcome the temptations of this life or over-emphasis on material things. Proper emphasis on spiritual

matters will serve as an armor against temptation. We often fail in the battle against Satan when we take our eyes off the goal of eternal life and instead allow things of this life to become too important to us (1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:1,2).

Do we meditate about eternity and the shortness of life, the seriousness of things to come and the fleeting nature of all material things? If we did, perhaps as Paul says here, we would emphasize what is truly important. Too often we “major on minors,” emphasizing what is physical instead of what is spiritual.

***13:13,14 – We should behave properly as in the day, not in reveling, drunkenness, chambering, wantonness, strife, or jealousy. But put on Christ and make no provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.***

### **Walk properly as in the day.**

Here Paul defines more specifically some characteristics of the night and darkness as compared to the day (verses 11,12). We should walk or live in a way becoming or fitting to those who are in the day: those who understand the truth about eternal and spiritual matters. Note again that gospel principles must unquestionably affect our ***lives***. Otherwise we fail to accomplish the purpose of the gospel.

Paul then specifies some of the works of darkness that we must put off:

### **“Revelry”**

“Revelry” (NKJV) is translated “rioting” (KJV), “revelling” (ASV, RSV, NEB), “carousing” (NASB), “orgies” (ESV).

This is what we would call a “wild party” with drinking (or drugs) and sexual looseness (dancing, immodesty, etc.). It does not necessarily involve apparent or obvious drunkenness (note “*half-drunken*” – Thayer), but just drinking associated with circumstances that may encourage lack of restraint. The world views this as the high point of life, the ideal good time. Some defend it because the people involved are not gutter drunks, addicted to alcohol, or abusive to other people. Yet the Bible still condemns it.

Christians should avoid such circumstances because they are sinful of themselves, because of what they can lead to (verse 14), and because of the evil influence and reputation the Christian would have on others if he participated.

“Revelry” (κωμος) – “a revel, carousel, i.e., in the Grk. writ. prop. a nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before the houses of ... friends; hence, used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late

at night and indulge in revelry ... Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“...excessive feasting, ... carousing, revelry...” – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

### **“Drunkenness”**

The word is so translated in virtually every major translation (NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, ESV, RSV). The idea is that of intoxication. Such is a characteristic of those who live in the night, not those who live in the day. People of the world practice it, yet it often leads to other forms of immoral conduct, broken homes, and destroyed lives. Those who walk properly in the day will avoid such conduct.

It should be remembered, however, that one is intoxicated, by definition, when he has impaired the ability of his mind to recognize right from wrong and to exercise the self-restraint or inhibition to do right instead of wrong. The alcoholic drinks of antiquity were generally less alcoholic than is true of our typical alcoholic drinks today for several reasons, including the fact that distilled liquors (whiskey) were unknown then, their wines were naturally less alcoholic than ours, and even then they generally diluted their wines with water. (Bible “wines” were not necessarily alcoholic: Isaiah 16:10; 65:8; Jeremiah 48:33; Genesis 40:9-11; Revelation 19:15; 14:10.)

Even so, drinking their undiluted wines led to intoxication (drunkenness), and the same is true of all “social drinking” today. One is intoxicated in the sense of having impaired his sobriety – his ability to distinguish right from wrong – by just one or two of our society’s typical drinks. One can or bottle of beer contains as much alcohol as a shot of whiskey. So, one need not be obviously drunk or an alcoholic to be guilty of intoxication or drunkenness.

See also Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 5:11; Proverbs 23:31,32; 20:1; 1 Peter 4:3; 5:8; 1:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8; 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; Proverbs 4:23.

### **“Licentiousness”**

This text of the NKJV says “lewdness,” but others say “licentiousness.” Other translations: “chambering” (KJV, ASV), “sexual promiscuity” (NASB), “sexual immorality” (ESV), “debauchery” (RSV).

This word, in this context, refers to unlawful sexual intercourse or fornication. God’s word says the sexual relationship belongs only within the bond of lawful marriage. God designed the sexual relationship, not just for human procreation, but as a beautiful expression of love between a married man and his wife. Sexual relations outside marriage defile God’s purpose regarding marriage. All such is characteristic of those who live in darkness, not in the light.



See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23.

Definition (κοιτη) – “...a bed, couch, ... b. spec. the marriage-bed ... c. cohabitation, whether lawful or unlawful ... pl. sexual intercourse ... Ro. 13:13...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### “Lust”

This text of the NKJV says “lust,” but other translations are “wantonness” (ASV, KJV), “sensuality” (NASB, ESV), “licentiousness” (RSV). Compare Mark 7:20-23; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:1-4.

The word refers to anything that causes or tends to arouse sexual excitement, desire, or lust between people not married to one another. The previous word in this list forbids unlawful sexual intercourse, but this word goes further and forbids enjoying thinking about or suggestively talking about or doing things that would encourage sexual immorality.

Even if no actual sexual intercourse occurs, it is still sinful to enjoy thinking about doing it with someone not your lawful spouse, or to want to see or touch that which is intimate or private. Anything that encourages the desire to do these is also forbidden. This would include indecent clothing, modern suggestive mixed dancing (couples not married to one another), mixed swimming (in modern swimwear), suggestive jokes and speech, petting, and other forms of sexual suggestiveness.

Definition (ασελγεια) – “...unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence ... ‘wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc.’ (Fritzsche) ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### “Strife”

Translated “strife” (NKJV, ASV, KJV, NASB), “dissension” (NIV), “quarreling” (ESV, RSV).

Christians should seek to live peaceably whenever possible (Romans 12:18). We should never compromise truth to have peace, but neither should we cause strife and quarreling because of our own selfish desires or uncontrolled tempers.

Definition (ερις) – “...contention, strife, wrangling: Romans 1:29; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 1:11; 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:9...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### “Envy”

Translated “envying” (NKJV, KJV), “jealousy” (ASV, NASB, NIV, ESV, RSV).



Obviously the word is used here in the bad sense of jealousy. Other similar passages include: 1 Corinthians 3:3; James 3:14,16; 2 Corinthians 12:20 Galatians 5:20.

This forbids that feeling of displeasure that resents when good things happen to others, thinking instead that we ought to receive the good. This is also a violation of love (13:8-10) and shows a selfish spirit.

Definition (ζηλος) – “...excitement of mind, ardor, fervor of spirit; 1. zeal, ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything ... 2. an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Put on Jesus and make no provision to fulfill fleshly lusts.**

If we clothe our lives in the will and character of Jesus, we will not fulfill these lusts. Further, we will avoid activities and circumstances that enable or encourage us to be guilty. Some people think they are acceptable as long as they actually do no evil. But most evil occurs because we did not take adequate precautions to prevent it from occurring. In many cases we provided all the circumstances and environment that made sin possible. Why then be surprised when we commit the sin? But even if we don't commit the sinful act, we sin if we just encourage ourselves toward sin by enjoying its trappings.

Many Scriptures warn us to avoid, not just sinful acts, but the things that tempt to sin. Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12. We should avoid enjoying, for the sake of personal pleasure, people, places, and circumstances that tempt us to sin. This is true for ourselves or for others. We should not provide other people with the things they need to sin when we know that is their intent.

# Romans 14

## 14:1-15:7 – Matters of Liberty or Personal Conscience

Chapter 14 and part of chapter 15 relate to the theme of dealing with certain differences of viewpoint. Applications are made to specific problems in that day, but the principles must likewise be applied to similar problems in every age.

***14:1,2 – Receive one who is weak in faith but not to pass judgments on his opinions. One may have faith to eat all things, but one who is weak may eat only vegetables.***

### ***“One who is weak in the faith”***

This is translated fairly consistently in (NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NIV, NEB, etc.). To apply the teaching properly, we must understand the kind of problem under consideration. Many false conclusions have been based on misunderstandings of what this chapter teaches.

According to context, one who is “weak in the faith” is one who has a faulty understanding of certain gospel teachings. Especially he is “doubtful,” uncertain, and questioning regarding what is right or wrong. See verses 2,22,23 and study notes below as we proceed. Specifically, it is one who holds a view that he cannot conclusively prove regarding the rightness or wrongness or an act that is really, according to the gospel, a matter of indifference, neither condemned nor required according to God’s word. But the member thinks, questions, or leans toward the view that the matter ***has*** been bound one way or the other. He cannot prove his view conclusively, to be honest, yet he still holds the view.

The chapter describes how such a person should act regarding his view and how he should be treated by those who do not hold his view. People of either view can easily be guilty of sin toward one another or of causing unnecessary strife in the church, but if they follow the principles of this chapter, peace and unity can be maintained.

Note: “faith” does not mean, in this context, “matters of faith” vs. “matters of opinion” as we often use the terms. This difference in concept does relate to what Paul is discussing, but he does not use the word

“faith” in this way. Verses 2,23 show that “faith” refers to the conviction of a man that a certain practice is acceptable before God. The man with “faith” believes eating meats is acceptable. The man who is weak in faith has doubts about it.

### **Class study note:**

The very nature of this subject virtually guarantees that there will be differences of viewpoint about specific applications. To study this subject in a class setting, ***first study the verses of the context making no applications of any kind except those made in the scriptures themselves or applications that are not controversial.*** Strive to understand the concepts and principles first. Then, after the entire context has been studied, let the class go back to discuss other specific applications.

### **“Receive”**

“Receive” (NKJV, KJV, ASV) is translated “accept” (NASB, NIV, NEB), and “welcome” (ESV, RSV).

This is addressed to those who are considered strong in the faith regarding how they should treat those who are “weak in the faith” (compare 15:1). Note parallel teachings in 1 Corinthians 8,9,10. The strong brother should accept the one who is weak as a faithful brother, fully fellowshiping him, because Christ has received him (see verse 3; 15:7). Even though we disagree with his personal view, as long as he does not violate the principles of this chapter in his conduct toward others, then he should be received and given a fully active role in the church. He should not be belittled, disregarded, or caused to sin (see verses 3,10, etc. as we proceed).

For similar uses of “receive” see Philemon 12,17. Note also the use of a different but related Greek word (λαμβάνω) in 2 John 9; 3 John 8,9.

“Receive” (προσλαμβάνω) – “...to take to, to take in addition ...; in the N.T. found only in the Middle, to take to one’s self ... a. to take as one’s companion ... b. to take by the hand in order to lead aside ... c. to take or ... receive into one’s home, with the collateral idea of kindness ... d. to receive, i.e. grant one access to one’s heart; to take into friendship and intercourse: Romans 14:1; 15:7; God and Christ are said ... to have received those whom, formerly estranged from them, they have reunited to themselves by the blessings of the gospel ... e. to take to one’s self, to take ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **“But not to disputes over doubtful things” (NKJV)**

Other translations: “to doubtful disputations” (KJV), “for decision of scruples” (ASV), “passing judgment on his opinions” (NASB), “disputes over opinions” (RSV), “quarrel over opinions” (ESV), “passing judgment on disputable matters” (NIV).

These words can have different meanings. The best way to understand the meaning here is to continue studying the rest of the chapter and see the examples Paul uses. Clearly, he refers to matters about which one is deliberating or reasoning, about which there is dispute or doubt.

The matters in question do not need to be forcefully debated and constantly agitated until a final, definite agreement is reached by all before we can receive a man. While both views may be expressed from time to time, neither view should be allowed to become a source of division, strife, or harsh feelings in the congregation. The issue does not have to be settled once and for all. We can continue to fellowship one another and work together even though we do not see the matter the same.

“Doubtful things” (διαλογισμος) – “...the thinking of a man deliberating with himself; hence 1. a thought, inward reasoning ... an opinion ... purpose, design ... 2. a deliberating, questioning, about what is true: ... when in reference to what ought to be done, hesitation, doubting ... disputing ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Application: Eating meats vs. eating vegetables**

Here is Paul’s concrete, understandable example of the kind of issue under consideration. One man believes eating meat is acceptable, but another is weak in faith and will not eat meat. He is a vegetarian.

What might motivate these concerns? Paul does not say. It almost surely relates to the differences between Jews and Gentiles, since Paul has discussed such differences throughout the book. Converted Jews might object to eating meats that were unclean (note “clean” and “unclean” in verses 14,15,20,21), or meats that had been offered to idols. Knowing that the public markets of a Gentile city like Rome might sell meats that have been offered to idols or defiled in some way that made them ceremonially unclean, Christians of Jewish background might simply refuse to eat all meat. Or, converted Gentiles might oppose eating meats offered to idols (this is discussed at length in 1 Corinthians 8 & 10).

Regardless of the reasons, however, the truth is that no meat is inherently sinful to eat provided it is eaten simply for nourishment (not as worship to an idol, etc.). God will not condemn the man who so eats (see verses 3,14; Mark 7:18; Acts 10:9-16; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, especially 8:8; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). So, eating of meats is, in this case, clearly a matter of “indifference.”

The man with strong faith knows this, so he can eat meat with a good conscience. But the man weak in faith has doubts and questions, so he abstains (see verse 23). He could never prove conclusively that it is sinful to eat, because the Scriptures do not so teach (God has received the one who eats – verse 3). Yet he has a conscience against it. Such

difference in views could easily lead to strife in the church. This is a perfect example of the kind of issue Romans 14 is meant to resolve.

### ***What kind of matters are under consideration?***

Most of us have difficulty making decisions about the specific kinds of activities to which we should apply the principles of this chapter. Exactly what kind of acts do or do not fall in the realm of Romans 14? Examining Paul's examples (eating meats, etc.), we conclude as follows (we will reinforce these conclusions as we proceed):

**These are matters which are neither conclusively forbidden nor conclusively required by Gods' word.**

We may choose to participate in the activity or not participate and neither way would we really be in sin according to God's law properly understood. 1 Corinthians 8:9 refers to these as matters of "liberty."

Some things are inherently ***sinful to practice***. God's word, properly understood, would teach us we sin if we participate. Other things are conclusively ***required*** to be practiced. We sin if we omit them. But other practices are matters of indifference or liberty. They are neither inherently evil nor required. We could choose to practice them or not practice them, and neither way would the nature of our conduct inherently violate God's laws.

Here are some obvious examples:

<b><i>Evil Things</i></b> (Sinful if practiced)	<b><i>Indifferent Things</i></b> (Not sinful either way)	<b><i>Required Things</i></b> (Sinful if omitted)
lying, stealing, adultery, murder, unauthorized religious practices	eating meat, kind of car, color clothes, number of children, buy or rent house	baptism, prayer, Bible study, care for the needy, giving to the church

Some misuse the passage by applying it to matters that are, according to the Scriptures, unauthorized religious practices. They want us to consider instrumental music in worship, church support of institutions, living in an unscriptural remarriage, etc., matters of Romans 14. We are told that such matters should never lead to division. In application, this often means that those who oppose these things must tone down their opposition, while those who practice them are left free to do as they please.

Others conclude that any and all controversial, disputed matters should automatically be considered matters of Romans 14. Some try to make this a catch-all, cure-all for all church troubles. Anytime any people disagree, some folks say we should overlook the difference because of Romans 14. Surely that cannot be correct. People who debate the necessity of baptism and the existence of God would claim such

issues to be matters of dispute and controversy. Does that mean we must fellowship atheists and unbaptized folks?

Such approaches ignore the clear teaching of Scripture that there are unauthorized activities that are sinful (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19). And there are acts which the church can conclusively prove to be sinful, so we must withdraw from those who practice them (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15). Not all matters are matters of indifference according to Romans 14. Some matters should be opposed and rebuked persistently because people are in sin (Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4).

### **The matters in consideration are also *individual* matters.**

This does not mean the *principles* can never be applied to group activities (though they are more difficult to apply there). However, the examples discussed here are all personal, individual applications (we will discuss this further later). This does not mean that all individual acts are matters of Romans 14. The Scriptures listed above show that many personal activities are subject to church discipline (fornication, stealing, laziness, etc.).

Paul's discussion will clearly show that he is discussing matters about which we do not need to agree because, no matter which way a person practices it, we cannot conclusively prove him to be committing sin. We may call such matters of liberty, indifference, or personal conscience. This appears to be the common ground of all the issues he discusses.

Why would differences regarding such matters even exist? It may be because of background or preconceived ideas before conversion, or perhaps because one is still young in the faith and has not done sufficient study. In the context of Romans, the main differences Paul discusses might come from Jewish backgrounds as compared to Gentile backgrounds. That has been the theme of the book, and is returned to in 15:1-13.

People of widely different racial and national backgrounds have many differences of personal preference and upbringing that tend to produce conflict. Since the gospel is for all without respect of persons, we should overlook our differences in personal viewpoints about matters that do not violate God's law either way, but receive one another and strive for peace in Christ. But regardless of the reason for the difference, the principles must be applied wherever this kind of difference occurs.

**14:3,4 – The one who eats should not show contempt for the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat should not judge the one who does eat since God has accepted him. Each one stands or falls before his own master, so who are we to judge another person's servant?**

**Do not judge or despise one another.**

How should these brethren treat one another? Here is the inspired solution. **Both parties** are required to so act as to “keep the peace” (verse 10). One who eats should not despise the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat should not judge the one who does. God has received him.

“Despise” (NKJV, KJV, ESV) is translated “set at naught” (ASV), “regard with contempt” (NASB), “look down on” (NIV). The one who approves of eating meat surely cannot prove his brother is in sin for not eating. Yet he may consider himself superior because of his knowledge. He may treat the other with disrespect, consider him less a Christian, and generally treat him with contempt. In so acting, he would be unloving and would contribute to strife and division in the church. Other problems are also discussed later.

“Judge” (NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB) is also translated “pass judgment” (ESV) or “condemn” (NIV). Nothing here forbids rebuking acts that are clearly sinful. We have already listed numerous passages showing such should be done (see verse 1). But the point here is that the vegetarian brother might tend to rebuke the brother who eats meat as though he is guilty of sin, condemning him as though he is displeasing to God and needs to repent. This is wrong for the reason clearly stated: “God has received him.” The man who eats is **not** in sin and therefore must not be rebuked as if he is in sin.

Note carefully: the passage clearly says that the nature of the act under consideration is such that there is no sin whichever way it is practiced. A man may have a personal conscience, preference, or strong aversion against a thing. He may dislike it, question it, doubt it, even have a personal conscience against it. He may choose to avoid that thing without sinning. But none of this is adequate reason to condemn another brother as being in sin unless there is conclusive evidence of sin.

**The Master is the judge in such matters.**

Christians must remember who the **Master** is. Who is in charge? Who makes the rules? We are servants and have no power except to follow the rules made by God. If God says someone is acceptable, then they are acceptable regardless of what we say. They stand or fall according to what their Master says, not according to what another servant says. We are not the ones to determine (judge) their standing before God. (James 4:12)

This point is essential to the understanding of the chapter. The issue is: What does **God** say about the matter, not what do I think about it? If God has received the brother, I dare not condemn him. I must not legislate for God.

Note that verses 3b,4 are addressed to the brother who questions or doubts a practice. He is not to judge a brother who participates in the practice. How does this compare to 1 Timothy 4:1-4 (and Galatians 4:10,11; Colossians 2:16)? If a brother chooses not to eat meat as a matter of conscience, he should follow his conscience. But if he begins to bind that teaching, condemns brethren who are not in sin, and disrupts fellowship and unity, then he has made human laws not made by God. These other passages clearly show that would constitute apostasy. But as long as he holds it as a matter of personal conscience and is peaceable, we should “receive him” (verse 1).

On the other hand, nothing here should be used to teach that we should keep quiet even when God **has** legislated against a matter. Again, it is the Master who determines what is right or wrong. If the Master says a thing is sinful, then it is sinful. If a brother sins according to the Master’s will, then the Master Himself tells other servants we ought to rebuke the sinner in the Master’s name (see verses under verse 1). What if someone uses Romans 14 to say we should not so rebuke the sinner? Then that person stands condemned by the very verse we are studying. He is condemning a servant who is doing what the Master said to do! They may condemn, but we still stand because the Master’s will must prevail!

A servant stands or falls because of what his master says about the matter. The master is able to make one stand, even if all other servants speak against him. What the servants think is irrelevant.

The clear conclusion of verses 2-4 is that Paul is discussing matters of indifference or liberty: things which cannot be conclusively proved to be forbidden or required according to God’s law. If a brother believes he can eat, he surely knows his brother has not sinned simply because he does not eat. And Paul says the man who eats is also not sinning, for “God has received him.” It is not a matter of sin whichever way it is practiced.

Let us return to our chart of the kinds of issues considered. According to **God’s will**, every act falls in one of these three categories:

<b><i>Evil Things</i></b> (Sinful if practiced)	<b><i>Indifferent Things</i></b> (Not sinful either way)	<b><i>Required Things</i></b> (Sinful if omitted)
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If every Christian had perfect knowledge, we would know exactly where to fit every act. The problem is that we do not have perfect knowledge. For every one of us there are areas of doubts and



uncertainties. For those who have “weak faith” these areas of uncertainty are larger than for those of more mature knowledge.

In practice, the chart looks like this for the **mature** Christian:

<b>Evil Things</b> (Sinful if practiced)	<b>Things Unsure</b>	<b>Indifferent Things</b> (Not sinful either way)	<b>Things Unsure</b>	<b>Required Things</b> (Sinful if omitted)
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But for the brother **weak** in faith, it looks like this:

<b>Evil Things</b> (Sinful if practiced)	<b>Things Unsure</b>	<b>Indifferent Things</b> (Not sinful either way)	<b>Things Unsure</b>	<b>Required Things</b> (Sin if omitted)
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On the chart, the middle three areas are where we must practice the principles of Romans 14. If we consider a matter to be indifferent or if we have a conscience but cannot prove a thing definitely, then we must practice Romans 14 regarding that matter.

Note also that a brother may be mature in his conviction on one matter, but weak in another, depending on how much study he has done in that area, his background, etc.

**14:5,6 – One man regards one day above another but another man regards every day alike. Each should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day and the one who eats do so to the Lord, giving God thanks. One who does not eat also does not eat to the Lord and gives God thanks.**

### **Applications to observing days**

Paul gives another example to illustrate his point. One person esteems a day above another, but another person esteems every day alike. Everyone should do what he is fully persuaded is right (compare verses 14,20,22,23), but not condemn others, etc., as already discussed.

“Esteem” (NKJV, KJV, ASV, ESV), is translated “regards” (NASB).

In what sense is one day esteemed better than other days? Whatever it means, it must agree with what has been said about eating meat. The context uses both illustrations to teach the same thing (verse 6 specifically makes them parallel). So, Paul must be referring to a matter of indifference.

Paul is not saying that the church may establish holy days and then require Christians to keep them (like the Catholic church has done with Christmas, Easter, etc.). Paul also expressly opposed the binding of Old Testament holy days. See Colossians 2:16; Galatians 4:10,11. That would

be equivalent to the church determining that all people should (or should not) eat meats, and teaching everyone so (1 Timothy 4:1-3, see notes above).

May individuals then choose to religiously observe such holy days established by false religious groups, such as Christmas and Easter, as long as they do not bind it on others or say others are in sin when they don't participate? That still creates difficulty with Galatians 4:10,11. Plus it involves people in observing religious activities which have no Divine authority but originated in pagan heathenism and religious apostasy (see Scriptures under verse 1).

Further, this would not be parallel to the issue of eating meats. Eating meats – even meat offered to an idol – is acceptable only when done for personal nourishment. It is not an act of worship to God, and was expressly forbidden when done as part of pagan idol worship (Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 8:7ff; 10:19-22).

To parallel the eating meats issue, the observing of days would have to refer to a non-religious observance that some thought was acceptable but others doubted that God would accept. This might include observing civil or personal holidays (comparable to our Independence Day, Labor Day, etc.) or birthdays, wedding anniversaries, etc.

Another possibility would be kind of the issue Christians often wrestle with: May we observe the civil, legal, and social aspects of days which some are observing religiously? May we, for example, take the day off work and visit the family (even give gifts) on “Christmas”? Likewise, for Jews it might include participating in the legal, family, and social aspects of Passover, Pentecost, etc. These days were not just religious holy days among the Jews. They were civil and family holidays observed by Jewish families and even by the government in nations where Judaism prevailed. There would be aspects of those days that could be observed as civil or family celebrations without religious significance, just as there are with “Christmas” and “Easter.”

To have a true parallel to eating meats, we would have to conclude that observing days would be forbidden if done as participation in pagan worship or unauthorized worship to God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). But if we separate them from their religious significance and participate in the “secular” aspects, that would be acceptable like eating meat for nourishment. But we would still have to be careful of stumbling blocks (as Romans 14 discusses later).

Another similar example would be circumcision. The gospel teaches that this act no longer means anything as a religious practice. But Jews had been brought up that it was a religious requirement to please God. When Christians tried to bind it as a religious observance under the gospel, Paul objected strenuously (Acts 15; Galatians 2-4). But when done for health reasons or simply to get opportunities to teach those who were circumcised, it was acceptable (Acts 16:1ff; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

Others conclude that Paul here refers to Jewish holy days, which were not bound on Christians, but which Jews as individuals and families could observe, even religiously, during the transition period after the gospel was first preached. The Jews had been keeping these days according to the Old Testament law while it was in effect, but then the law changed. Perhaps people in this unique situation were given time to make the transition, but were forbidden to bind these days on others (Colossians 2:16). This creates problems in Galatians 4:10,11. But even if it were true, it would be unique to those Jews in that age of transition. It would no longer be true today, since that transitional period was surely over long ago. So, the only applications to us would still be the ones described above.

But would it not be error to conclude that Romans 14 means a convert from heathen idolatry may continue to religiously observe a holy day to honor Zeus or Baal? Likewise, nothing here can be used to justify people today who want to continue religiously observing unauthorized and pagan holidays like Christmas & Easter.

Whatever the days described here, in order to fit the point Paul is making, they must be activities that are clearly matters of indifference according to God's law.

(Note that this conclusion means that the NIV is misleading here when it translates "considers more sacred." The same is true for Thayer's definition of "observe" on verse 6 below.)

"Esteems" (κρίνω) – "...1. to separate, put asunder; to pick out, select, choose ... 2. to approve, esteem: ... one day above another, i.e. to prefer ... Romans 14:5 ... 3. to be of opinion, deem, think ... 4. to determine, resolve, decree ... 5. to judge ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **Each observes (or does not observe) the day (or the eating of meat) to the Lord**

This continues the point of verse 5.

"Observes" is so translated in (NKJV, NASB, ESV), "regards" (ASV, KJV), "regards ... as special" (NIV).

Note that this verse directly parallels observing days to eating meat. Some claim that observing the day "to the Lord" proves it is done religiously as an act of worship. But the parallel proves the opposite. Note that the one who eats meat also does so "to the Lord." And the ones who do **not** observe the day or eat the meat also do so "to the Lord." Clearly "to the Lord" cannot mean a religious observance here, since none is being observed! Furthermore, eating meat as an act of worship to God is unauthorized and forbidden (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 expressly show that eating meat as an act of worship to a pagan idol would be fellowshiping the idol, which is forbidden (see above).

It follows from this parallel usage that "to the Lord" means simply that the act is done with the intent of pleasing God by being submissive

to Him. Specifically, it is further explained to mean “he gives God thanks.” A day can be observed (or not observed) as a civil, family, or legal holiday and give God thanks for the blessings of the day, without observing it as a religious holy day, just as one can eat meat (or not) and give God thanks without it being an act of religious worship.

Paul goes further, in fact, and says that **whatever** Christians do, living or dying, they do it “to the Lord” because in all things we are the Lord’s – verse 8. This is in contrast to doing it “to himself” (verse 7). It is not done selfishly but to please God, with thanks for all His gifts. Yet surely there is no significance of religious worship, like religious observance of holy days, in **everything** we do.

So, whether or not we eat meat, and whether or not we keep some civil or social aspects of various days, we should do all with the intent of pleasing God, thanking Him for our blessings, doing only what we are sure in our consciences is acceptable to God. If we do so, whatever view we hold, we are pleasing to God because the acts in question are matters of indifference, neither required nor forbidden.

“Observes” (φρονεω) – “...1. to have understanding, be wise... 2. to feel, to think ... 3. to direct one’s mind to a thing, to seek or strive for ... to regard a day, observe it as sacred, Romans 14:6 ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***14:7-9 – No one lives to himself or dies to himself. If we live or die we do so for the Lord and we are the Lord’s. Christ died and lived again for this purpose that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.***

**No one lives or dies to himself, but lives or dies to the Lord.**

Compare 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:20ff; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelation 14:13; Luke 20:38.

Living to oneself is contrasted to living to the Lord. The point is that we must not simply live the way we want but the way that pleases God. We must be conscious that God is in charge and He will judge us, so we must live to please Him. (See notes on verse 6.)

This is so because we are bought with a price and belong to Him (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 5:23-25; 1 Peter 2:9,10). We become His when, by faith, we obey Him and receive forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 10:9-17; 6:3,4).

This is true in death as well as in life. If we live faithfully for God, then when we die we will still be pleasing to Him. We are His whether we live or die. At death we return to Him (Ecclesiastes 12:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-5:10).

Human masters we serve only in this life. When we die, we are free from them. But Christ is Lord for time and eternity, in life and in death.

This being so, we must direct ourselves diligently to please Him all the time. The application would be that, as long as our brother does this, we should not harass him over matters in which we cannot prove him to be in sin according to God's word.

### **Christ lived and died that He might be our Lord.**

Compare Revelation 1:18; 2:8; Philippians 2:11; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36 (see context); 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Romans 1:4.

Because of sin, all men were destined to physical and then eternal death. God cannot accept us in our sins, but our sins alienate us from Him. So that we could be forgiven and become His servants, Jesus died and arose to life again. As a result, He is Lord of both the dead and the living.

Christ deserves, of course, to be the Lord of all regardless of how we live. But we could not have that servant-master relationship with Him unless some means of forgiveness was offered. We were instead servants of sin. However, because of His sacrifice, we can be made servants of righteousness (Romans 6:17,18,22). Note that His resurrection was necessary to this, as well as His death (He "lived" refers to His life after He died and arose).

The application is that, when we make demands of brethren that the Lord does not make, then we fail to recognize even the significance of His death and resurrection. He is Lord, as proved by His death and resurrection. Did we die and arise to save men from sin? Then why do we make rules that differ from those of the One who did so?

***14:10-12 – Why do you judge your brother or set at nought your brother? We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. God says that every knee will bow and every tongue confess to Him, and we will all give account of ourselves to God.***

### **Do not judge in such matters, because we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.**

The first part of this verse refers back to verses 3,4 and explains the application this discussion of judgment has to matters of personal conscience. The brother who questions a practice, but cannot prove conclusively that it displeases God, is asked why he "judges" his brother. The brother, who knows a practice is not required, is asked why he shows contempt for his brother who does not participate.

The reason both actions would be wrong is this: We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Christ is the Master and He will judge all of us. Each will be rewarded for his works according to the will of the Master. Why then should I condemn a brother when I cannot prove he has sinned? Why should I show contempt for a brother, ridiculing him or belittling him, when he is committing no sin but simply cannot in good conscience practice as I do?

The Lord is the Judge. He perfectly knows the standard of right and wrong. He knows the hearts of all men. He will make the right decision. Some matters simply have to be left up to Him to decide. We cannot decide them and should not try to do so.

**From this section, we learn some important things about the judgment.**

- \* Jesus the Lord will be the Judge (verses 4,7-9,10-12).

- \* All men will be judged. Judgment is universal.

- \* Judgment is certain. This is an appointment all will keep. We will be required to give an account.

- \* Each one will be judged for his own conduct. Each will give account for **himself** to God.

While we have no right to condemn a brother when we cannot conclusively prove him to be in sin, yet we can warn him that judgment is coming and he must be prepared. We are not true brethren if we let people face the judgment unprepared. Nor are we true brethren if we usurp the Master's role and condemn those whom we cannot prove to be in sin.

(See also Matthew 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 10:42; 17:30,31; Romans 2:4-11; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-31; Revelation 20:11-15; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.)

**Every knee shall bow to the Lord, and every tongue shall confess to God.**

This quotes Isaiah 45:23. It shows the supreme authority of God. He requires that all men recognize Him by word (every tongue will confess Him) and by deed (every knee will bow to Him). Clearly many people do not so recognize Him in this life. Yet there is coming a time when **all** men will acknowledge Jesus, regardless of what they thought of Him during their lifetime.

Note again the clear statement of the universal nature of judgment: **every** knee shall bow and **every** tongue shall confess.

Note also the certainty of judgment. "As I live, says the Lord..." Judgment is certain and we will all be there just as surely as God is alive. If there is an eternal, living God, then we will be judged. There is no escape.

Finally note that "the Lord," who will be the Judge and to Whom all will bow, is clearly here identified to be "Christ" who died and arose from the dead (verse 9; compare other passages about the judgment). But He is here called "God" (verses 10-12). And the context of Isaiah 45:23, which is quoted here, shows that the Judge is Jehovah God. So, Jesus is true Deity in the fullest sense. He is called "God" and "Jehovah" and will be our Judge. Compare Philippians 2:10,11.

### **So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.**

This summarizes verses 10-12. All will be judged. In that judgment, each will give account of himself to God. We will be judged according to our works (see references above; Matthew 12:36; 16:27; 1 Peter 4:5).

Note again the universal nature of judgment: “each of us” shall give account. And also note its individual nature. Each will give account of **himself**. We will not be condemned because Adam sinned or our parents or other people sinned. Nor will we be justified because they were righteous. Guilt of sin is not inherited. Contrary to Calvinistic inherited depravity, babies are born innocent, not guilty.

The application in context is that, if God is the Judge and our brother will surely be judged, then we should leave that judgment to God and not condemn a brother whom we cannot clearly prove to be in sin. Again, this does not mean we should neglect to rebuke sin when we can conclusively prove someone has violated Divine instructions.

### **Summary of verses 2-12**

These verses discuss the case in which a brother has a conscience about a course of action, but he cannot conclusively prove that the Bible requires that course of action:

1) Christians should study a matter through and make sure we are right before we condemn a brother. If we have condemned him when we cannot prove our point, then we are the ones in sin.

2) We should not cause division or a break in fellowship by condemning a brother when we cannot conclusively prove him to be in sin.

***14:13,14 – Do not judge one another, but instead judge that no man should put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in his brother’s way. Nothing is unclean of itself except to the one who accounts it to be unclean.***

**Rather than judging a brother, we should determine to not cause him to stumble or fall.**

Paul has shown the danger of condemning a brother when we cannot prove him to be in sin. But now he begins to consider another aspect of the subject. Something we can judge is that, in such matters, we should not cause our brother to stumble or fall. We should not make such an issue over matters like these that we cause a brother to sin or be lost. We should not tempt someone to sin.

This could happen in several ways. 1 Corinthians 8 & 10 are parallel passages showing that some brethren recognize an act to be a matter of personal liberty. Yet they exercise their liberty before others in such a way that a weak brother is led to violate his conscience by participating in an act he believes to be sinful (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-33). This would be a stumbling block or temptation to sin.



There are other ways this could happen. Brethren on either side could force the issue to the point that division and a break of fellowship occur unnecessarily. Or one or the other could stir the issue up so constantly that some brethren become discouraged and fall away. In any such case, those who force the issue to this point are guilty of being a stumbling block (compare Romans 16:17,18). Both brethren – the one who has a conscience against a matter and the one who sees it as a matter of indifference – both are obligated to work to keep the peace and to keep others from falling away or going into sin.

Note that Paul's description shows that he is here concerned about conduct that leads a brother to stumble or fall – i.e., to commit sin (or at least to be strongly tempted to commit sin). The problem is not just that the other brother does not like what we do, or even that he is upset with us for doing it. The issue Paul describes occurs when our conduct actually leads the brother to **sin** or at least to be strongly led toward committing sin.

Sometimes a brother claims, "You offended me," meaning simply that he is troubled by something we did and he thinks Romans 14 means we should conform to his opinions. Yet his attitude is such that there is no danger that he will commit sin because of our conduct. Such an approach is a misuse of Romans 14 (see verses 15,20,21).

For other passages regarding tempting others to sin, see 1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:13-16; 18:6,7; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-33; Romans 16:17.

**Such matters are unclean only to him who considers it unclean.**

Here Paul expressly states the real facts of God's law regarding the practice of eating meats, which was the subject that introduced this discussion (see notes on verse 2). There are no such things as unclean meats now. It is not wrong to eat any kind of meat. (See Acts 10:9-16; 1 Timothy 4:1-3.)

Obviously, Paul is not here saying that no conduct, no matter what it is, is ever sinful unless we think it is sinful. Such would completely contradict hundreds of other passages in which God words defines acts to be sinful, whether or not we believe them to be sin.

Rather, this verse clearly proves that the issues Paul here discusses are matters of indifference. They are not sinful either way. You can participate or not participate and either way the act is not inherently sinful of itself. Meats are not unclean, so there is no sin if one eats them. But surely no passage requires men to eat meats. So eating meat is neither forbidden nor required. It is a matter of indifference. Compare 1 Corinthians 8:8 – "neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." It is a matter of "liberty" (1 Corinthians 8:9). It is not inherently sinful either way. It is wrong only if a person acts in a way that violates his conscience.



This principle can be broadened, in a sense, to include all that God has made. Everything has a proper use by which it is not unclean (1 Corinthians 10:23; 6:12). This is not to say any and all uses of it are acceptable. That would be the same as saying no act of any kind is sinful.

In fact, almost anything can be used sinfully. Virtually everything God has created, even His spiritual creations, have been and can be perverted to become sinful. If God has decreed an act to be sinful, then it is sinful even if we are ignorant of the sin (compare Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Galatians 5:19-21; Matthew 7:21-23; Acts 23:1; 26:9; etc.). The point is that all things do have good uses. Nothing God created is inherently sinful in every use to which it is put; everything has a legitimate use.

However, even if something God created is being used in a way that is not inherently sinful, yet a person may still sin by doing it thinking he is sinning. If he accounts it to be unclean, to him it is unclean (compare verses 20,23; 1 Corinthians 8:7).

A Christian must never deliberately violate his conscience or intentionally do what he believes to be wrong. Such actions would be disrespecting God, even if the act was not inherently sinful. If I misunderstand what God wants, yet if I go ahead and do what I think contradicts His will, then I show that I am not concerned enough about doing His will. So I sin if I do what I believe to be sinful. My practice must always be consistent with my belief. It is possible to have an incorrect belief, follow that belief, and still be wrong. But if I am doing what I believe to be sinful, I can be sure I am wrong.

***14:15-17 – If our eating meat grieves a brother, then we do not walk in love. We should not allow meat to destroy one for whom Christ died. Nor should we let our good be evil spoken of, because God’s kingdom is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

**Causing a brother to come to destruction or grief in such matters is a violation of love, since Christ died to save him.**

The term “grieve” is explained in the last part of the verse to mean to “destroy” (compare verses 14,20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:11-13). The point is that, by becoming a stumbling block to our brother in this matter of liberty, we cause him to sin. Even if the act is not sinful of itself, but if we lead him to do it in violation of his conscience, he has sinned. Sin leads to the grief of ultimate destruction if not repented of (1 Corinthians 8:7-13; 10:23-33). “Grieved” here does not mean simply that one is bothered, upset, or angered by our action. Context shows it means he is led to commit sin, which produces the grief of spiritual destruction.

If our conduct leads to this consequence, we are not walking in love. Here is the basic issue in this discussion: **love**. Love teaches us not to

harm others, especially spiritually (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). But if I lead my brother to sin because of my liberty or because of my personal conscience in a matter I cannot prove to be sinful, then I have surely harmed him. **Love should lead me to see that my personal viewpoint in a matter of liberty is not worth anyone's soul.** If I walk in love I will not press the issue to the loss of a soul.

Christ died to save my brother. If Christ thinks salvation of a soul is so important that He was willing to die to achieve it, then surely I can give up my liberty or cease pressing a personal viewpoint (which I cannot prove), if by doing so I can help bring about the salvation of that soul. We need to get our priorities in order. The strong must bear the burden of the weak (15:1; Compare Galatians 6:1,2). Love will work for salvation of souls, not for personal victory or personal liberties.

“Grieve” (λυπεω) – “to make sorrowful; to affect with sadness, cause grief; to throw into sorrow...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

**In this way you avoid your good being spoken of as evil.**

Again, Paul specifically asserts that eating meat is not sinful but is “good.” It is a matter of liberty or indifference. But if I act regarding this liberty so that a brother is led to sin, then my act, which was inherently good, will nevertheless be evil spoken of because it led a brother to sin.

This is not saying that anytime anyone speaks against my conduct I must immediately give it up in order to produce peace. Nor is it saying that, if one does speak against my conduct, I should argue vehemently and not let him say those things about my good deed. What it means is, as stated above, if my deed leads him to sin, then though the deed was not sinful, yet it resulted in another person's sinning, and that is evil. In context, that must be the point here (compare verses 15,19-21; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10).

**Note again that the very fact I can cease this practice for the sake of my brother is what proves conclusively that it is a matter of indifference!**

If the act is sinful in and of itself, then I must cease it because it is sinful, regardless of what anyone else thinks about it. But if it is something that God requires me to do, then I must not cease it no matter how many people object (Acts 5:29). The only kind of acts Paul is here discussing are acts that I can practice or not practice and either way I have not inherently violated Divine law!

**The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy.**

In our relationships to our brethren in God's kingdom we need to remember what is truly important. Matters such as eating and drinking are matters of indifference and do not inherently determine anyone's salvation. What should be given priority are those things that are

essential to salvation: righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit. These are vitally important because they pertain to salvation (see verse 18).

The application is that liberties should not be allowed to destroy what is really important in our spiritual relationship to God. Yet far too often brethren have the attitude that we will pursue our own liberty or our own viewpoint no matter what effect it has on others. The end is that people fall into sin or churches divide, destroying righteousness, peace, and joy. Souls are destroyed in those areas that are of real importance in the kingdom because of a matter of relative insignificance.

Note again, that Paul clearly demonstrates here that the matters he is discussing (eating meats, etc.) are not matters of “righteousness”; rather, he contrasts them to righteousness. So, they are not inherently required one way or the other in order to be “righteous” before God. It also follows that, if practicing it one way or the other **would** be necessary in order for us to be righteous, then it **would** be a matter of priority in the kingdom.

The **principle** Paul discusses here, however, needs to be applied in many areas, not just regarding matters of liberty. The true priorities in the church must be those spiritual things that affect our eternal destiny. They are supremely important over matters of physical wellbeing (compare Matthew 6:19-33; 16:24-27; Romans 8:5-8; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; John 6:27,63; Luke 12:15-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Colossians 3:1,2).

Some involve the church in the physical desires or interests of people and so hinder or even destroy the spiritual mission of the church. In particular, some involve the church in the “Social Gospel,” thinking the church should provide for the physical wellbeing of people with entertainment, recreation, sports, etc. This fails to recognize that the greater needs of men are spiritual, pertaining to their eternal salvation, and these are the needs the church was established to address. Churches that practice the Social Gospel have perverted the spiritual nature of the kingdom.

It is true that Paul did not write this verse primarily to condemn church involvement in material things. The main applications regarding such practices must be based on other passages. However, this verse does confirm that spiritual matters must take priority over physical matters in the nature of the church and that the purpose of the church can be perverted by emphasizing physical enjoyments.

**14:18,19 – He who serves Christ will be acceptable to God and approved by men. So, follow things that make for peace and whereby we may edify one another.**

**He who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

The reason righteousness, joy, and peace are so important in the kingdom is that, by serving Christ in these things, one can be acceptable to God as well as approved by men. Pleasing God is what really matters. I can please God whether or not I eat meats. But if I destroy my brother over matters of liberty, I do not please God for I have destroyed righteousness, peace, and joy.

Once again verses 17,18 show Paul is discussing matters of indifference. They are things which can be practiced either way without influencing righteousness, peace, or joy in the Holy Spirit, and they do not inherently affect whether or not I am acceptable to God.

So, the ultimate standard is what God accepts. I should be sure I do what pleases Him and then what helps others please Him. I should forego personal liberties and pressing personal viewpoints so that I and others can continue in peace in His service. Any other approach runs the risk that he or I or both will become unacceptable to Him.

**So pursue the things that make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.**

Peace and edification are the main concern here, and we should act by the rule that we will do what produces peace and edification.

Division is harmful to God's work, weakening believers and driving brethren from the truth. Peace is **not** more important than truth and obedience to God. We should neither sin nor overlook sin for the sake of peace. But peace **is** more important than the right to exercise personal liberties or bind personal consciences on others. (See 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17; Romans 12:18; Psalm 34:14; 1 Corinthians 7:15.)

Likewise, "edification" refers to building up our brethren, strengthening them in their service to the Lord. We ought to encourage obedience, rather than tempting people to sin or be disobedient. So, to tempt a brother to sin is a failure to edify him (compare 15:2; 1 Corinthians 10:23; 14:3f,26; Ephesians 4:12,16,29). We should strive to strengthen our brethren, not weaken them. This is far more important than any personal liberty or personal viewpoint of conscience. Compare verses 15-18. The brother who has a conscience against a matter and the brother who thinks he is free to participate both have a responsibility to work for peace and edify one another.

While these principles are applied here in the context to matters of indifference, nevertheless the principles of peace and edification have even broader applications than that. They would apply also, for example,

in the area of things that God requires in His word. In those areas, peace and edification would lead us to encourage and urge our brethren to practice what is right. They apply also in areas that are forbidden by God. In those areas peace and edification would lead us by teaching and example to urge others not to commit sin. Surely we should never set an example of participation in such sin. But likewise, the principles of peace and edification would apply in matters that are questionable or doubtful: activities that have little or no value building people up spiritually but border on sin, could be wrong, and are likely to lead us or others toward sin. Such practices do not promote love, edification, etc., but tend toward destroying a soul by being a stumbling block.

***14:20,21 – Do not overthrow the work of God for the sake of meat. All things are clean, but they are evil if a man eats with offense. So, it is good not to eat flesh, drink wine, or do anything that causes a brother to stumble.***

This is exactly the same point as in verses 14,15 (see notes there). God's work is to save men eternally. If my example leads my brother to sin, then I am destroying or overthrowing God's work. God is working for this man's salvation, but the effect of my conduct is to lead him to be lost! God might have succeeded in saving him were it not for me. So I am found to fight against God! And for what reason? Simply because I want to exercise my liberty or because I have a hang-up about eating meat! My brother's salvation is more important than food.

Paul again agrees that the eating of meat is "pure" – meat can be eaten without any violation of purity. As discussed on verse 14, the "all things" is obviously limited to context (see notes there). Here especially it means all kinds of foods, including meats. But if a man partakes thinking it is sin, then for him to do so would be a sin. And if my example or pressure leads him to do so, then I have overthrown God's work and I have sinned.

Note that eating "with offense" in verse 20 could be taken to mean that a person eats even though he stumbles because it violates his conscience. However, the ESV and NASB translate in such a way that it refers to eating in such a way that causes another person to stumble. Either way is true, of course, and has been emphasized throughout the context.

Verses 15-20 can be summarized as follows:

<b>Which Is More Important?</b>
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Whether a person eats meat or does not eat meat	Love for a brother Benefits of Jesus' death Righteousness, joy, peace Pleasing God Peace & edification The work of God
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**It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.**

Paul here directly states the conclusion to which this discussion has been leading. To act so as to cause my brother to sin, even if only against his own conscience, is a failure to show love, etc. (see summary under verse 20). Instead, I should forego my liberty. My personal desire to participate is not nearly so important as my brother's spiritual wellbeing (compare 1 Corinthians 8:13; 10:32,33).

If we are unwilling to act as Paul describes here, we are being selfish, unloving, and unconcerned about our brother. True, we may study with the brother, hoping he can soon see the truth and no longer have a problem of conscience. But meanwhile, we must practice these principles for as long as the problem lasts, however, long that may be (1 Corinthians 8:13).

### Applying the Principles Taught Here

We must understand the reasons Paul gives for this conclusion. This helps us know when the principles apply and under what circumstances to practice them.

***First, we must apply the principles to anything that causes the kind of problems Paul describes.***

Paul says it is not just eating meats but, "anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."

Now, if a matter is **required** by God, then I must do as God says. I cannot leave the matter off to please my brother, but must practice what God commanded hoping this will lead the brother to see his need to do likewise. If a matter is **forbidden**, then I must avoid it, both because it is sinful and so I can avoid leading my brother to sin. The principle being taught here applies only if a matter is **indifferent**: a matter of liberty neither required nor forbidden according to God's law. Yet even here, if my brother's conscience is such that my participation may lead him to sin against his conscience, then I should avoid so acting.

Suppose a practice is **required** or **forbidden** but he believes improperly about it. If I teach or practice the truth may I be guilty of sin by leading him to sin against his conscience? No, in these cases I am giving him a good example of what he ought to do. If he follows my

example, he may still violate his conscience; but if he did not follow my example, he would surely be in sin. He would sin because he would disobey God's command in the matter. In this case, I am not in sin since my example is encouraging him to do what he ought to do to please God. Many examples show that Jesus and his apostles were stumbling blocks to the world in that they taught and practiced what the world opposed (1 Corinthians 1:23; Romans 9:32f; 1 Peter 2:8ff; Matthew 15:12-14).

***Further, the reasons for Paul's conclusion shows us how far to go with matters of indifference or personal liberty.***

The KJV and NKJV say not to do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. The last two phrases are not in the ASV, but the conclusions still follow from the reasons Paul has given. I should change my conduct, not just if it causes someone to **sin** (stumble), but also if I am weakening him or hindering his growth and work for God in such a way as to make it likely that he will be lost. Love would teach this also.

Further, the reasons Paul gives would teach us to consider **all** the people who will be influenced by my example. In some cases my conduct may cause spiritual problems for one brother. I may find, however, that if I accommodate him, I am hindering other people and causing greater problems than I would be if I did not so accommodate him. In such a case, love would teach me to help all concerned as well as I can, but to accommodate the brother with a specific conscience problem may **not** be the loving thing to do for all concerned.

Again, the **reasons** Paul gives for his conclusions should lead me to ask: If I accommodate a brother's conscience in a certain matter, will I really be helping him in the way that is best spiritually for him? Such a question requires great honesty and love in answering. But if I am honestly convinced that accommodating the brother's conscience is not helping him, then I should not accommodate him.

Some examples: (1) Suppose a brother is clearly in serious error on many points. Many attempts to convert him have been unsuccessful. If I accommodate him in one area of his conscience, I have not helped him be saved. He is resisting truth in general, so he will be no better off if I accommodate him.

(2) Suppose he disagrees with my practice, but he is not going to participate in it no matter what I do, nor will his work for the Lord be hindered. He may be upset with me, but he is not going to sin either way. Then I must evaluate whether there are good reasons for practicing the matter anyway. Maybe it is not just a matter of my personal desires. Maybe good is being done for other people.

(3) Some people are simply stubborn and self-willed. Anytime they want their way in a matter, they argue that other people are "offending their conscience." It becomes a means of manipulating others to get their own way in any matter that displeases them.



Some people are continually disrupting the church over one issue after another. If we accommodate them in one area, it will just be a matter of time before they create another disturbance over something else. Further, they may not be willing to be peaceable even if we accommodate them in a matter – i.e., they refuse to fulfill what verses 3-13 require of the one who holds a matter of personal conscience. They are continually condemning a practice as sinful, stirring the issue up, creating strife and trouble.

Such people are causing division and stumbling contrary to the doctrine, and should be withdrawn from, not accommodated (Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:9,10). These people need to be opposed like Paul opposed the Judaizers in Acts 15 and like Jesus opposed those who bound the washing of hands (Matthew 15), not accommodated like Paul had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16. Knowing where to draw the line may be difficult and we may see it only after we have tried awhile to accommodate the brother. But this is a valid distinction that must be considered.

### **What about drinking wine?**

Paul says the principles of this chapter apply to drinking wine. Since the chapter is referring to matters of liberty, does this prove modern social drinking is a matter of liberty? To answer, we must consider other Bible teaching about alcoholic beverages:

#### ***Drunkenness is sinful.***

Drinking wine that leads to intoxication clearly is not a matter of liberty (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9,10; Ephesians 5:18). ***This point of itself proves that Paul is not saying that all wine drinking is a matter of liberty.*** Since we know that much wine drinking is sinful, not a matter of liberty, it follows that Paul must be referring only to certain kinds of wine drinking. So we must determine what kind of wine drinking Paul refers to here.

#### ***Modern “social drinking” would constitute excessive drinking by gospel standards.***

We must use words as the Bible uses them, not necessarily as they are used today. Consider the Bible word for “wine” as compared to modern alcoholic drinks.

#### ***In Bible times, “wine” could mean fermented grape juice or unfermented grape juice.***

See Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 48:33; Song 5:1; Isaiah 65:8; Revelation 19:15; 14:19,20. This meaning can be compared to our word “cider.”

Any good encyclopedia on “wine” will show that people in Bible times knew several ways to preserve wine unfermented, and they commonly did so. Yet this was still called “wine.” The only way to know whether “wine” means fermented or unfermented is by context.



Their wines when fermented were about 8% alcohol. But this was normally **diluted** with water, usually one part of wine for 3-8 parts of water (resulting in 1-2% alcohol). This was taken only with meals, further diluting the effect by mixing with other food and drinking relatively slowly.

Drinking fermented wine undiluted as a social activity was considered excessive, immoderate drink!

**In modern times, many people drink distilled alcohol, which has high alcohol content (40%-50%), and was unheard of in Bible times.**

Would you agree that it is wrong to drink a shot of whiskey? (Remember your answer.)

Modern wines are almost never diluted with water. In fact our wines have higher natural alcohol content (10-16%) than Bible wines, and often distilled alcohol is added to wines to **increase** the alcohol content to 15-25%! Drinking modern wines would be **excessive** drinking by Bible standards.

Beer is made alcoholic (4%-6%) by a brewing process. Modern beers are lower in alcohol than **undiluted** Bible wines, but higher than **diluted** wines. And beer is drunk in greater quantities than wine and often drunk by itself, not with a meal.

One can or bottle of beer has as much total alcohol as a glass of wine or a shot of whiskey! Surely, true Christians would agree that a shot of whiskey is excess of alcohol. Then so is a can of beer!

**Other passages and principles also condemn modern social drinking.**

### **1 Peter 4:3**

This passage condemns various degrees of drinking.

(1) “Drunkenness” (NKJV) or “excess of wine” (KJV) or “winebibbing” (ASV). This is a drunken spree, “extravagant indulgence ... long drawn out” (Trench).

(2) “Revelry” is a wild party with drunkenness and sexual looseness.

(3) “Banqueting” (KJV) is “carousing” (ASV) or “drinking parties” (NKJV). It means “drinking” (Thayer, Vine), “not of necessity excessive ... but giving opportunity for excess...” (Trench). In other words, a social gathering at which people drink, even if they do not become obviously intoxicated: i.e., modern **social drinking**.

### **Vigilance, self-control and sobriety**

1 Peter 5:8 – We should be vigilant so we are on guard for the devil who seeks to destroy us.

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 – We should practice self-control so we have our bodies in subjection to avoid sin and practice righteousness.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:2,4,6,12 – All Christians are commanded to be sober, not intoxicated. We are to keep our minds clear so we can recognize right from wrong and have the self-control to avoid error.

But the very first effect modern alcoholic drinks have on the body is to confuse the part of the brain that involves our discernment and inhibitions. Just one or two modern beers affect the mind so one is not vigilant and sober! He is “intoxicated” by definition in that the ability of his mind to function has been impaired.

### **Avoiding temptation**

Proverbs 23:29-33 shows that we should completely avoid drinking alcohol from the beginning because of the end results to which it can lead. The Bible generally teaches that, rather than participating in a practice simply for self-indulgence or social purposes, if that practice can easily lead to sin, then we should also avoid even its beginning forms

See Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12.

### **Example and influence**

All Christians must set a good example (Matthew 5:13-16; 18:6,7; 1 Timothy 4:12).

But the main reason people begin drinking is because of the influence of other people. This is why it is called “social drinking”! Young people especially are affected by older people they look up to.

One of every ten social drinkers becomes an alcoholic, and a much higher percentage will get obviously drunk. So, if other people begin to drink because of our influence, we have become a stumbling block leading people to drunkenness and alcoholism.

It follows from the above facts that modern social drinking is not the kind of drinking wine to which Paul was referring here. It is not a matter of liberty but violates clear Bible principles.

Yet even if it were a matter of liberty, Christians in our society would have to avoid it because of the principles Paul teaches here in Romans 14 and other passages regarding influence. Our modern alcoholic beverages are so different from those of New Testament times that anyone who is known to drink them will have a harmful influence and will cause others to stumble. It will lead astray young people, new converts, weak members, and especially former alcoholics. It will hinder our teaching because many people in the world know Christians should not drink and will not listen to those who do.

The issues of meat eating and drinking wine are both different today than in Paul’s day, but in different ways. Eating meat is of little controversy in our society and in the church today. It has become less of a problem, yet in the New Testament it was discussed at length in 3 chapters.

On the other hand, the issue of drinking alcoholic beverages has changed in that, though it was a problem then, it has become much more a problem in that our alcoholic drinks are much more alcoholic than commonly in Paul's day. We must apply the Bible principles, but we must apply them according to the problem as we face it in our society, not as in Paul's society.

### ***What then did Paul mean by “drinking wine”?***

We now know Paul does not mean that all wine drinking is a matter of liberty. He says some wine drinking is a matter of liberty, but he says not one single other word about it in context. It follows that we cannot know whether or not modern social drinking is included as a matter of liberty unless other passages elsewhere so teach. We must reach conclusions based on accumulating all the evidence, but we have given evidence that other passages condemn modern social drinking.

So what kind of wine drinking does he mean would be a matter of liberty? Some possible problems that would fit the context of Romans 14 might include:

(1) Perhaps some people objected to **all** use of “wine,” even unfermented wine, as a matter of influence because it could be confused with fermented wine (people could not tell by looking whether or not it was intoxicating).

(2) Perhaps some were ascetic about wine like they were about meat. Maybe they had practiced drunkenness before being converted and now, after conversion, believed Christians should totally avoid even non-alcoholic (or the common mildly alcoholic?) drinks. This would fit the context.

(3) Perhaps some new converts or weak members saw Christians drinking non-alcoholic wine and concluded it was all right to drink even alcoholic wine (not seeing or knowing the distinction other Christians were making).

(4) Perhaps some had made Nazarite vows under the Law of Moses and were still keeping that vow, refusing to drink any grape product. Such would face problems if other Christians drank even unfermented wine in their presence, just like the vegetarian had when others ate meat.

Since Paul does not define the kind of wine drinking he mentions, it is hard to know what problem he refers to. Perhaps it is one of those listed above or perhaps it is something else. But other passages show that wine drinking can most definitely be sinful of itself, not a matter of liberty.

Considering the nature of modern alcoholic beverages as used in our society, I must conclude that modern social drinking does not constitute a matter of liberty such as Paul discusses. But even if it were a matter of liberty, it would surely be such a bad influence that the principles Paul uses here would show Christians should not do it. Remember in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 that Paul shows some matters of

liberty are such an obvious bad influence (like eating meat in the idol's temple) that every Christian should know it would be wrong as a matter of influence. Modern social drinking would fall in that category, even if it were a matter of liberty.

**14:22,23 – Hold your faith between yourself and God. You are happy if you do not condemn yourself in what you approve. But one who doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not eat of faith; whatever is not of faith is sin.**

**One may have faith that an act is a matter of liberty, but that does not prove he may exercise that liberty.**

Paul continues to admonish the brother who knows an act is a matter of liberty. He has faith he can participate in the activity without necessarily sinning.

But that faith should be kept between himself and God. He should not **practice** the liberty even though he is sure the act is not sinful of itself. He knows this and so does God. It is between them. But love and concern for his brother should lead him to keep the matter between him and God. He should not insist on practicing the matter since it causes hindrance to his brethren (verse 21).

He can be happy knowing in his heart the matter is not sinful (compare verses 5,23). He is convinced the matter is acceptable. Again, this does not mean we are always right just because we think a practice is acceptable; it is possible to think it is right when in fact it violates God's word. The application is only to matters of liberty as described in context.

**He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.**

"But" shows this contrasts to verse 22. The one who is convinced a practice is acceptable can be happy (verse 22). "But" in contrast, the one who doubts the practice, yet participates anyway, has sinned because he has violated his conscience. This restates verses 14,20 in a clear concise conclusion.

Christians should not act in a way they believe might be sinful. We do not avoid just the things that have been conclusively proved to be wrong. If one course is clearly acceptable and another course is doubtful or questionable, then we should choose the "safe" course. We must not violate our consciences.

Why? Because "whatever is not of faith is sin." It is possible to sin even when we have "faith" that a matter is acceptable. But if we do not have "faith" it is acceptable, then we are surely in sin if we practice it. Note that "faith" here is the opposite of "doubt." So, it means conviction a thing is right (not "the faith" of the gospel).

This principle is vital to faithfulness. Many Christians participate in practices that they must know are doubtful. They cannot possibly prove them to be valid by the Scriptures, yet they go ahead anyway. Some seem to think they are acceptable to God unless someone can absolutely prove they have sinned. They get as close as they can to the brink and live as much as they can like the world (12:1,2) for their own pleasure.

The idea seems to be, “Until you can 100% prove I am in sin, I will keep acting this way.” It should be the other way around. Unless we can clearly prove the act is acceptable, we should do what is safe. Leave wide margin between ourselves and sin. If honest investigation leads us to be uncertain, then seek another course.

Sometimes this passage is used against unauthorized religious practices (instrumental music in worship, sprinkling for baptism, etc.). It is argued that these cannot be found in “the faith,” so they are sinful. I believe this is a valid principle based on other passages. I even believe this passage can be used to disprove such practices. But I do not believe the argument, in the form stated above, is valid. In this verse “faith” is the opposite of doubting; it does not refer to “the faith” of the gospel.

Yet the principle can be applied in that, if we study the gospel, we cannot find these practices there. How then can we do them without doubts? Surely an honest examination of the Scriptures, in light of passages about Bible authority, should lead us to serious uncertainties about such practices. It follows we should never participate in them until we are sure we can prove them by the Bible. But we will never be able to prove them (since they are not in the Bible), so we must never participate in them. Some acknowledge that they can’t see authority for the practice, but they continue to participate in it. That is a violation of the passage.

## Limits on the Application of Romans 14

Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8&10 teach the general principle that, if exercise of a personal liberty will cause a brother to sin, we should be willing to forego the liberty in order to save his soul. However, the teaching, as giving in Scripture, is limited (**specific**) in application. Some people misapply the passage by making it more **general** than what is stated in Scripture and taking it to extremes God never intended. To understand the proper application of the passage, we must consider the context and other passages.

That there are limits is clear from Bible application of the principle. Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16) as a matter of influence. But he refused to have Titus circumcised, also as a matter of influence (Galatians 2). This simple example illustrates that there are lines to be

drawn based on different circumstances. It simply is not true that we must change our practice every time someone objects to our action and implies that maybe they will sin or otherwise be troubled. Consider some specific limits on the principle, as stated in the Scriptures.

**The Underlying Principles: Love for Brother, Edification, Peace, Salvation of Souls, and Glory for God  
(Romans 14:15,19; 1 Corinthians 8:1-3; 10:31)**

The basis of Paul’s teaching is love and edification for our brethren and glory for God. We should do what helps save others and what gives glory to God. Everything taught is an application of these principles. Some decisions are difficult cases, even borderline cases. Remembering and properly considering these underlying principles may help us make proper application.

**Application to Matters of Liberty**

Examining Paul’s examples (eating meats, etc.), we conclude these are matters which are neither conclusively forbidden nor conclusively required by Gods’ word. They are matters of liberty such that, whether we choose to participate in the activity or not participate, neither way would we inherently sin according to God’s law (1 Corinthians 8:8,9). The very fact that we may practice these things but should cease if someone is caused to stumble, that of itself proves these are matters which are neither forbidden nor required by God’s law. If God’s law bound them one way or another, we must refuse to change, regardless of what others wanted (Acts 5:29; etc.).

By way of contrast, some things are inherently **sinful to practice**. God’s word, properly understood, would teach us we sin if we participate. Other things are conclusively **required** to be practiced, so we sin if we omit them. But other practices are matters of indifference or liberty. They are neither inherently evil nor required. We could choose to practice them or not practice them, and neither way would the nature of our conduct inherently violate God’s laws.

EVIL THINGS (Sinful if practiced)	INDIFFERENT THINGS (Not sinful either way)	REQUIRED THINGS (Sinful if omitted)
lying, stealing, adultery, murder, unauthorized religious practices	eating meat, kind of car, color clothes, number of children, buy or rent house	baptism, prayer, Bible study, care for the needy, giving to the church, teaching the lost

Some misuse the passage by applying it to matters that are, according to the Scriptures, unauthorized religious practices. They want us to consider instrumental music in worship, church support of institutions, living in an unscriptural remarriage, etc., matters of

Romans 14. In application, this means that those of us who oppose these practices must never say that those who participate in them have sinned, and we must be willing to continue to fellowship those who practice them. If we were to teach that those who practice these things have sinned, or if we refuse to fellowship them, we would violate Romans 14.

Others conclude that any and all controversial, disputed matters should automatically be considered matters of Romans 14. Some try to make this a catch-all, cure-all for all church troubles. Anytime members disagree, some folks say we should overlook the difference because of Romans 14. Surely that cannot be correct. There are some people who debate the necessity of baptism and the existence of God. They would claim such issues to be matters of dispute and controversy. Does that mean we must fellowship atheists and unbaptized folks?

Such a view ignores the clear teaching of Scripture that unauthorized practices that are sinful (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19). It ignores the fact there are matters regarding which the church can prove people to be conclusively in sin so we must withdraw from them (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:33). It ignores the fact that some matters should be opposed and rebuked persistently because people are in sin (Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). Not all practices are matters of indifference as discussed in Romans 14.

Still others would apply the principle of Romans 14 to persuade the church (or individuals) not to practice things that God commands or that at least are useful and authorized ways of carrying out a Divine command. We cannot give up an act that God wants us to do just to please a brother who objects to it. Such does not glorify God nor act in love. Nor should we give up an act that has significant value in the work of the church. Remember that the basic underlying principles are love, edification, glorifying God, and saving souls. If an activity is clearly authorized, glorifies God, and helps us to teach and save souls, then to give it up for the sake of one brother, may cause more souls to be lost than if we continued the activity.

### **Individual vs. Church Activities**

The matters in consideration in Romans 14, etc., are also **individual** matters. Every example and application refers to individual activity. None involve congregational activities.

Note throughout the chapter the terms Paul uses that refer specifically to individuals, not to a group: "one ... he ... him ... one person ... each ... his own mind ... he who ... himself ... each of us ... one another



... yourself ... himself ... he who,” etc., etc. (compare James 1:27; Galatians 6:10).

This does not mean the underlying **principles** can never be applied to group activities (though they are more difficult to apply there). However, the emphasis is surely on personal, individual applications.

When **group** activities are considered, a brother may be upset by an action. But if we act in a way to satisfy him, we may upset other people in the group or cause trouble or even division as a result. Clearly this is not Paul’s intent. When group activities are involved, we must consider the effect on the **whole group**, not just the person who raises the issue.

And note that the context says the **strong** should bear the burden of the **weak** (15:1,2; 14:1,2). But when a whole congregation is expected to give up a practice just to please a brother, that it is not just the strong bearing the burden of the weak. Rather all the members are being required to bear the burden: strong and weak, young and old, new converts and mature members, etc. That is clearly not what Paul said in the context.

Some object to a local church conducting Bible classes or supporting a gospel preacher in the local work or owning a building to meet in. Should we give all these up to please one (or a few) brothers? If we give them up, we cease practices that are, not only clearly authorized by Scripture, but of significant value in saving souls and edifying members. Remember, the principle is to practice what promotes love, edification, and the salvation of souls. To give up classes, etc., may keep one or a few brethren with us, but might also seriously hinder work that God requires us to do: spread the gospel and edify the members.

Nothing that Paul teaches here would require us to satisfy one or a few brethren at the cost of hindering a commanded work, neglecting to spread the gospel to lost souls or to edify the members, or so offending other weak members or new converts that we tempt other members to go into sin or to remain in sin.

Surely the principles of love, edification, and the salvation of souls should be applied in our decisions even about church activities. Such decisions may lead the church to modify their practice to satisfy the consciences of some members. But this must be done with a careful understanding of the effect on all the members and on the overall effectiveness of the church in accomplishing the work that God has assigned it. It must not be assumed that the church is required to change a practice just because one or a few brethren raise an objection of conscience.

See our list of other similar examples below.

### **Actions that Bother Folks but Do Not Cause Them to Sin**

Remember that the principles of Romans 14 apply in matters where our conduct tempts someone to sin. The concern is that a brother may



fall (sin) and be destroyed (Romans 14:13,15,20). Some people insist we apply these principles in situations where it is highly unlikely that they or anyone else would ever sin because of what others do. Such is not a legitimate use of the principle.

Further, there must be some sensible, reasonable connection that shows how a brother's action might cause another brother to sin. In the situations Paul describes, he explains how eating meat could cause a brother to sin against his conscience. The weak brother misunderstands truth, but we can see how the actions of others could cause him to sin.

But it does not fit the passage for a brother to object to some action when there is no sensible explanation for how it could cause him to sin. Suppose he just objects to the color of the building, yet there is no reasonable grounds why the color of the building would cause him to sin or fall away (other than perhaps his divisive, cantankerous attitude). This is not the case Paul is describing. If a brother is really so weak as all that, changing the color of the building would not save him anyway. He would soon just be "offended" by something else. If such a person falls away, he can only blame it on himself.

### **Matters of Sincere Conscience vs. Contentious Divisiveness**

Paul's teaching assumes that the "weak" brother is sincerely trying to serve God, so our conduct may make the difference in whether or not he is saved eternally. Our act so tempts him that he might be expected to sin and be lost; but if we gave it up, he would not sin and be lost.

On the other hand, Scriptures clearly condemn those who are divisive and contentious. See Matthew 5:9; James 3:13-18; Romans 12:18; 14:19; Genesis 13:8; Proverbs 20:3; Psalm 133:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-6; Galatians 5:19-21; John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20,25; Luke 11:17; Titus 3:10; Proverbs 26:21; 6:16-19.

Some people repeatedly complain about others and are just generally divisive, causing strife and contention. Brethren may try to help them or give up liberties to encourage them, but they just continue to find other reasons to criticize and cause strife. Soon it becomes obvious they are not just "weak brethren" but trouble makers who are divisive and themselves are causing stumbling for others. These must be disciplined by the church (Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:10).

If our action would make little or no difference between whether anyone is saved or lost, then the principles do not apply. Just as some saved people may dislike our action but would never be lost because of it, so some lost people may object to our action but would never be saved even if we changed. The issue is: Will our conduct cause people to be saved or lost? This must be evaluated honestly, not selfishly.

Paul described, in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, different applications in different situations. Eating meat in the idol's temple (where the idol is worshiped) would obviously lead people to think we believe in worshiping idols, so it is forbidden. At the other extreme, eating meat

sold in the market would almost surely not cause any one to sin, so Paul says to go ahead. But eating meat at a feast might involve eating meat offered to an idol. Yet Paul says to ask no questions but just eat, unless someone states their concern with the act. When we know there is a problem, we should not eat.

So, there are times when it is not obvious whether an action one way or another will cause people to be saved or lost. Paul has taught that we are obligated to change when we have good reason to **know** what effect our conduct will have. When we do not know, then it cannot be proved absolutely which way we should go. This is why questions of influence in matters of liberty can sometimes be viewed differently by different brethren, and neither can conclusively prove their view is right. We need to practice what satisfies our conscience and not condemn others unless there is clear evidence others are being caused to stumble. But otherwise, there will be differences of viewpoint.

### **People Offended or Hindered by Whatever Course We Take**

There will be times when either course we take will offend someone. If we go one way, some people will claim to be offended. If we go the other way, others will claim to be offended. We have a case of conflicting consciences such that, whichever way we go, someone will have problems. In that case we can only evaluate the situation with concern for all souls and do the best we can.

This is one reason why issues of influence are generally issues of individual conduct. Properly understood, we may apply the **principles** to congregational decisions, but there would be many people to be considered. We should seek to do what will best help more people be saved. But it is not a simple matter of one brother giving up a liberty to save another brother.

### **A Brother Expects Others to Sacrifice, but Will Not Do so Himself**

Suppose a brother opposes the activity of others on the grounds that it violates his conscience, so he insists they give up their practice. However, he himself persists in a practice(s) that likewise violates the consciences of others. He may demand others change to please his conscience, but he does not see that his conduct would be just as likely to offend people. In other words, his position is self-contradictory.

Such an approach is not justified by Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8&10. Rather, it contradicts these passages. In fact, it is not following the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) or loving a brother as yourself (Matthew 22:37). Remember, the basis of Paul's teaching is love (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). Paul's discussion in Romans 14 requires both the weak and the strong brother to act in love.

What the “weak” brother is doing, in this case, is binding upon others rules that he himself will not follow. That is not love but hypocrisy. See Matthew 23:3,4; Romans 2:21. For other members to give in to such a brother is actually encouraging him in a wrong attitude and a misapplication of Scripture.

Neither Romans 14 nor any other Scripture requires others, for the sake of a man’s conscience, to make sacrifices that contradict what he himself does or would do for others!

### **Distinguishing between Conscience and Personal Preference**

Romans 14, etc., teaches us to avoid causing a brother to sin against his conscience, but it only requires us to offer him a reasonable means to do so. It does not require us to offer a multitude of different options, or to allow him to insist on a solution that he simply prefers, when another solution should satisfy his claims and would be less troublesome to others. So long as we find an option that reasonably should not cause him to sin, we have met his need and satisfied the passage.

Specifically, suppose a brother has a problem of conscience, so another brother offers to give up his liberty in a way that should avoid causing the first brother to sin. But suppose the weak brother does not like that solution, because he **prefers** another solution. Romans 14 does not give the weaker brother the option of **insisting** on some specific course of action. All that is necessary is that the stronger brother act in such a way that the other brother ought not to be caused to **sin**. The weak brother has no right to insist on troubling or upsetting others – perhaps a whole group of others – simply to satisfy his conscience in a way he **prefers**, when another course would cause less trouble for others.

For him to expect such a course of action would be selfish and unloving, and therefore a violation of the very principles on which Paul bases his teaching. Again, both the weak and the strong are required to act in love. If the weak brother is not acting in love, then others should not encourage him by going along with him. He must learn that, if he is the one with the conscience problem, so long as others have found a way to avoid causing him to sin, he should simply appreciate what his brothers have done and be willing to make whatever sacrifices are needed to deal with the problem that his conscience has caused.

We may **help** such a brother, but for him to simply **shift** the burden to us and expect us to do all or most of the sacrificing, while he just gets his way, is not what Paul is teaching, nor does it conform with general Bible teaching. To give in to such a brother is not helping him at all but is encouraging him in his lack of love. Galatians 6:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Romans 12:1.

## Examples

That there are limits to the application of Romans 14, etc., should be clear by considering some examples. Suppose a congregation is involved in the following practices but some member then objects to them on the grounds of personal conscience. Must we give them all up? (Note that these are not hypothetical situations; I have personally been involved in or heard of such issues being raised.)

- \* Church supporting a gospel preacher
- \* Church owning and meeting in a building
- \* Church conducting Bible classes
- \* Church using plural containers on the Lord's supper
- \* Church using song books
- \* Church teaching from a translation other than KJV
- \* Church using tracts or other literature to teach
- \* Church using visual aids (blackboard, projector, etc.)
- \* Church teaching the gospel over radio, TV, or Internet

None of these can be strictly proved to be absolutely required by God, and some folks have objected to them claiming they violate Bible teaching. Yet all are clearly authorized in the Scriptures, they all make a major contribution to accomplishing works that God has commanded us to do, and giving them up would be a serious harm to the church's work, probably driving away weak members, new converts, and prospective converts from the community.

To use Romans 14, etc. to teach that a local church must give up all such simply to satisfy the mistaken consciences of a member or a few members is to completely misuse and misunderstand the Scriptures.

# Romans 15

***15:1,2 – Those who are strong should bear the weaknesses of those who are weak, rather than just pleasing themselves. We ought to please our neighbor for good to edify him.***

**The strong should bear with difficulties caused by the weak.**

Paul has shown throughout the book that both Jew and Gentile are saved by the same gospel. Here he continues the discussion of chapter 14, seeking to translate that principle into practical application so people from such diverse backgrounds can receive and encourage one another as brethren in Christ. In 15:1-8 he summarizes the general obligations Christians have to strengthen and edify one another. Jew and Gentile especially need to work together to strengthen one another as brethren in Christ, rather than fighting over inconsequential matters.

He begins by generalizing the point of Romans 14. Chapter 14 discussed how the strong and weak should relate to one another in matters of liberty, personal judgment, and personal conscience. Especially the strong brother, who understands the truth and is more mature in Christ, should be willing to make sacrifices for the wellbeing of those who are weak.

This should not be surprising since similar things are done in many areas of life. Adults care for their immature offspring. Healthy people care for sick people. People with abundant goods should help those in destitution. Christians should teach and encourage non-Christians, etc. Likewise, those in the church who are stronger and more mature should make allowances for and assist those who are weak.

This effort on behalf of the weak requires unselfishness and self-sacrifice on the part of those who are strong. We cannot “please ourselves” by doing whatever we desire, concerned only for our personal interests. We must be willing to avoid practices which we consider liberties if they tempt others to sin. See also Galatians 6:1,2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

This does not mean, however, that people should be satisfied to stay weak or that the strong should be content to let them remain weak. The weak have the responsibility to study and grow and become strong, in which case they would be responsible to in turn help those who are weak.

We have a right to expect such growth and if it does not occur, we have the right to rebuke them for their lack of growth.

### **Pleasing our neighbor for his good to edification**

Instead of doing what pleases ourselves (verse 1), we should seek to please others. This is the true spirit of love and unselfishness (compare 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). We should be concerned for the needs of others more than for our own personal desires. This form of selflessness can solve differences and make for peace, unity, and growth. Selfishness and pride, however, lead to strife.

Note, however, that Paul defines what he means by pleasing our neighbor. It does not mean doing just whatever other people want us to do to satisfy their own indulgences regardless of God's will. It means doing what is **“good”** for everyone involved, **edifying** them. But good is defined by God's word (2 Timothy 3:16,17), and that which is edifying is determined by God's will (1 John 5:2,3).

So, nothing here should ever be used to argue that we should please people at the expense of displeasing God or compromising His will. Others may not know or believe what God's word says, so they may object and think we are not showing love when we do what God says. Surely we should try to explain the truth to them. But we must do what God says is good regardless of how people feel about it (Matthew 10:34-37; 6:1-18; Galatians 1:10).

All Christians should be concerned about edifying others. Compare 1 Corinthians 10:23,24,33; 9:22; 14:3ff (especially verse 26); 2 Corinthians 13:9; 12:19; Philippians 2:3-8; Ephesians 4:12,16,29; Romans 14:19; 15:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:23-25.

“Edification” (οικοδομη) – “...1. (the act of) building, building up ...; in the N.T. metaph., edifying, edification, i.e. the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness, (see οικοδομεω) ... 2. ... a building ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***15:3,4 – Christ did not please Himself, as Scriptures says that the reproaches of those who reproached others fell upon Him. The things written in earlier times are for our instruction so we might have hope through perseverance and encouragement of the Scriptures.***

### **Jesus set the example of sacrificing for others.**

Jesus is the perfect example of One who did not please Himself but worked for the good and edification of others. He did exactly what verses 1,2 require of us. He sacrificed Himself for our wellbeing at great cost to Himself (compare 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:6-8; etc.).

Paul quotes Psalm 69:9 as an expression of Jesus' selflessness. He bore the reproach of those who reproached God. (This use by Paul is not the primary application of the meaning given by David when he wrote

the psalm; rather, it is a similar application. Even as David could say this of himself, so it could be said of Jesus.)

Jesus came to earth as a man and did the Father's will. As a result, He was opposed and finally slain because men opposed the will of God. Jesus had enjoyed bliss in heaven. He left heaven to come to suffer on earth. Why? Not for His good, but for our good and to please His Father. Had He considered mainly His own personal advantage, He would never have come. He came for the good of others, and this is the example Paul holds for our imitation.

Do we show the kind of love Jesus exemplified? Are we willing to give up our pride and self-interest so others can be saved? Would we suffer persecution, inconvenience, and heartache to please our Father? This is what Jesus' example demands. Such attitudes would eliminate the kind of strife over inconsequential matters that Paul has been discussing.

### **The Old Testament written to instruct us**

Paul has gone to great lengths to prove that the Old Testament law is not binding today; rather, men today are saved by faithful obedience to the gospel (see especially 7:1-7; compare Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17). Despite this, he has just taught a lesson by quoting an Old Testament passage. This raises the parenthetical question: What is the value and use of the Old Testament today? If it is not binding as law, does it have any value at all? How should we use it? Is it right to quote it as evidence for anything?

Some in the church today see no value in studying the Old Testament. They may even object to teaching and preaching based on the Old Testament. They think it has essentially no value – at least none sufficient to make it worthy of our time in study.

Yet, Paul here affirms that the law does have a proper use. The Scriptures were in fact written for our learning. They educate us in things we need to know. They were written, not just for Jews before Jesus' death, but for Christians also. We need to study and appreciate useful lessons from them (see also 1 Corinthians 10:1-13). But how can this be if they are not binding as law?

The answer is that they give hope through patience and comfort. Many Old Testament teachings give us reason to hope, though we have been suffering, afflicted, and are making sacrifices such as Paul has said that God requires. This hope gives comfort and patience as we face problems.

The sacrifice of Jesus, Paul said, teaches us to bear patiently with the weaknesses of others so we and they can have hope for the future. Jesus' self-sacrificing attitude was similar to that of David in the passage Paul quoted. So, we can learn from the suffering and self-sacrifice of David and other Old Testament men of God. These men suffered, but



God was pleased with them. They were rewarded for their faithfulness and so will we be. These examples give comfort and encouragement.

We can learn other valid uses of the Old Testament by examining how it was used by New Testament writers in other examples. These valid uses include:

1. Historical records (creation, the flood, etc.).
2. Evidence to support faith in God, Jesus, and the Bible (fulfilled prophecy, unity of the Bible, etc.)
3. Facts (not laws) about the unchanging nature of God and man (see 3:10-18).
4. Understanding and appreciating the New Testament because of similarities and differences compared to the Old Testament (see verses 9-12).

Since the Old Testament has different purposes from the New Testament, we must study it with a different approach. Yet we surely need to study and handle it aright if we intend to obtain the full value of God's inspired word.

***15:5,6 – May the God who gives patience and comfort grant all Christians to have the same mind with one another according to Christ, so that with one accord they may all with the same voice give glory to the God and Father of Christ.***

God grants both patience and comfort through the word (verse 4). Paul pleads that these blessings from God might lead to like-mindedness or unity among God's people. Compare John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20; Romans 12:16; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2; 4:2.

Much that Paul has said in context was designed to promote unity among God's people, especially among Jews and Gentiles who were now worshiping God together as Christians. These groups naturally had significant differences in their backgrounds. Likewise, in every society there are people from different backgrounds, races, nationalities, personalities, etc. God does not want separate congregations for each group; He wants unity where they can work and worship together.

"According to Jesus Christ" – This shows the source of unity. Jews and Gentiles, like other people of widely divergent backgrounds, can never be united by human efforts alone. What is required is a common bond of salvation through Jesus, a common goal of eternal life, and a common standard in God's word (Ephesians 4:3-6). This leads to true oneness in spirit, which must then show itself in unity of attitude and practice.

This unity is one of both mind and mouth: attitudes and speech (verse 6). We reach a oneness of conviction based on the word, then we join together in teaching that word and in praising God. We have all been saved by God's grace. Surely we should let Him set the standard and we



should all follow the standard, setting aside racial and personal prejudices and backgrounds. We should join hearts and mouths in praise to Him for His grace to us.

This unity requires effort. Differences arise in doctrine. These must be resolved on the basis of God's word. Differences also arise in personal conscience and liberties. These are resolved as in chapter 14. In each case, unity comes by following God's word. We must insist on purity in standing for what God's word teaches, but we must not bind personal preferences, human traditions, or personal convictions that we cannot prove to be necessary according to Scripture.

Division has never been pleasing to God and we must not condone, excuse, justify, or overlook it. We must defeat it by following His will. Nothing here or elsewhere teaches we should compromise truth for the sake of unity.

***15:7 – So, receive one another even as Christ received you to the glory of God.***

“Receive” is the same word used in 14:1, where Paul introduced this concept (see notes there). The point is that people were once alienated from God and one another. God has now received them by forgiving their sins. Who are we to maintain or to erect barriers where God has broken them down? The main application here was to Jews and Gentiles. God had accepted them both as His children under the gospel, so they should receive one another as brothers in Christ.

We must not reject from our fellowship those whom God has received (as discussed in chapter 14). This is true of Jew or Gentile. It is also true of those with whom we may have differences in matters of personal conscience. If Christ has received us, we ought to receive one another. Peter learned this in connection with Cornelius (Acts 10,11,15). He was not to call common or unclean that which God had cleansed (10:15,28,34f).

This teaching puts denominations in an unenviable position. They claim to believe people in other denominations are pleasing to God and destined for eternal life, yet they form separate groups because of their conflicting doctrinal beliefs and practice. They differ, contradict, and divide. If we have differences regarding matters bound by God, then we should not claim that those with whom we differ are pleasing to God but should rebuke them and call them to repent. But if our differences are matters of personal conscience, we should not press them to the point of spiritual alienation.

Some use this passage as if it proves we should “receive” everyone regardless of conduct. But the passage says to receive one another as Jesus receives us. Yet the Scriptures teach that Jesus refuses to “receive” those who persist in disobeying His commands, so we should do likewise (2 John 9-11). Not all conduct is acceptable to God, so not all conduct should be accepted by us. If people are not pleasing to God so that He

cannot “receive” them if they continue in that conduct without repenting, then we also must not receive them. We must not lead them to believe they are pleasing to God when they are not.

Some matters are private matters in which we cannot judge other people’s lives because we simply do not know the facts well enough. God knows everything and will make ultimate judgments in such cases. Other matters are personal conscience which we should not judge. But when the issues are clear and we can prove people are in sin, then we must not accept that which we know to be unacceptable to God.

“Receive” (προσλαμβάνω) – “...to take to, to take in addition ...; in the N.T. found only in the Middle, to take to one’s self ... a. to take as one’s companion ... b. to take by the hand in order to lead aside ... c. to take or ... receive into one’s home, with the collateral idea of kindness ... d. to receive, i.e. grant one access to one’s heart; to take into friendship and intercourse: Romans 14:1; 15:7; God and Christ are said ... to have received those whom, formerly estranged from them, they have reunited to themselves by the blessings of the gospel ... e. to take to one’s self, to take ...”  
– Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

## **15:8-33 – Paul’s Ministry among the Gentiles**

***15:8 – Christ had become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth to confirm the promises given to the fathers.***

Verses 8-12 reaffirm the truth stated throughout the book that Gentiles can be saved by the gospel as well as can Jews. This is a specific application of the principle of verse 7 regarding the need for brethren to receive one another in Christ. Jew and Gentile should receive one another, despite their differences in background, because God has received them both in the gospel. This application appears to make clear that the main differences Paul has been discussing in chapter 14 and in 15:1-7 are the differences that arose between Jews and Gentiles.

Christ became a servant to the circumcision in that He was the seed through whom the promise made to the fathers was fulfilled: He was the “blessing on all nations” (Galatians 3:16). This promise to the fathers was to be fulfilled through Abraham’s seed. Circumcision was a sign of this covenant.

Jesus ministered to (and of) the “circumcision” (descendants of Abraham) in that He was a descendant of Abraham and He brought about the fulfillment of this promise. The blessing He brought to both

Jew and Gentile (all nations) was forgiveness through His sacrifice on the cross (Acts 3:25,26; Matthew 20:28). He brought to reality that which had been just a promise before. This confirmed the promise to the circumcision and confirmed the truthfulness of God's word.

Note that this meant Jews should **accept** and **appreciate** Jesus, not reject Him. He was exactly what they were hoping and looking for. The fact He removed their law and special favored status should not turn them against Him. He was what they needed and had been promised, if they would only open their eyes. Instead, many closed their eyes and stubbornly pursued their own ways.

***15:9-12 – Gentiles might glorify God as written. I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing to Your name. Rejoice, Gentiles, with His people. Praise the Lord, all Gentiles. And, the root of Jesse will arise to rule over Gentiles, and they will hope in Him.***

### **The Old Testament prophesied the acceptance of the Gentiles.**

In accordance with the principle of verse 4 – that the law is for our learning – Paul began quoting some Old Testament passages that confirmed his teaching that the Gentiles could receive the blessings of the gospel as well as the Jews. This had been prophesied in many passages, but the Jews had overlooked them or refused to accept them.

Some of these passages make the point indirectly and inferences are needed, yet they all show that God's message would go to the Gentiles. The Jews should not be surprised when Gentiles accepted the Messiah, for their own Scriptures had predicted it. Here are some of the quotations:

#### **Confess and sing among the Gentiles**

Psalms 18:49 (2 Samuel 22:50) says that God would be confessed and praised among the Gentiles. Why do this if the Gentiles could not accept the message and themselves praise God? It follows that the message of the true God and His great blessings to man would go to Gentiles and they could benefit from it.

David even pictures himself as confessing and praising God among the Gentiles. The idea is that they were worshiping God together. This should help us see that Jesus intends for the gospel to lead Jew and Gentile to accept salvation and then worship together. The goal was not separate congregations for each group. The same should be the goal for all who are saved in Christ.

Note that this Old Testament passage, which prophesied about the praises of God in the New Testament, said the praises would be **sung**. This is indeed fulfilled in the New Testament in that all passages that speak of praising God in music in the New Testament speak of **singing** praise to God.

Since this is an Old Testament quotation, some have claimed that the word here translated “sing” could include instrumental music. Though this word for “sing” (ψαλλω), in its original significance, could refer to the use of instruments, yet “in the New Testament” it means to sing, with no instrument inherent in the word (see Thayer’s definition below).

Various translations: “sing (to your name)” (NKJV, KJV, ASV, NASB, ESV, RSV), “sing hymns” (NIV, NEB), “sing praise” (MLV, Marshall). All major conservative translations show that the word used here in the New Testament refers to singing. If the word could include the use of instrumental music in the New Testament, why is it that no conservative translation says so?

There is no evidence of mechanical instruments of music used anywhere in the New Testament in the worship offered to God by His church or Christians on earth. God has warned us not to change His will but to practice only what He has revealed (Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19). So, we conclude that He wants the praise of the human voice and heart, not mechanical instruments. See Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

“Sing” (ψαλλω) – “...a. to pluck off, pull out ... b. to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang; ... to touch or strike the chord, to twang the strings of a musical instrument so that they gently vibrate ...; and absol. to play on a stringed instrument, to play the harp, etc. ...; to sing to the music of the harp; in the N.T. to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song, James 5:13 ... Ephesians 5:19 ...; Romans 15:9; ... 1 Corinthians 14:15\*” – Thayer.

**For further discussion of instrumental music in worship, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

### **Gentiles rejoice and praise God’s name.**

The quotation in verse 9 had said God would be praised in the midst of the Gentiles. Verses 10&11 go further and quote prophecies that predicted the Gentiles themselves would join in the praise.

Verse 10 quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 saying the Gentiles would rejoice with God’s people. Verse 11 quotes Psalm 117:1 saying all people should praise God, including the Gentiles.

Clearly God had not given up on the Gentiles (chapter 1) to the point He never intended to make any efforts to save them. He had predicted all along that they would have their opportunity to turn to Him and serve Him again. This is fulfilled in the gospel which is for Jew and Gentile (see 1:16).

## **The root of Jesse would reign over the Gentiles and give them hope.**

Finally, and most clearly of all, Isaiah 11:10 spoke plainly of the Messiah, the root of Jesse, who would rise to power and rule over the Gentiles and they would hope or trust in Him.

Note that He would not forcibly subjugate the Gentiles, like the Jews had been overpowered by the Romans so as to serve reluctantly and spitefully. Rather, they would trust Him and hope in Him. They would serve Him from the heart. This is the true service of the gospel, yet the Old Testament predicted all along that the Gentiles would offer this service to the Messiah when He came. (The NKJV in Isaiah 11:10 itself says He would be a banner to the **people**, and the Gentiles would **seek** Him. This translation seems different, but the implication is still that they would serve from the heart.)

This same concept is expressed in Isaiah 42:1-4,6, quoted by Jesus Himself in Matthew 12:18-21. It says the Christ would bring justice to the Gentiles and they would trust in His name (Matthew 12:21). But instead of the Gentiles trusting in Him, the Isaiah passage in ASV says that the islands will wait for His law. Yet verses 6,7 say there would be light to the Gentiles to open blind eyes and set prisoners free, showing that the reference is to Gentiles.

***15:13,14 – May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing so you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul was persuaded that they were full of goodness, filled with knowledge, able to admonish one another.***

### **God gives hope, joy, and peace in believing.**

Paul is drawing his instructions to a conclusion. He has taught at length that the gospel, not the Mosaic Law, is God's means of saving men today, and that this salvation is equally available to Jew and Gentile. He has made extensive applications so we can use the lessons in a practical way. Now he is drawing the teaching to a conclusion by expressing the value these truths should have in our lives, accompanied by personal comments about his own work.

Here he expresses his hope that they will receive from God the joy and peace that this faith (believing) in Jesus is designed to give, and that they may receive abundant hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joy, peace, and hope are fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24). These fruits come by allowing the power of the Spirit's message (the gospel) to work in our lives. One who has a true faith in Jesus and has received forgiveness by Jesus' blood, will have the joy of knowing his sins have been forgiven, the peace of a right relationship with God, and the hope of eternal life. All these concepts have been discussed earlier in the book.

## **Paul expresses confidence in their ability to admonish one another.**

In order to admonish others as we should, we need a knowledge of God's word. Otherwise, we may admonish them to do that which is sinful. Also, we need goodness that enables us to set a good example and that leads us to want to give the instruction that is needed. Those today who seek to be teachers should consider these qualifications carefully. Have we studied the word so that we have the necessary knowledge to teach? Have we changed our lives so we have the goodness that others ought to imitate?

And note that all Christians should develop this ability to admonish. We should do it for "one another." This is not something that just a select few do for others (though some may have greater time or ability and so may emphasize the work more). But all should learn to do this for others.

"Admonish" (νουθετεω) – "...to admonish, warn, exhort: ... Acts 20:31; Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Colossians 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12,14; 2 Thessalonians 3:15 ... \*" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

***15:15,16 – Paul wrote boldly to remind them because of the grace given him from God to serve as a minister unto the Gentiles, ministering the gospel so that the Gentiles might be an acceptable sacrifice sanctified by the Holy Spirit.***

Though Paul was confident the Romans were able to admonish one another, yet he believed they needed to be **reminded** about these truths. We may know certain truths, yet we may forget the proper application of them, or we may fail to see the importance of making proper applications, or we may become negligent in doing what we know we should do. For many reasons, Christians need to be reminded even of things they know (compare 2 Peter 1:12; 3:1,2; Jude 5). We should not resent the fact that we are told repeatedly things that we already have heard.

Paul especially believed that he needed to give this admonition because the salvation of the Gentiles was his special calling as a minister of Jesus (Romans 11:13; Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:16; 2:7ff; etc.). Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus road and said He would send Paul to the Gentiles. Later He repeated this in a vision to Paul (Acts 26:17,18; 22:17-21). Having this responsibility, Paul thought he especially needed to write them about the proper relationship between Jew and Gentile in the gospel.

His teaching would offer the Gentiles as a sacrifice to God (by the way they lived their lives for Him – 12:1,2). The Gentiles were sanctified or set apart to God's service. This was accomplished by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel which the Holy Spirit had revealed

(compare John 17:17). Since Paul had done so much teaching among the Gentiles, he speaks of them figuratively as though they were the sacrifice he had offered up to God by the sanctifying power of the word given by the Holy Spirit.

***15:17-19 – So Paul gloried in Christ in things relating to God. But he hesitated to speak what Christ accomplished through him for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit, so he fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum.***

Because he had been called to minister to the Gentiles, Paul believed he had cause to glory in these matters. He was not bragging on himself or his own abilities, but was rejoicing in Christ who was the source of all the blessings Jews and Gentiles had received in the gospel (1 Corinthians 3:1; Philippians 3:3).

He did not mention the things that had not been accomplished through him (a double negative). The NKJV rendering seems to mean that he would not speak about anything except what Christ had accomplished through him. This is confirmed by the NASB which says, “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.” So, he did talk about what the Lord had done through Him, but not about other things. Christ had worked through Paul in word and in deed, in the preaching of the gospel from Jerusalem through Illyricum (a region in northern Greece). He had also been empowered to do mighty signs and wonders by the Spirit to confirm the message preached.

In saying these things, Paul confirmed that what he did really was from God. He had preached to the Gentiles the very message he had stated in depth in this epistle. That preaching was confirmed by the miracles done. So, as in Acts 15:12, his point is that they could be sure what he said was true, because it was of the Holy Spirit.

Note that the gospel should be “fully preached.” We must preach all that God has revealed, not allowing people to continue in any sin because we did not warn them about it (Acts 20:20,27). And we should preach it to all people so all have the chance to obey it (Colossians 1:28,6,23; Mark 16:15).

Like Paul, we should give God credit for whatever He accomplishes through us, as Paul did here (Acts 15:12; 21:19,20; Romans 1:5; 2 Corinthians 3:5).



***15:20,21 – Paul’s aim was to preach in areas where Christ was not already named, so he might not build upon another man’s foundation. It is written that those will see to whom no tidings had come, and those who have not heard will understand.***

He preferred to preach where the gospel had not yet already been preached (where Christ had not been already named). The only reason he gives is that he did not want to build on another man’s foundation.

Preaching to people for the first time is laying a foundation for their spiritual relationship to God. Regarding various methods for doing this work, different men have different judgments and preferences (though there should be no differences in the truths presented). Some have a special ability to begin new works and lay a good foundation. Others have more ability to encourage and build up those who are new converts. Paul preferred new works.

Nothing here should be taken to mean it is wrong for men to follow others in preaching in an area after a church had already been established. Such was often done. See 1 Corinthians 3:6; Acts 18:19; 19:1; Titus 1:5; compare the preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem. In fact, in verses 22-24 (below), Paul said he intended to do this very thing in Rome. He simply had a personal preference not to do this kind of work.

In preaching in areas where the gospel had not been preached, Paul was acting in harmony with Isaiah 52:15, which said that men who had not heard of God would see and understand. But the Jews had heard of Jesus, at least in prophecy, so Paul preferred preaching to Gentiles who had heard nothing of the true God. Here again is a passage that implies the gospel would be for Gentiles as well as Jews.

***15:22-24 – Paul had been hindered many times from going to Rome, but having accomplished his purposes in the area where he was, and having a desire to see them, he hoped to visit on his way to Spain and be brought on his journey by them.***

Paul had begun this letter by explaining his desire to preach in Rome, but he had been hindered previously (1:9-15). In describing his preference for preaching in new regions where the gospel had not been preached, Paul gave additional explanation why he had not previously gone to Rome to preach. Obviously, there was already a church there (since Paul was writing to them), though he had never been there. To go to Rome would be to preach in an area where the gospel had already been preached. This was the very thing Paul preferred not to do.

However, he believed he had accomplished his work wherever he was (he no longer had “a place in these parts”). The gospel had become known throughout the area where he was, so he wanted to move on. He intended to go to Jerusalem (verses 25ff) and then make a trip to Spain. He hoped to pass Rome on his way and spend some time with them. This



would in some measure satisfy his desire to associate with them, then they could further him (or assist him) on his journey to Spain. Compare Acts 19:21.

This trip to Spain did not occur, at least not in the way Paul had planned. As Acts 20ff shows, Paul did go to Jerusalem but was imprisoned there. He did go to Rome, but as a prisoner. If he ever visited Spain, it was not on the journey planned and described here.

***15:25,26 – First, Paul intended to go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints, because churches in Macedonia and Achaia had been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.***

Before Paul traveled to Rome, he first had another journey to make. He had to go to Jerusalem to carry a contribution from brethren in Macedonia and Achaia to the needy saints in Jerusalem. This contribution and trip are described in several verses elsewhere (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Acts 20:1ff; 24:17; note that this was **not** the same trip described earlier in Acts 11:27-30).

These passages show that this contribution involved churches that were taking up collections on the first day of the week. Funds from these collections were sent by the hands of messengers to the church (Jerusalem) that had needy members whom it was unable to relieve. This is Scripturally authorized cooperation, and is the only revealed pattern for churches to send donations to another church.

Church support of benevolent institutions or “sponsoring churches” violates several important principles revealed in this pattern:

1. The Bible pattern involved contributions sent to help people who were “poor”: destitute, needy, unable to meet their own physical needs. It was a case of churches who had abundance of funds sending to a church where members had a lack, but the local church could not meet the need. Instead, in the sponsoring church arrangement, churches usually send money to a large, wealthy church that is perfectly capable of caring for its own needy members (if it has any). In fact, these sponsoring churches are usually even sending donations to other churches! How then can they be in poverty? However, the church has “assumed” a work that is just as much the work of other congregations to begin with, then it begs for money to use to oversee the work.

2. In the Bible pattern, the messengers took the contribution to the place where the need was (Jerusalem – verses 25,26). They did not send it to some overseeing church nor to a central board, which then in turn sent it on or supervised the distribution of it to needy people or preachers in other places. No church had supervision of the funds of other churches except to distribute to their own destitute members. The need was in Jerusalem, so the churches sent the funds to where the need was. It was a local emergency.

3. In the Bible pattern, the sending was temporary until the need was met. There was no intent for the sending to go on indefinitely. There was a specific need and the intent was to satisfy that need so it would cease. The church in Jerusalem did not intend to become dependent on the sending churches on an ongoing basis. She intended to overcome her emergency situation and become again able to independently satisfy her own needs (see especially 2 Corinthians 8:13ff).

4. In the Bible pattern, the contribution was for needy **saints**. Nowhere does the gospel authorize use of funds collected by the church to be given to care for needy non-members. Such is the duty rather of individuals.

Other passages also reveal other principles that are violated by church donations to central institutions supervised by a Board of Directors or to sponsoring elderships to oversee the work for the churches. The essence of the problem is that they **centralize** the work, funds, and supervision of the work of churches under the oversight of a board or eldership. This violates the independence and local supervision of the work of the local churches as planned and revealed by God (see Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

**For further discussion of church organization and cooperation, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

***15:27-29 – These churches were pleased and were even debtors to send, because as Gentiles they had partaken of the spiritual things received from Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, so they owed it to them to serve in material things. After this trip, Paul plan to go to Spain and visit Rome on the way.***

The sending churches, in this case, were largely composed of Gentiles in regions outside Judea. The Jerusalem church was largely composed of Jews. It had been the first congregation established (Acts 2), so from it the gospel had been spread throughout the world, including to the areas where these churches now existed among the Gentiles.

For these Gentile churches to send to Jerusalem was, in a sense, paying back a debt. They should send the donation to repay and to express their gratitude to the Jewish brethren who had helped them learn the truth. Paul also appeared to hope that the contribution would help improve the attitudes of Jews toward their Gentile brethren. This again relates back to the theme of the book, showing that Jews and Gentiles should all be one in the church.

I do not believe Paul is here saying the money should have been sent merely and entirely as a payment for services received. It was a donation to help the needy saints. He is simply showing that this gratitude should make the Gentiles especially willing to help out in this time of need.

After the trip to Jerusalem, Paul hoped to go to Spain, passing by Rome as mentioned earlier in verses 22-24. “Fruit” is a figurative reference to the contribution to Jerusalem. It was a product of the labors of the brethren. The Bible often uses “fruit” in a symbolic sense referring to the good works or qualities Christians display in their lives.

Paul was confident that, when he arrived in Rome, Christ would fully bless his visit with them.

***15:30-33 – Paul pled with them to strive in prayer with him that he might be delivered from enemies in Judea and accomplish his ministration there, then that he might come to be with them.***

Having explained his plans and intentions to them, Paul then asked them to pray diligently with him that these plans might come to fruition. His main concern was that there were unbelievers in Judea who might hinder these plans. Acts 20,21 show that he was warned of these dangers but went to Jerusalem anyway. Here he appears to be concerned that such people as these may keep him from successfully delivering the funds for the saints or keep him from successfully going to Rome.

As it turned out, Acts 21 and following show that he was attacked by these unbelieving Jews and imprisoned by the Romans. He was able to deliver the funds for the saints, and he eventually did go to Rome, but not in the manner he planned. He went instead as a prisoner because he appealed to Caesar. This illustrates how God will work for our good, but may not work matters out in the way we had planned and anticipated.

Paul concluded his expression of his plans by fervently calling for God’s peace to be with them all. We have peace with God through Christ if we continue to be faithful (Romans 5:1,2). Paul was praying their relationship with God might continue strong.

# Romans 16

## Chapter 16 – Paul’s Closing Remarks and Personal Greetings

***16:1,2 – Paul commanded to them Phoebe as a servant of the church in Cenchrea, and asked them to receive her in the Lord and assist her in whatever way they she may have need, since she herself had helped many including Paul.***

### **Paul’s commendation of Phoebe**

There was a faithful church in Cenchrea (Acts 18:18). Phoebe was a Christian lady who had done much good work in that church. She had helped many people, including Paul himself. We are not told exactly what form of service she had rendered, yet clearly there is much good work for Christian ladies to do. God’s word does restrict women from certain public or authoritative activities (1 Timothy 2:11,12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35), but that does not mean there is nothing for them to do! Godly women like Phoebe can find many ways to be useful.

From this context, especially verses 1-4, we learn that it is right and proper for Christians to express appreciation for the work others are doing. We ought to work to please the Lord, regardless of whether or not we receive the praises of men. And praise should be genuine, not flattery. We should exalt God, not honor men to the point of division or showing partiality (1 Corinthians 1-4; James 2:1-11). Nevertheless, none of this means we should ignore the good work others do, nor should we refuse to show appreciation for it. Encouragement from Christians might be just what a member needs to pick them up when they are discouraged.

### **An office of “deaconess”?**

Was Phoebe a “deaconess” is an official capacity like a man may be appointed to an office of deacon? Some go to great lengths to claim that she was, and they even speculate endlessly about what work she did (see Lard). However, none of this is stated in any passage, here or elsewhere. It is entirely a figment of imagination.

“Servant” is the feminine form of the word that is elsewhere translated “deacon,” however the word is more commonly translated

simply “servant” or “minister,” even for men who are not appointed to an office. This is similar to the word “elder,” which is used in some passages to mean simply one who is older, but not appointed to an office (Titus 2:2-4).

### **Uses of the word “servant”**

- \* Physical servants – Matthew 22:13; 20:26; 23:11; etc.
- \* Any Christian viewed as a servant to God and other people – Colossians 1:25; John 12:26
- \* Preachers – 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Colossians 1:7; 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Ephesians 3:7; 1 Timothy 4:6; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:15
- \* Civil rulers – Romans 13:4
- \* Jesus – Romans 15:8
- \* Men who have been appointed to serve in a specially qualified position in which they do works of service on behalf of the church – Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,12

So, one can know that the word for “servant” refers to an office only on the basis of context. But no context anywhere designates a woman as appointed to any office in the church. We know that men were appointed to an office of elder, because we have passages that describe them being ordained (Acts 14:23) and passages that state the specific qualifications one must meet before being appointed (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Likewise, we have a list of qualifications for men who serve in the office of deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

But what passage anywhere states that women were ever appointed or ordained to any office in the church? And what passage states the qualifications they must meet in order to be appointed? In the absence of a description of their qualifications or a passage describing their ordination, we can only conclude that we could never know who would qualify or who should be appointed. The entire matter becomes a matter of human speculation

This, no doubt, explains why those who believe “deaconesses” should hold an office can offer nothing but endless speculation about the subject. Lard speculates, for example, that Phoebe had no husband and was probably a widow, despite the fact that even male deacons had to be married! He also speculates that Tryphena and Tryphosa (verse 12) were deaconesses, because they were women who labored in the Lord. Incredible! If we are going to speculate without evidence that Phoebe had been appointed to an office because she is called a “servant” of the church, why not also speculate that all those in the context who “labored” for the Lord had been appointed to the office of “laborer” or “laboress”? We could speculate on and on about different “offices” in the church, if

we need no list of qualifications and no passages anywhere stating that people were appointed to these positions.

The only passage we have that gives qualifications for an office of deacon is 1 Timothy 3, and it says one must be husband of one wife and rule his house and children well. No woman can qualify.

In the absence of any passage clearly stating that women served in an office of deaconess, in the absence of any statement of their qualifications, and in the absence of any passage describing women being ordained to such an office, I can only conclude that to appoint such would be to act without Divine authority.

### **Members moving from one area to another and letters of commendation**

This passage does show the value, when a person travels from one locality to another, for the church or Christians who know them to inform other churches or Christians about them. We have here an approved Bible example for letters of commendation. It is Scriptural and proper to investigate the background of someone who comes to us from another church. And it is proper for a church, when people leave it, to provide information to help others know whether or not to receive one who has come to them.

(It is not clear from this context whether or not Phoebe actually intended to become part of the church in Rome, or whether she was just visiting there temporarily. But in either case, Paul saw fit to send a letter of commendation. If such a letter would be fitting for a visitor, why not even more so for one who was moving to an area and sought to become part of the local church?)

In Acts 9:26-29, Saul moved to Jerusalem and sought to join himself to the church there. But the disciples were not willing to accept Saul till they knew he had been truly converted. When Barnabas testified that Saul was a true disciple, the Jerusalem disciples accepted him as a member despite his evil, harmful past. In order to determine whether one should or should not be received, a church may question the person himself, but it is also proper to call character witnesses. These witnesses may be in other congregations, so churches sometimes communicated with one another about members who moved from one place to another (Acts 18:27; 2 Corinthians 3:1; Romans 16:1,2).

So, it is Scriptural for churches to investigate the members who seek to be identified with the local church. This helps overcome the problems caused by members who sin in one congregation and then run elsewhere to avoid the consequences of their sins. It also helps the church, and especially the elders, to fulfill the responsibility to protect the members from false teachers who seek to come in and lead people astray (1 John 4:1; Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28-30; etc.)

***16:3-5 – Paul sent salutations to Priscilla and Aquila who were his fellow workers and had risked their lives for him. He and the Gentile churches were grateful to them. He said to salute the church in their house and also to salute Epaphroditus who was the firstfruits of Asia unto Christ.***

### **Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul.**

Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned several other places in the gospel (see Acts 18:2,26; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). Paul met them in Corinth where they had moved after being required to leave Rome along with other Jews. Paul lived with them there and worked together with them in their common occupation of tentmakers. Later Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos for his incomplete knowledge regarding Jesus.

Paul adds here that they had risked their lives for his sake. No details are given so we do not know exactly what they did. Nevertheless, Paul obviously was deeply grateful to them and he believed others should feel the same (see notes regarding gratitude under verses 1,2 above).

The fact Paul addressed them in this letter to Rome would imply that, at this time, they were back in the area of Rome.

### **The church in their house**

Paul extended his greetings, not just to Aquila and Priscilla, but to the church in their house. Though some commentators hold otherwise, this appears to mean that their home was the meeting place for a local church. Such an arrangement is also mentioned elsewhere, and the same has occurred in various places in modern times, especially when churches are small and just being established in a new area.

Churches met in various places in the New Testament:

Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:7 – The church in Jerusalem grew to include five thousand men, and multitudes more were added after that. Note that the Scriptures expressly state that this church met together with one accord in a porch of the temple (5:11-14; compare 2:46).

Acts 11:20,21,24,26 – Likewise in Antioch great numbers were converted and many people added. Yet the church assembled regularly and taught many more people (verse 26; compare 14:27; 15:30). Surely congregations of the size of Jerusalem and Antioch were too large to meet in any private home.

Acts 19:9 – Paul separated the disciples from the synagogue and taught in the school of Tyrannus.

Acts 20:7,8 – The disciples in Troas met to break bread in an upper room (third story – verse 9).

Several passages in 1 Corinthians refer to the church or the “whole church” meeting together “in one place.” (5:4; 11:17ff; chapter 14 especially 14:23).

There are apparently examples in which churches were small enough they could meet in homes (Romans 16:5,23; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). This is one scriptural way to arrange for a place to meet when the church is still small. But there are clearly many other places where churches met other than in homes.

A local church should spread the gospel diligently, hoping for the church to grow. And many New Testament churches did grow very large. Further, the church should seek to grow large enough that it has a plurality of men qualified to serve as elders. This generally requires a congregation to have more members than could meet adequately in a private home. Yet no matter how large it grows, the whole church should meet together regularly (including whenever they have the Lord's Supper). This requires obtaining a meeting place large enough to accommodate the whole group.

There is no consistent pattern regarding meeting places; therefore, I conclude the place does not matter, so long as it adequately meets the needs of the group to accomplish its God-given duties.

### **Epaenetus**

Nothing else is known about Epaenetus. He was the "firstfruits" of Asia, apparently meaning that he was the first one converted (or perhaps the first one Paul converted) when the gospel was spread to Asia (compare 1 Corinthians 16:15).

### **16:6-9 – Greetings sent to Mary, Andronicus and Junias, Ampliatus, Urbanus, and Stachys.**

Throughout these and the following verses Paul names various individuals, nearly all of whom are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. He makes general comments which are self-explanatory and little else is known that could be added. We will comment where we see appropriate.

### **Mary labored much for us.**

Many women were named Mary in the gospel accounts. We have no way to know which Mary Paul refers to here. All Paul says of her is that she was a diligent worker who had some ties in which she worked for Paul. Once again, as in the case of other women Paul mentions, there is ample work for women to do for the Lord if they will apply themselves diligently.

### **Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners**

Andronicus and Junia were fellow countrymen and fellow prisoners of Paul. – Some translations (compare ASV) say "kinsmen" instead of "countrymen." See also verses 11,13,21; 9:3. How close the relationship was, we cannot be sure. We do not even know when or where they were imprisoned with him. They had been converted even before he had, and they were well known to other apostles.



## **Amplias, Urbanus, and Stachys**

Once again, we know nothing else of any of these men. They were apparently dedicated servants of God. Paul had met them in other places and in some cases had worked with them. Paul expresses specifically his love for them.

## ***16:10-12 – Greetings sent to Apelles, Aristobulus, Herodion Narcissus, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Persis.***

### **Apelles, approved in Christ**

Again, nothing else is known of Apelles, but Paul knew enough to be convinced that he stood approved of the Lord.

### **Those of the household of Aristobulus**

Paul greets those of Aristobulus' household. This could have been a way of greeting the whole group, including Aristobulus, or perhaps he greeted only the household because Aristobulus himself was elsewhere.

### **Herodion, my countryman**

Herodion was a countryman of Paul and evidently a Christian. Nothing else is known.

### **Those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord**

As with the household of Aristobulus (above), Paul greets only those of the household of Narcissus (rather than just Narcissus himself). He refers to them as "in the Lord," perhaps meaning they were all in the Lord or perhaps greeting only those in the Lord.

### **Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord**

These are feminine names. Again, these women worked diligently in the Lord's service. Beyond that we know nothing (see above about Phoebe regarding the speculation that they were deaconesses).

### **Beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord**

Peris (another feminine name) also labored much in the Lord, so Paul again expressed love for her.

## ***16:13-15 – Greetings sent to Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas.***

### **Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.**

A man named Rufus is mentioned in Mark 15:21, though there is no obvious connection to this Rufus. Paul sent greetings to "his mother and mine." Does this mean Rufus was brother in the flesh to Paul, or was Rufus' mother so close to Paul spiritually that he spoke of her as his mother? No specifics are given here or elsewhere.

**Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.**

Nothing is known of any of these people except this mention of them.

**Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.**

Again, nothing else is revealed in Scripture about these people, to my knowledge.

**16:16 – Salute one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ salute you.**

**Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

Compare 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:26. Consider the following points:

1. Kissing was a common, customary form of greeting among people in that society, even among people of the same sex: see Luke 7:45; 22:48; 15:20; Acts 20:37; Genesis 27:26; 33:4. (See also Matthew 26:49; Mark 14:45; Matthew 26:48; Mark 14:44; Luke 22:47; Genesis 48:10; 50:1; Exodus 4:27; 18:7; Ruth 1:14; 1 Samuel 10:1; 20:41; 2 Samuel 14:33; 15:5; 19:39; 20:9; 1 Kings 19:20; Genesis 29:13; 45:15; Song of Solomon 1:2; 2 Samuel 20:9; 1 Kings 19:18; Job 31:27; Proverbs 24:26.

2. In these passages, the apostles are not commanding Christians to institute a religious ritual or ceremony, for the practice was already an existing customary greeting having no religious significance. The Scriptures simply regulate a custom that already existed.

Note especially that Luke 7:44-46 clearly shows that washing of feet and kissing, like anointing with oil, were common forms of hospitality, greeting, or honoring others in that day. The context shows, not that they were commanded or required, but that they were customary. None of them are bound as commands or ordinances today, especially in worship or in the church. They are in no sense New Testament practices. But they do illustrate that we should show care and kindness for others.

The emphasis should be on the words “of love,” or “holy.” Christians will naturally want to greet one another and show affection. One common means of that day was by a kiss. Apostles approved of the practice as a custom, but insisted that it be kept holy and a sincere expression of love. It should not be allowed to degenerate into an occasion of sensuality or hypocrisy, but should be kept pure and sincere.

3. The holy kiss is mentioned only in the **greeting** sections of letters along with salutations and other customary greetings. It is never discussed in any doctrinal part of any book like other regular ordinances that God has ordained for New Testament religious service (baptism, the Lord’s Supper, etc.).

It is a **greeting**, not a **command**. It is like telling someone, “Say Hello to \_\_\_\_\_ for me.” Or “Give \_\_\_\_\_ a hug for me.” If the person

forgets to do so, has he done something terrible? If an inspired apostle said to do such a thing, would that change the nature of it? Would every such request made by an inspired writer automatically cease to be a personal request and become instead a command of God, under penalty of sin? If an apostle wanted someone to just say “Hi” for him, like we do, how would he tell people to do so? Isn’t that all this really is?

Study other greeting portions of Paul’s letters and you will find many other statements instructing those who received the letters to do things, yet we naturally take them to be personal requests for those specific people to whom the letter is addressed in that particular time. They are not universal commands to be practiced by all other people in all other times who read the letters. They are not requirements which would constitute sin if neglected, nor would they incur an eternal penalty. These are simply requests or advice.

Note these examples:

Romans 16:3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15 – If these are requests from Paul in giving greetings, not commands such that neglect of them constitutes sin, why view any differently the greeting of the holy kiss in Romans 16:16 and parallels elsewhere?

Titus 3:15 – Must **we** greet everyone who loves Paul? If Titus missed some, did he sin?

2 Timothy 4:13 – Must we take books and parchments with us when we travel? Would Timothy have sinned if he left one behind?

Philippians 4:21 – Does this mean all of us must salute every saint everywhere, or even every saint we ever meet? If one visits a congregation and greets some of them but not all, is that a sin? See also Colossians 4:15; 2 Timothy 4:19.

4. We are never given any **purpose** for the practice that attaches any reason why it should be a universal practice for all time. It is never based on any principle of universal application, as are the command to be baptized or to remember Jesus’ death in the Lord’s supper, etc. We are never given any regulations about time or place or circumstances in which to do it (as is done with baptism, Lord’s supper, etc.). Rather than giving us a command to do this and to start it if we have not been doing it, the implication seems to be: Since you are doing this, when you do it, do it like this.

5. A parallel is found in 1 Peter 2:17: “Honor the king.” This is not a command to them to institute a king if they did not have one. It simply tells them how to treat a king if society already has one. If another custom existed regarding civil authority, then we should honor those in authority according to the custom as it existed. So it is with the kiss. The instruction is not to start the practice even if it does not exist. The point is that if it already does exist, then make sure it is done in a holy way. But if some other customary greeting exists, then use it in a pure and sincere manner.

6. Other forms of greeting existed in Bible times (compare 2 Corinthians 13:13), and were used by Christians. Kissing was nowhere emphasized as a unique greeting among Christians. Other people besides Christians used it, and Christians used other greetings besides it. So why must we use it today?

7. Never is any other social custom of those days bound on God's people for all times. If this is done here, then it would be the only instance of it. Compare foot-washing, slaves and masters, tearing garments, wearing sackcloth, etc. God never gave instructions instituting these as being things required by His will. He did, however, give regulations restricting them where they existed. This is what is being done with the kiss.

8. If this act was to be practiced in all societies, consider the likely harm it would lead to in societies like ours. Kissing was a common greeting in that society, and could be so restricted as to keep it "holy." But in our society, it is far more commonly a sexual act, especially when done by people of the opposite gender who are not immediate family members. To practice such in a society such as ours among all members, including men with unrelated women, would tempt to sexual lust and would definitely have that appearance. To keep the practice "holy" in both appearance and reality would be impossible. That of itself should militate against it as a requirement in such societies as ours.

"Holy" (ἅγιος) – "1. properly reverend, worthy of veneration ... 2. set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively His ... 3. of sacrifices and offerings; prepared for God with solemn rite, pure, clean ... 4. in a moral sense, pure, sinless, upright, holy..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"Kiss" (φιλημα) means simply "a kiss" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **The churches of Christ greet you.**

"Churches of Christ" is clearly a reference to various congregations of God's people. They belong to Christ because He purchased all Christians with His blood (Acts 20:28). He built the church (Matthew 16:18) and is the head of it (Ephesians 1:22,23). It is appropriate to call it His church in the universal sense, and if so then local congregations are "churches of Christ."

This is not the only proper or Scriptural term or expression to use for the church. Obviously many other terms are used in the New Testament. We should take care that the expressions we use are Scriptural and properly describe our relationship to Deity. Never does the gospel use terms to refer to the church that exalt or emphasize any human being or any particular doctrine. Such practices are divisive and misplace the honor that ought to go to Christ – see 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. The Lord's church should always be referred to by terms that honor Deity and show our relationship to God.

This phrase "church of Christ" has been chosen by many local congregations to use in their advertising and even in their legal name

when recorded by the government. It is Scriptural and appropriate, and for churches to use it is expedient for travelers to help locate a congregation to meet with.

However, we must take care not to oppose other terms that are also used in the Scriptures or to conclude that this is the only Scriptural terminology. On the other hand, one wonders when some people almost appear to object to the use of this phrase which is so obviously Scriptural. And others appear to want to avoid the term because they are ashamed of the doctrine which has been taught by faithful churches of Christ.

**To learn more about the proper terminology to use to refer to the church, we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct).**

***16:17,18 – Mark those who cause divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the doctrine, and avoid them. They are slaves, not of our Lord Christ, but of their own appetites and by smooth and flattering speech they deceive the innocent.***

This is one of several gospel passages showing the responsibility of the church to discipline or chastise members who sin and will not repent despite being rebuked. See also: 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

**The kinds of sin chastised: divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine**

*“Divisions”*

Divisions (“dissensions” – NASB, RSV) are strifes, separations, and alienations among brethren (compare Galatians 5:20). By teaching false doctrine, by turning people against one another, or by setting a sinful example, one may cause bitterness and conflict between brethren, or may even cause some to leave a congregation (compare Acts 20:29,30).

Those who are guilty would include the people who stir up the trouble, those who leave a congregation to go into error, or those who encourage or support or defend those who do such things as these (because they partake of the evil – 2 John 9-11).

“Divisions” (διχοστασία) – “...dissension, division ... Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 3:3; Galatians 5:20...” – Thayer.

*“Offenses”*

Offenses (KJV, NKJV) are “occasions of stumbling” (ASV), “hindrances” (NASB), “obstacles” (ESV). This refers to tempting others to commit sin, encouraging acts that would be sin, or becoming an occasion that causes others to sin, hence a stumbling-block (compare Matthew 18:6-9; Luke 17:1,2; Revelation 2:14-16). Note that one may be

guilty of this by tempting people to sin, even if those people resist the temptation and do not actually commit the sin (compare Matthew 16:23).

One may also be a stumbling-block by insisting on practicing personal liberties to the point weak brethren are led to commit sin (1 Corinthians 8 & 10; Romans 14). On the other hand, one may cause division by pressing a matter of personal conscience, which he cannot clearly prove, to the point that strife and alienation occur in the church (Romans 14).

The divisions and offenses referred to here are those that are “contrary to the doctrine” (compare Galatians. 1:8,9; 2 John 9; etc.). Truth can have the effect of dividing or upsetting people (Matthew 10:34-37; 15:12ff; etc.). The church must not chasten people who “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), even if such speaking does lead to division because others reject it.

“Offenses” – (σκανδαλον) – “... a. prop. the movable stick or tricker (‘trigger’) of a trap, trap-stick; a trap, snare; any impediment placed in the way and causing one to stumble or fall, (a stumbling-block, occasion of stumbling) ... b. metaph. any person or thing by which one is (‘entrapped’) drawn into error or sin ... to put a stumbling-block in one’s way, i.e. to do that by which another is led to sin ... words or deeds which entice to sin ... to cause persons to be drawn away from the true doctrine into error and sin ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

### **The discipline administered**

“Note”

This is translated: “mark” them (ASV), “keep your eye on them” (NASB), “watch out” (ESV). These people must be identified to the “brethren” in such a way that all know to be on guard to avoid the harm such people can cause, and so the brethren can practice the next action listed.

“Note” (σκοπεω) – “...to look at, observe, contemplate. to mark ... to fix one’s eyes upon, direct one’s attention to ...” – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

“Avoid” (KJV)

This is translated: “turn away from them” (ASV), “keep away from them” (NIV), “disassociate yourselves” (TCNT). This is not a haughty self-righteousness, but a refusal to socialize.

The brethren can act this way toward the sinner only if he has been “marked” or identified so that the brethren could know to act this way toward them. (Compare 1 Peter 3:11 which says that we are to so avoid the sin itself.)

Note that we are not to overlook or ignore the person, let alone excuse, rationalize, or justify his conduct. We are commanded to refuse to associate with him. Other passages show that the reasons we do this are: (1) To show the person that he ought to be ashamed of his conduct,

and (2) to warn the other members to avoid such conduct and not be caused to stumble by it, and (3) to clear the reputation of the church, so that others know we do not condone such conduct. We remove his influence from among us, even as we warn him to repent, by refusing to associate with him.

Other passages also show that this refusal to associate extends even to the point of not eating with him (1 Corinthians 5:11). We are not acting in hatred, nor may we physically harm him, but we do set him aside from our association.

So, this passage, like others listed above, is describing how a Christian should be treated if he leads people into sin either by teaching error or by otherwise tempting them. Other passages listed show the person should first be rebuked and this action is taken only if he refuses then to repent.

“Avoid” (ἐκκλινω) – “to turn aside, deviate, ... to turn (one’s self) away ... to turn away from, keep aloof from, one’s society; to shun one ...” – Thayer.

**For further discussion of church discipline, see our article on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

**Such serve their own belly, not our Lord Jesus Christ, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.**

Verse 18 gives God’s description of people who do so cause divisions, etc. “For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve” – ESV. They serve their own desires (belly) instead of serving God, and they deceive innocent people by their smooth-sounding efforts to rationalize their views and conduct. Such approaches are typical of false teachers (compare 2 Corinthians 11:14,15; Colossians 2:4; 2 Peter 2:3).

Philippians 3:19 is similar. It speaks of false teachers whose god is their “belly.” “Belly” here, like Romans 16:18, seems to refer to their natural desires. They do what they want instead of what God wants. This includes emphasis on physical things. That seems to refer primarily to physical appetites. But Paul further defines the word in Philippians 3:19 by saying that they “mind earthly things” (compare Colossians 3:1,2). That seems to me to broaden the definition to include all kinds of natural desires.

This does not mean we must be able to prove a man has ulterior motives or is insincere, before the church can chastise him. We cannot read hearts (1 Corinthians 2:11), and a man can even deceive himself so he thinks he is sincere when he is not (James 1:26; 1 Corinthians 3:18). What we must judge are a man’s fruits – his visible conduct and teaching (Matthew 7:15- 27). If the person’s conduct fits what verse 17 describes,

then we treat him as that verse says; verse 18 then tells us the kind of person he is in God's eyes.

***16:19,20 – The report of their obedience had reached abroad to all, so Paul rejoiced over them and wanted them to be wise in what is good but innocent in what is evil. So the God of peace will crush Satan under their feet and the grace of Christ would be with them.***

**I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.**

Though Paul had warned them to disassociate from divisive trouble makers, he here shows the value of good influence. Their obedience was known widely and Paul was glad for this. He hereby expresses hope that they would resist the efforts of Judaizers and other evil influences and would maintain their purity before God. Compare Romans 1:8; Acts 28:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

He wanted them to be experienced, not in doing evil, but in doing good. They should be wise in good, but simple in evil. "Simple" here means "free from guile, innocent" (Thayer). See 1 Corinthians 14:20; Matthew 10:16; Jeremiah 4:22; 13:23.

This does not mean we should be unaware of evil to the point we are naive or gullible. We should not be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11; Compare Luke 22:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Peter 5:8). We should have the wisdom from God's word to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14). But we should have no personal first-hand knowledge of evil from having participated in it.

This is the opposite of what many people advocate. They think you must practice evil in order to understand that it is bad. "If you haven't tried it, don't knock it." If we criticize a form of entertainment people ask, "Have you seen it?" Paul here shows that you do not have to do evil to know that it is evil.

**God will crush Satan under your feet shortly.**

Bruising a person under one's feet is a symbol of victory. A victor would often put his foot on the neck of the one conquered. Compare Genesis 3:15.

Through Jesus they would soon have the victory over evil, and we can do likewise: 1 John 5:4,5; 4:4; 2:13,14; John 16:33; Revelation 2:7; 3:21; 12:11; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14. Satan can defeat us if we attempt alone to deal with him, but he cannot defeat Jesus. If we are on Jesus' side and serve Him faithfully, he cannot defeat us either (1 Corinthians 10:13; James 4:7).



**16:21-24 – Paul sent greetings from Timothy, Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus.**

Paul had earlier in the chapter sent greetings to various of his acquaintances in Rome. Here he lists a group of people who were with him and who also sought to send their greetings to the Christians at Rome.

Timothy was a frequent traveling companion of Paul. Paul later wrote two epistles to him. See Acts 16:1; 1 Timothy 1:2. Paul here calls him his fellow-worker.

A man named Lucius is mentioned in Acts 13:1 as being a teacher in the church in Antioch.

A man named Jason was in Thessalonica and was captured by a mob seeking Paul who was, apparently, staying in Jason's home (Acts 17:5-9).

A Sosipater was among the messengers of the churches traveling with Paul (Acts 20:4). Paul calls these people his countrymen.

However, it is uncertain whether the men named here are the same men as those in the above verses.

Paul often used secretaries who actually penned the words of the epistles as Paul gave them (1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; Philemon 19. Tertius says he wrote this epistle, which means he was the penman on this occasion, and he sent his greetings.

The name Gaius is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14; Acts 20:4; 19:29, though again it is not clear that all these verses refer to the same man. Paul baptized a Gaius in Corinth. Here Paul says he was host to Paul and to the whole church. Whiteside says the church in Corinth (from where Paul wrote this epistle) was too large to meet in one man's house. Apparently Paul lived with Gaius, and Gaius also was hospitable to others. (But compare Acts 18:2,3).

Erastus was the treasurer of the city. An Erastus is mentioned in Acts 19:27; 2 Timothy 4:20, and was apparently one of Paul's traveling companions. But again it is not clear that this was the same man.

Quartus is not mentioned elsewhere.

Paul concludes, as he often does, by seeking the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be with them all. See notes on Romans 15:33

**16:25-27 – So, to Him who has power to establish them according to the gospel of Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept silent through times eternal but is now manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of God is made known to all nations unto obedience of faith, to the only wise God through Christ be glory forever.**

The gospel, not the Old Testament, is the means God uses to establish and strengthen men spiritually (compare 1:16). This is what men must appeal to for Divine strength and guidance today.

The gospel revealed the mystery kept secret since the beginning of the world. This mystery refers to the fact that salvation is available for all, Jew and Gentile, through the gospel. It is often so described: Ephesians 3:1-9; 1:9; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 4:1; Colossians 1:26,27; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; Romans 11:25; 1 Peter 1:10-12.

It was at one time mysterious in that it was unknown by men because it had not been revealed. Even though the Scriptures of the Old Testament prophets had made known that God intended to give a new covenant, yet they did not make clear what it would involve. But when Paul wrote this epistle, it had been revealed to the point it was no longer unknown.

This message was for men of all nations, Jew and Gentile (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:6,23; Luke 24:47). That is why it should be preached to all.

“Obedience of the faith” (compare 1:5; Acts 6:7) is the purpose for which the gospel was revealed. We are not saved by faith without obedience, though many use the book of Romans to try to so prove. The faith must be obeyed (Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6).

All that Paul had taught here would lead to glory for God through Jesus, who is the central figure of the gospel Paul was calling the Romans to follow.

## Appendix: Observations Regarding Christians' Relations to Government

Many questions exist in application of the principles discussed in Romans 13:1-7. We consider some of the more difficult questions here.

### 1. May a Christian Salute, Pledge Allegiance, or Bow to the Flag or to a Civil Leader?

It depends on the significance of the act. If it is simply an expression of willingness to obey the law, pay taxes, and appreciate the benefits received from government, then pledging allegiance is exactly what this passage commands. However, if such an act is taken as an indication that the rulers have power like gods (as in the case of the Caesars), if it indicates that we will obey them no matter what they say, or if it elevates them to any unscriptural position, then Christians must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29; Daniel 6; compare book of Esther).

### 2. Does God Bring to Power Each Specific Form of Government and/or Each Specific Ruler?

God ordained the *principle* of civil authority, but that does not prove He originated each form of government (monarchy, dictatorship, republic, communism, etc.). In fact, some forms of government, such as communism, are by their very nature contrary to His will.

Communism advocates atheism, hatred of religion, violent revolution, destruction of the family, class hatred, confiscation of private property, lying, and class extermination. These are all inherent in the philosophy and practice of communism, and many communist rulers have practiced all these. How could God approve systems and conduct that are so inherently contrary to His word?

Nevertheless, God may bring such evil governments and evil rulers to power to use them for His purposes (Romans 9:17). He does not make them evil and does not approve evil. But when men choose to be evil, God sometimes uses them for His purposes. Many Old Testament passages show that He specifically influenced which men were allowed to rule (Daniel 4).

On the other hand, this does not necessarily prove that He unalterably decrees or determines each and every ruler in each and every country. He is ultimately in charge. But often a specific decision may not make a difference either way regarding His plan. In such a case it would seem possible that He may simply let people have what they choose (compare 1 Samuel 8).

### **3. Does Government Have the Power of Capital Punishment?**

***Government surely had the power of capital punishment in the Old Testament.***

Both before and after the giving of the Ten Commands, God ordained capital punishment: Genesis 9:5,6; Numbers 35:9-21; Exodus 21:12-25; Leviticus 20:1-16,27. God's law taught "thou shalt not kill," yet He expressly commanded the government to kill people for certain crimes. It necessarily follows that capital punishment does not inherently violate the command "Thou shalt not kill." On the contrary, capital punishment was commanded, and in many cases it was sinful to fail to put the evildoer to death. It follows that such actions by the government today would not necessarily violate the command to not kill.

***John 19:10,11 – Jesus agreed Pilate had the power to put Him to death and said the power was given Him "from above."***

It is possible, however, that this means only that God had chosen to allow Jesus to be killed as a sacrifice for sins. Otherwise, neither Pilate nor anyone would have ever had power to harm the Son of God.

***Paul agreed to submit to the death penalty if he had done things worthy of death – Acts 25:11.***

***God ordained that government is an avenger of wrath to punish the evildoer, and this includes "bearing the sword" – Romans 13:1,4.***

What can the sword be but an instrument of death? While the sword may be used to wound, it is surely also an instrument of death. I can think of no reasonable explanation for this statement other than that government possesses by Divine decree the power of capital punishment.

***Passages that forbid killing and taking vengeance are individual in application.***

See notes on Romans 12:14,17-21.

There are many things that are wrong for individuals to do by their own independent choice but may be authorized by God for certain groups to do. We often make the point, for example, that there are differences between what local churches are authorized to do and what individual Christians are authorized to do.

Specifically, government is authorized to take vengeance on the evildoer: the very thing individuals are forbidden to do. This is a question, not just of capital punishment, but of ***any*** kind of punishment. If we argue that Romans 12:17ff or Matthew 5:38ff prove it is wrong for the government to execute an evildoer, why would not the same passages prove it was wrong for the government to imprison, fine, or whip an

evildoer? Those acts are all forbidden for individuals to do. On the other hand, if government can do those acts despite such passages as 12:17ff, then we must agree that those passages do not forbid vengeance by the government. As an institution, government is ordained of God to do certain things individuals are forbidden to do. If so, why can it not execute criminals on the same principles that it imprisons or beats them?

The Old Testament also had passages forbidding the taking of individual vengeance, yet the government still clearly had both the power and command to execute evildoers. Why should similar passages in the New Testament be given a different meaning?

***Some argue that the death penalty is too severe.***

Some say that execution permanently ends all hope for the guilty party to repent and be saved, so less severe penalties should be used that leave open the possibility of repentance.

But where is the Bible proof for such a conclusion? I find none. If this conclusion were valid, it would also have applied in the Old Testament, yet God clearly commanded capital punishment there. The argument appears to be simply human reasoning and emotional appeal with no Scripture to prove it. While punishment should fit the crime, nothing proves the death penalty is always improper.

All the above evidence appears to me to indicate that capital punishment is valid today. Yet at the present time this is, for me, only a tentative conclusion. More study is needed to reach a firm conclusion.

(See below for the issue of a Christian “pushing the button.”)

#### **4. May a Christian Participate in Government?**

May a Christian hold office or work for the government? Specifically, may a Christian “push the button” (or pull the trigger) in cases of capital punishment. (See below for discussion of a Christian’s involvement in war.)

Many jobs involve people directly or indirectly working for the government without exercising authority to enforce the laws or punishing crimes any more than working for any other business. Examples: building highways, operating a government-funded hospital, etc. There is no reason such would violate Bible principles any more than working for any other business. (See Romans 16:23.)

But when discussing enforcement of the laws and punishment of evildoers, the context here in Romans 13 (and elsewhere) always appears to distinguish the Christian from the government. The government is ordained by God to do a service for Christians, but nowhere are Christians pictured as actually doing the work of punishing evildoers. In other human relations, Christians are pictured as being on either end of the relationship (husband/wife, parent/child, servant/master, etc.) Why

is this not the case regarding government, if Christians can be the executor of justice?

In the Old Testament, faithful men of God served as kings and rulers of various types. But God's law in Israel combined the civil law and spiritual authority. These were not two separate institutions like the church is now a separate institution from civil government. The only New Testament examples of people in government positions who might enforce the laws would be Cornelius, Sergius Paulus, or the Philippian jailer, yet we do not know what work they did after conversion.

On the other hand, the work of government is presented as a good work, ordained by God, so that those who do the work are serving God (verses 1,4,6). How can it be that a work ordained by God and done in His service is forbidden to Christians?

One response is that, if all people were Christians, punishment of evildoers would not be needed at all. Could it be that this is a service done by non-Christians on behalf of society, God using them as He often has used people for His purposes even though they were not really His people? Compare God's use of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Judas, Pilate, and the Jews who killed Jesus.

Could government be a "necessary evil" by means of which God uses evil men to control other evil men for the good of His people? The fact that differences among Christians are to be resolved among Christians and not taken before civil rulers would surely appear to uphold this view (1 Corinthians 6:1,6). Christians appealed to civil rulers only to protect them from unbelievers (see notes on 12:19).

Personally, my conscience would not allow me to be the one to wield the sword to execute capital punishment against the evil-doer. And while I personally could not serve as a police officer or judge, neither could I find evidence sufficient to teach other Christians that it would be sinful.

What about voting? This is a privilege somewhat unique to certain types of nations. Most citizens historically have had no say regarding who their rulers would be. Voting simply indicates what men we wish to have serve in office, or what stands we wish our rulers to take. Surely Christians are authorized to express our views on specific issues the government faces. Expressing who we want as rulers would appear to be authorized in the same way that Christians appealed to the government for protection of rights (see notes on 12:19). If we can appeal to rulers to protect us, why can we not express who we wish to be the ones to do that work?

## **5. May a Christian Go to War for His Government?**

Note that the question is not, as some want to word it, "May a Christian join the military?" The fact is that the majority of people in the military have never participated in active combat, and never tried to kill anyone. Most positions in the military do not involve killing but involve varying degrees of remoteness from actual combat. Even many

conscientious objectors would serve as medics to help the wounded. They are in the military but do not fight in combat.

This is not the same question as that of punishing specific individuals for their crimes. Justice demands that, before punishing an evildoer, civil rulers must have clear proof that he is guilty (as shown in the Old Testament and the trials of Jesus, Paul, etc.). Evidence must be presented and a conclusion reached regarding the guilt of the specific individual in committing some specific act. Such evidence is not available, and is not generally even considered, regarding nations when decisions of war are made.

The real issue is whether or not a Christian may attempt to kill other people in combat. Many background issues regarding this have been covered above.

### ***May a Christian go to war anytime the government says to fight?***

Surely no Christian can give a blanket justification of war in general. In every war, either one side is wrong or both are wrong. Surely God does not justify both sides when men are killing one another. How then could Christians just go to war every time their country fights? Surely some of the time they would be defending the side that was in sin.

Further, the Christian would be trying to kill people who had done nothing wrong except the same thing that the Christian himself was doing: his country said to kill, so he tries to kill. Modern warfare also inevitably involves killing innocent people who are not even trying to fight.

The only way to justify such fighting would be to argue that God would hold the rulers accountable for the sinfulness of the war, but individual soldiers are just obeying their superiors and are not accountable. Yet in what area of life may Christians so act? We are members of many groups: church, family, business, and government. In which of them are we not held accountable for participating in acts simply because the group decided to do them? In every case, we are required to evaluate the right or wrong of any act before we agree to participate (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11; Acts 5:29; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). We are not necessarily condemned just because other people in the organization sin, but we are wrong if we participate in or condone the sin. Even if authorities tell us to sin, we must obey God rather than men.

In particular, we should hope there will be Christians in every country. Now if citizens of one country may fight simply because their government went to war and rulers say to fight, then Christians in every other country can do the same. ***The result will be Christians trying to kill Christians.*** How can this be justified by any Bible concept of brotherly love and unity? This point alone seems to me to conclusively disprove the general contention that Christians may go to war.



***Perhaps Christians must evaluate each war and participate only if it is a “just” war.***

However, when do Christians ever exercise such an option? If you join the military, you take an oath to obey your commanding officers no matter what they tell you to do or who they tell you to attack. Whether the war is just or not, or whether specific individuals have done wrong or not, if you are commanded to kill, you are expected to kill. You are not allowed to select when you will or will not kill. How can Christians put themselves in such a position?

Some may claim that our military has a conscience clause that allows a soldier to refuse to obey an order that violates his conscience. Perhaps so, but when has any Christian ever used that clause and refused to fight because the war was unjust? I have never heard of such a thing being done in my lifetime, either from a member of the church or from a non-Christian. And any soldier who attempted it would suffer a world of grief at the hands of the military. The effect, in practice, of joining the military in a combat position is that the Christian will kill if his government says to.

And how would the citizens ever know which side in the war was justified? Governments in wartime always distribute propaganda and often lie to their citizens to justify their deeds and promote support for the war effort. Even the rulers often do not know the full facts. How could individuals ever know what wars are justified?

***Israel surely fought against its enemies in the Old Testament.***

Unquestionably, God permitted and sometimes even required Israel to fight wars. However, even then not all wars were justified, but only those that punished nations for their corruption. God was the judge in such matters, and He expressly revealed when a nation was worthy of destruction so that a specific war was justified. His people were not to wage war unless they had consulted with God. Living prophets revealed when war was or was not approved.

It follows that God did at times approve of Israel's fighting in warfare. Israel was God's chosen nation. The Old Testament included special blessings to them as a nation including the land of Canaan. Many of the blessings were physical in emphasis and some of these required them to fight in war. It follows that if God was going to fight for them, that He certainly approved of those wars.

It is equally obvious, however, that if they wanted the blessings of God in any particular warfare, they would need specific evidence that He approved of that war. In order for Him to bless the act, they would need authority for it.

The fact that God approved of some warfare did not mean that He would always approve of every specific war. Here are passages showing that Israel was required to obtain authority from God in order to know that He approved of the war in order for them to participate. Also



included are passages in which God forbade them to fight in certain cases, including cases in which they fought without His approval and displeased Him.

Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24-28; Deuteronomy 9:4; 18:12 – God promised that He would allow Israel to defeat the people of Canaan, not because Israel was so righteous, but because the people of the land were so wicked.

Deuteronomy chapter 2 – Although God approved of Israel's attack against the nations of Canaan, He specifically forbade them to attack Edom or Moab as they marched toward Canaan.

Numbers 13,14; Deuteronomy chapter 1 – When God first led Israel to the land of Canaan, He intended for them to enter the land and defeat the nations there. However, when they refused to enter, He said He would punish them with wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. And then they determined to go into the land and fight, but He forbade them and they were defeated. So, in the one case they displeased God when He instructed them to fight and they refused, and in the other case they displeased God when they fought despite the fact He instructed them not to do so.

Jeremiah 38:17-23 – When Babylon came to fight against Israel in the day of Jeremiah, Israel was the nation that was guilty of sin. So God by inspiration through Jeremiah instructed Israel not to fight but to surrender. And note that this was a case of a defensive war. Israel did not have God's approval even to defend themselves in war in this case.

Judges 20:18 – Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God to inquire of God. They said, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?" The LORD said, "Judah first!"

Judges 20:23 – Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and asked counsel of the LORD, saying, "Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?" And the LORD said, "Go up against him."

Judges 20:28 – "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?" And the LORD said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

2 Samuel 5:19; 1 Chronicles 14:10 – So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand."

1 Kings 12:24; 2 Corinthians 11:4 – Thus says the LORD: "You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me." Therefore they obeyed the word of the LORD, and turned back, according to the word of the LORD.

1 Kings 22:5,6 – Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “Please inquire for the word of the LORD today.” Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, “Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?” So they said, “Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of Him?”

See also Joshua 9:14; 1 Samuel 23:2,4; 28:6; 30:7,8; 2 Samuel 5:19,23,24; Judges 20:28.

Israel had the means to inquire of the Lord about any specific war. Through their priests and prophets God would tell them specifically whether or not their enemy deserved to be destroyed. In particular, whether or not a nation should be destroyed depended on the wickedness or righteousness of the people of the nation. Sometimes it was other nations that deserved to be destroyed because their wickedness, but in some cases it was the nation of Israel itself that deserved to be defeated and taken captive by their enemies for their sins.

This raises the question of how any Christian can know under the New Testament whether or not any specific war or battle has the approval of God. Every nation, including our own, has some people who are guilty of wickedness. But God did not authorize fighting in the Old Testament until a nation became wicked enough that it deserved to be destroyed.

If God still wanted His people to fight in war today, would it not be necessary for us to have specific authority from Him in order to know that any particular nation was wicked enough that it deserves to be punished? If so, how can we know that information since the gifts of direct revelation have ceased? We have no inspired priests or prophets of whom we can inquire like Israel did. If we must have authority to kill, how do we obtain that authority? How do we know whether the enemies of our nation deserve to be destroyed or whether our own nation has become wicked enough that it should be punished?

***Perhaps it could be argued that a nation could fight only in a defensive war – i.e., only if its own people or territory is attacked or invaded.***

But how do we decide which acts of war are defensive and which are offensive, especially in an age of warfare by missiles and air strikes? Every war, once started, involves both offense and defense on both sides. In today's warfare, if each nation waited until it was personally attacked before fighting, it may well be destroyed before it struck a blow. If nations did not band together to fight a common enemy, they may be eliminated one by one (compare Hitler's attacks against the nations of Europe).

Is it possible that the “defensive” side provoked the attack by mistreating other nations? Even though they might not have struck the

first blow, might they not have provoked the blow by other forms of evil? How could they then claim to be justified in a defensive war?

Jeremiah 38:17-23 – When Babylon came to fight against Israel in the day of Jeremiah, Israel was the nation that was guilty of sin. So God by inspiration through Jeremiah instructed them not to fight but to surrender. And note that this was a case of a defensive war. Israel did not have God's approval even to defend themselves in war in this case.

### ***May war be an area in which God uses evil men to defend His people?***

If all people were Christians, war would never occur. It is needed only because of evil men. Could it be that God uses evil men in war to punish other evil men and thereby protect His people?

God has often used evil men to work for the good of His people, perhaps unknowingly. Some examples have been Assyria, Babylon, and the Romans, whom God used to take captive Israel and/or Judah as punishment for their sins. They destroyed cities, killed people, took captives, and specifically destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. All this was ordained by God, and the armies who did it were doing a work God wanted done. But they were still evil people, whom God used to do the work.

The most obvious example of all would be the Jews who killed Jesus. They did a job that God needed to have done and had ordained to be done (Acts 2:23; 4:28; 1 Peter 1:18-20; 2:7,8). This job was essential to save mankind from sin. But no righteous person could have done it and remained righteous. The Bible expressly states that those who did it committed sin in the very act (see Acts 2,3,4,5, etc.). So God ordained an act to occur, but He had to use evil men to do it, and those who did the act sinned in doing it. Yet it resulted in salvation for all.

Why cannot this be the case also with the armies of nations who fight wars? It may result in the protection of Christians and other innocent people, whom God wants protected. But God may be using evil men to do the work, and they may in fact be guilty of sin in doing it.

### ***What about Cornelius?***

Some people use Cornelius to justify serving as a soldier. He was a centurion who was converted, so some say this proves Christians may be soldiers today (Acts 10,11). (Some cite other examples too, such as the soldiers that John the Baptist instructed, centurions that Jesus taught, etc. But these people lived under the Old Testament. We have already agreed above that God's people could go to war in the Old Testament, but circumstances were different. And we live under a different law. Examples of soldiers before Jesus' death do not prove what we may or may not do today.)

## **We don't know what Cornelius did after conversion.**

True, he was a centurion and was converted. But the story ends there. It is an assumption – not a necessary conclusion – that he continued to be a centurion. We must not use unstated and unnecessary conclusions to contradict other direct evidences.

For example, some people use the “household conversions” to justify infant baptism; but this does not follow, because we do not know there were infants in those households. To make the argument, they must prove there were babies in those households who were baptized. Likewise, to use Cornelius, people must prove that he continued to be a soldier with God's approval.

Other people who were converted included Crispus, the ruler of a synagogue (Acts 18:8). And a great many priests were converted (Acts 6:7). Did they continue to rule the synagogue and serve as priests, offering animal sacrifices, etc., after conversion? The passages do not say specifically one way or the other. Shall we conclude Christians today may be rulers of Jewish synagogues and Jewish priests?

The essence of conversion is change. To assume Cornelius did not change his job is to assume what must be proved. Lots of people in sinful practices and sinful occupations have been converted. They had to change to please God, whether or not the accounts specifically state they did so.

## **Many Roman soldiers were more like policemen than warriors.**

We are accustomed to separation between policemen and soldiers. Policemen in our society enforce laws on citizens of the country, but they do not fight wars against enemies. They may use violence; but when they do the job properly, they harm only those who are guilty of violating specific laws. As discussed above, this is entirely different from fighting wars.

Soldiers today, however, almost never enforce laws on the citizens of their country, but rather fight wars against foreign armies. This involves them in seeking to kill people who have not more violated a law than they themselves have violated a law. Soldiers on both sides are simply trying to kill others, because their countries are at war, not because the soldiers are personally guilty of some violation of civil law.

But this distinction apparently did not exist in New Testament Palestine. The nation was controlled by the Romans by means of an army of occupation. They were clearly subject to Roman law, and the Roman army enforced the laws to which the people were subject, just like policemen do today. There is no evidence that Cornelius or any Roman soldier in Palestine was fighting a war against a foreign army. They were occupying a subjugated nation, enforcing the laws in effect on the people.

In short, even if Cornelius continued to serve as a centurion (which we do not know), his work would have been that of a policeman, not that of combat against foreign armies in wartime. The most Cornelius could prove would be that a Christian might serve as a policeman, not that a Christian may be a soldier in combat in war.

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