

ROMANS

Justification By Faith

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Introduction

Let us journey back in time to about the year A.D. 57. The apostle Paul is on his third missionary journey. He is now in Greece in the city of Corinth. He and his team will spend about three months there before going on to Jerusalem (Acts 20:3).

It was probably toward the early part of this visit to Corinth that Paul received the alarming news that some Judaizers who had dogged his steps were threatening the churches in the province of Galatia. The Judaizers were teaching believers that to be saved they had to keep the Law of Moses, including the rite of circumcision.

Of course, this was a direct denial of the gospel of Christ. By making the observance of the Law of Moses a requirement for salvation, it denied that faith in Christ alone is sufficient. That would mean that Christ did not provide a complete salvation; thus He would not be our complete Savior. Salvation would not be by Christ alone but by “Christ-plus”—plus something we do—in this case keeping the requirements of the Law of Moses. That added something that never saved anyone.

In effect, that would make Christ of *no* effect. If Christ did not provide a complete salvation, and the Law could not save us, we would be left without a savior. We would still be in our sins.

When Paul received this alarming news, the Holy Spirit came on him and moved him to write the Epistle To The Galatians. His letter to the Galatians is a concise, “emergency” epistle, urgent in its tone and direct in its message. Paul wrote it by his own hand (Galatians 6:11).

Shortly thereafter, evidently still during the three months Paul was in Corinth, the Holy Spirit directed him to write to the mature church in Rome, laying out and committing to them a systematic and thorough explanation of justification (being made righteous) by faith and what it means to be justified by faith. So, what is urgent in Galatians is explanatory in Romans.

The theme of the Epistle To The Romans is “justification *by* faith for obedience *to* faith.” Romans can be called “the Christian manifesto.”

The epistle is composed of three main sections:

Chapters 1 - 8:

Justification by faith

Chapters 9 - 11:

The sovereignty of God

Chapters 12 - 16:

The practical life of the justified

The Salutation And Purpose

Romans 1:1 - 17

THE SALUTATION.

Romans 1:1 - 7

**¹Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ²which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The salutation embodies the theme of the epistle: the gospel concerning the risen Christ, for all people, for faith and obedience, for His name.

Although the salutation is divided into seven verses, it is one continuous sentence. This is not unusual in the Bible, particularly in the epistles of Paul. The reason is this: divine inspiration is “truth on a roll,” building one truth on another, each emerging out of the other, a symphony that progressively increases in power as it moves toward its climax.

So here is how the salutation flows: Paul is a love-slave of Jesus Christ, an apostle by divine calling, separated from all other pursuits so he can give himself fully and exclusively to his mission. The gospel—the good news—had been promised by God and was the heart of the written message of the inspired prophets of old. The gospel—not the Law—was the focus of the Old Testament prophets. It is important to keep this fact in mind.

The gospel is the good news “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Second Person of the Eternal Trinity became the “only begotten (one and only) Son” according to the flesh through the virgin Mary, in the direct line of physical descent from king David.

The “Sonship” of Jesus Christ was divinely declared with power according to the Spirit of holiness (the Holy Spirit) by (out of) the resurrection. So then, the resurrection of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is God’s authoritative declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is His unique (one and only) Son. The divine message: “Jesus Christ our Lord!”

The risen Christ is the source of Paul’s apostleship, and the purpose of Paul’s apostleship is to bring people in all nations to obedience to faith—*the obedience that faith requires and that true faith produces*. Like the two sides of the same coin, faith and obedience are inseparable. Any attempt to separate them kills both, leaving both faith and works dead.

Believers are beloved by God and are summoned to the higher calling of true sainthood. They are saints by calling and they are to live out that high calling in daily and consistent discipleship.

Although the letter is addressed to the whole Church at Rome, beloved of God and saints by divine calling, it is a deposit of revealed truth for the whole Church everywhere and in every generation. The early Church at Rome possessed the spiritual qualities and

the maturity to be a responsible repository for this treasury of eternal truth.

The high calling of believers in Christ is introduced here and is developed later in Chapter eight (see 8:28).

Grace and peace are ours from God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE PURPOSE.

Romans 1:8 - 17

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”

The elect—the chosen in Christ—are the focus of God’s eternal purpose both in creation and in the gospel. Paul is thankful to God through Jesus Christ for the whole church at Rome and for their famous faith. The spiritual qualities and maturity of the church at Rome in Paul’s day are mentioned again in 15:4 and 16:19.

Paul calls God to be his witness that he prays for them without ceasing. That is, the apostle does not “cross them off his prayer list.” They are a part of his continuing prayer life.

In this connection the apostle affirms that he serves God with his “spirit in the gospel of His Son.” Notice, he did not serve his own human spirit, merely being driven by an inner emotional compulsion. He served God intelligently and purposefully *with* his spirit—with all the inner energies and emotional stamina that his human spirit generated.

And what a dynamic spirit was in him! With that same drive and energy of his human spirit he had persecuted the Church before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. With his spirit he had been “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). But the moment he met Jesus he fully and immediately turned that same inner drive in the opposite direction. “Lord, what will you have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). He spun around 180 degrees and headed in the right direction without “taking his foot off the accelerator.” His momentum never slowed. Now it was all for his Savior and Lord. What an example Paul is for all believers.

We notice what Paul prayed for. He longs to see them in person and prays that God will give him a prosperous journey. We “fast forward” to chapter 15, verses 31 and 32, where he repeats his desire to come to them and asks them to pray for him that he will be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea and that the believers will accept what he is bringing them. He asks this so that he may come to them at Rome with joy by the will of God and be refreshed with them.

As we read the record in Acts of the subsequent events in Paul’s life and ministry, we see that it did not turn out quite that way. Years later Paul finally arrived in Rome, but as a prisoner and after having suffered shipwreck and other adversities.

Paul had a deep conviction (here the strength of Paul's spirit shows itself again) that he had to go to Jerusalem first and personally deliver the offering he had collected for the believers there. Had Paul listened to the collective wisdom of the churches, his own co-laborers and a reputable prophet named Agabus (Acts 11:28 and 21:10), his prayer and the prayers of the church at Rome would have been answered.

When Paul would not listen to the believers at Tyre who said to him "through the Spirit" (Acts 21:4—the same Greek construction as in Acts 11:28) that he should stop going up to Jerusalem, they gave up and left it up to God to work out His will in spite of Paul's well-intentioned but misguided intransigence.

And, of course, that is what God did. God is sovereign and He knew how to get Paul to Rome one way or another and to accomplish some wonderful things along the way. God's "plan A" for Paul was to get him to Rome, and He did. What God's "plan A" to get him there might have been we do not know. We do know that God is never out of options. We must never give up just because we think we "blew" God's "plan A" for us. Even God's sovereign "plan B" in our lives is full of adventure and blessing.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul tells them why he longs to see them. He wants to share some spiritual gift with them so that they will be established. He is not referring to the nine "gifts" of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12. He explains what he means in verse 12: to establish them by the mutual encouragement of each other's faith.

Paul assures them that often he had planned to come to them but had been hindered. He expands on his objective. He wanted to obtain some "fruit" (converts and ministry results) among them also, as he already had among the Gentiles. Paul was always looking to "the regions beyond" his present field of ministry, wanting to preach the gospel to them.

Paul sensed his deep, compelling debt to others, to Greeks and non-Greeks, wise and foolish. He owed them the gospel and he was determined to discharge that debt. That is why he was "ready" (eager) to preach the gospel to those at Rome. Rome was the capital, the "hub" and diffusion point of the entire empire. Preaching there was his high goal.

Verses 14 - 16 form a "three-point sermon": (1) I am a debtor; (2) I am eager; (3) I am not ashamed.

What a Savior! What a gospel! What a calling!

The gospel is for all, is able to save all who believe, and produces righteousness by faith. The gospel is complete (verses 3, 4), universal in its provision and call (verse 5), powerful to save all who believe (verse 16), and results in righteousness in those who believe (verse 17).

Notice, the gospel reveals God's *righteousness* (verse 17). We usually think of the gospel as revealing almost exclusively God's grace and mercy. It certainly does that, of course. Yet, we must keep in mind that the gospel also demonstrates the fact that God, being righteous, provided in Christ the only possible way to grant grace and mercy without violating the demands of the moral law and therefore His righteousness. That is, God provided and offers us forgiveness and justification on terms that uphold and demonstrate His righteousness and His righteous moral governance.

If salvation were the result of God's mercy alone, the death of His Son on the cross would be totally unnecessary, cruel, and unjust. But mercy without an atonement would give people the false and fatal idea that God is not serious about sin and that He is careless about His obligation to oppose and judge sin.

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross prevents that false notion and the destructive consequences of that notion. We have sinned. Sin brings the just penalty. Someone has to suffer under that penalty to uphold moral law and moral order. Either we bear the penalty or someone who is sinless must bear our sins and suffer under that penalty for us. This is absolutely necessary to make it clear that God is not trifling with our sin, even when He graciously forgives us. Thus the righteousness of God as well as His grace and

mercy is revealed in the gospel.

Because we have all sinned, we could never stand righteous before God in ourselves. We are justified *from* sin (not *in* sin) by putting our faith in what another (Jesus Christ) did for us. Saving faith is a definite act that leads to a life of ever-increasing faith (“faith to faith”—see Romans 6:19; 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16; and 2 Corinthians 3:18 for Paul’s use of this way of expressing ever-increasing growth, either in good or in evil).

And so, “the just shall live by faith” (verse 17). We find this statement also in Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38. It is a life of total trust in Jesus Christ that brings us immediately into a righteous standing before God and sets us into a righteous lifestyle.

Total Moral Depravity: The Gentile World

Romans 1:18 - 32

Verse 17 is transitional and leads into the subject of the rest of chapter 1—the total moral depravity of the gentile world. The entire section of the epistle from chapter 1:18 through chapter 3:20 describes humanity’s total moral depravity, its desperate need for righteousness and its total failure to attain righteousness.

Chapter 1:18 - 32 graphically describes the total sinfulness and guilt of the gentile world. It is made up of two paragraphs: verses 18 - 23—the folly of idolatry; verses 24 - 32—God gave them up (over) to their own dishonorable passions.

Romans 1:18 - 23

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Having rejected God, the human race turned to idolatry. God is righteous. When people refuse to submit to the righteousness of God, they will create gods after their own desires, gods that are as sinful as they themselves are, gods that will let them do what they want to do and give them a religious justification for their doing so. This attitude is demonstrated by a well-known person who boasted, “If God did not let me do what I want, then I would change gods.”

VERSES 18 - 20:

The Gentiles Are Responsible.

Just as the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (verse 17), so also the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness (verse 18). Sinners suppress the truth in a vain attempt to avoid its moral demands on them. This universal rejection of the truth has brought about universal moral guilt.

The pagan world had (and still has) what is called “natural revelation.” Since the creation of the world certain invisible qualities of God have been clearly seen, being inferred from the macrocosm and also in more modern times from the microcosm: specifically God’s eternal personal deity and His infinite power. This leaves all moral agents morally accountable and without excuse for their selfish disobedience, *even if they have never heard the gospel of Christ*. They are lost, not because they have not heard the gospel but because they are guilty sinners and they know it. If they hear the gospel and reject it, they add the guilt of this act of unbelief to that of rejecting natural revelation.

We see this same intransigence in the stubborn refusal by many on philosophical grounds to recognize or even consider the mounting and overwhelming evidence for

intelligent design in nature. The root cause is a perverse and wicked bias against the Creator, rooted in stubborn pride and the horrific thought of facing Him in judgment. And so they continue to suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. Their last-ditch “Maginot line” of defense is the assertion that all science is materialistic by definition. If indeed all science is materialistic by definition, science thereby either places itself in the tenuous position of defending the vulnerable postulate that all reality is material, or precludes itself by its own ground rules from claiming that the scientific method (using the five physical senses) is the sole means of knowing all reality. Once they admit that science seeks the best interpretation and understanding of the data and not merely the best *materialistic* interpretation and understanding, their last refuge is swept away and their worst nightmare becomes a reality: they look up and see Almighty God staring them in the face.

VERSES 21 - 23:

The Gentiles Are Willful.

This section describes the fall from monotheism into idolatry. Contrary to popular belief, monotheism (the belief in one God) did not emerge from an evolutionary religious process. The very earliest societies had the revelation of God, but they deliberately rejected it. In their passion and pride they refused to glorify God. They altered the glory of the incorruptible God into an idol. Light rejected became darkness. The result was crass idolatry, a caricature of God that grossly slandered Him. Their foolish hearts were darkened. “Foolish” in verse 21 means “unable to put things together” in their minds (see also verse 31).

We see the result of this irrational process when we observe intelligent Hindus on their knees worshiping a pack of rats! We see it also in modern new-age “spirituality,” as man worships himself. We see it in “deep ecology,” the deification of nature and the earth itself (why worship a rock or a tree when you can worship the entire planet!).

When people degrade God, they degrade themselves. This holds true whether it is practiced in the worship of idols and images or in a materialistic anthropology that is willing to degrade humanity ontologically by denying our high origin and nature in its attempt to eliminate God from its view of reality.

This is why a correct view of God is essential to a correct view of ourselves. If we are to think right about man, we must first think right about God.

Romans 1:24 - 32

²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

The consequence of the pagan world's rejection of the revelation of God in nature was that God gave them over to their own desires. God let them have what they were determined to have. God withdrew His restraining influence and let the pagan societies "run with their passions." He abandoned them to idolatry and all the sexual promiscuity that goes with idolatry. He withheld light from those who refused to see. This is called reprobation. It involves what is termed "judicial blindness."

Men abandoned the natural sexual relationship with women, choosing instead to practice with other men what is indecent and shameful. The resulting effect in themselves is the due penalty for their perverted sexual behavior. God is serious about the sanctity of marriage. He placed strict protective boundaries on human sexuality, and people transgress those boundaries at their own peril.

God abandoned them to a morally depraved mind. Just as they had abandoned God *in* their thinking, God abandoned them *to* their thinking. As God withdrew His restraining influence, they pursued their passions against all reason, their guilt only the greater in proportion to the level of their suppressed intelligence and the amount of light rejected. This was not merely an intellectual problem; it was a moral problem. They did not *have* a problem; they *were* a problem. The depravity was of the heart (the action of the will) before it became a depravity of the mind.

They "exchanged" (traded) God in the lie—the lie that is the essence of idolatry—that the creature, the created object, is "god". They worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.

At this point in verse 25 Paul breaks out into a brief, spontaneous doxology to the true and living God.

Sexual sins and their consequent diseases and other human problems are a result of humanity's "bad trade." Bad theology promotes bad morality. People become like the gods they create. The results are the natural consequences of violating God's natural moral order, just as injury and death are the natural consequences of violating God's natural physical order.

The universal moral law, that God has revealed and that He enforces by due rewards and penalties, is founded in our nature and relationships as human beings. It fits us perfectly. Living in harmony with it results in our well-being and happiness. Sin is unnatural. If sin were natural, it would be beneficial. But sin is unnatural and therefore destructive. Every problem that results from human choices and behavior can be traced back ultimately to the violation of a biblical principle.

In free societies people can disobey the Bible if they choose. But one thing they cannot do—they cannot disobey the Bible and avoid the consequences, natural and judicial.

Verses 28 - 32 describe what happens when people deliberately expel the true and living God from their view of reality. It is an ugly picture, as real and up-to-date as today's news.

In concluding this chapter, we identify three errors of the gentile (pagan) world:

- they did not glorify God (verse 21);
- they rejected God (verse 28);
- they hated God (verse 30).

According to verse 32, in spite of the acknowledged guilt of such depravity and the certainty of pronounced divine punishment, they continue to go along with "the crowd of the damned." This shows that the threat of just and deserved punishment does not in itself deter people who are determined to pursue the flesh. This is true in the Bible and also in the reality of human experience. The consequences are undeniable.

So the purpose of chapter 1 has been established: to demonstrate that the entire gentile world is guilty of sin and under its just penalty. They are guilty and without excuse. Without Christ they are on "death row," awaiting the judgment.

But what about the Jews? They have the knowledge of the one true and living God. They have the holy Law, given by God to Moses. Where do they stand before God? This is the subject of Romans, chapter 2. It is our next subject.

The Guilt Of The Jew Under The Law

Romans 2:1 - 29

Romans 2:1 - 16

¹Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: ⁷eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, ⁹tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹For there is no partiality with God.

¹²For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; ¹⁴for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) ¹⁶in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

Years ago I was on an all-night flight from Tel Aviv to New York City. Seated next to me was a middle-aged gentleman. We did not become involved in conversation right away. During the first part of our flight I was silently reading my pocket New Testament. Observing this, my fellow-passenger introduced himself. His name was Isaac. He was a Jewish businessman from New York with business interest in both Israel and New York.

Isaac was an open-minded man. He regarded Jesus as an influential teacher who said many good things. Isaac was well-satisfied with his own faith and was comfortable conversing about spiritual matters.

As our conversation progressed, I took him to Deuteronomy, chapter 28, the passage that describes the blessings that come on those who obey the Law and the curses that fall on those who disobey it.

I pressed upon Isaac that we have all sinned, a fact clearly stated in The Scriptures, and therefore we have all incurred the penalty of the Law. Therefore as a Jew he could not base his hope on the Law because the very Law that was the foundation of his faith actually condemned him. As an intelligent man, he saw the point immediately. I presented Jesus of Nazareth to him as the Messiah and his only Savior.

I wish I could say that Isaac accepted the Messiah, but that was not the case, at least

not at that moment. As a well-established man with children, grandchildren and other family members, he weighed the consequences of confessing faith in Jesus as the Messiah and his Savior.

“What shall I tell my family?” he asked. When I suggested a course of action, he replied, “I can’t do that.” So ended the discussion. My heart was heavy. I hope and pray that one day Isaac found Yeshua, the Messiah.

Here in the second chapter of his inspired epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul declares that just as the Gentiles have sinned and stand guilty before God, even so the Jews also have sinned and stand guilty before God.

This gives us a clearer understanding of our Lord’s words in Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.” These words were spoken to a Jewish audience during the Sermon On The Mount. Although the principle applies universally, it had specific relevance to people who considered themselves to be spiritually and morally superior to Gentiles. They judged the Gentiles for committing sins that they themselves were committing, thinking that their special status with God gave them impunity. Jesus dropped a “bombshell” when He informed them that they will be judged by the same moral standard that they apply to the Gentiles. Paul’s words in Romans 2:1 tie directly to Christ’s words in Matthew 7:1.

God does not have a double standard. He is no respecter of persons (verse 11). People who commit the same sins they judge others for committing are just as guilty. God does not grant them immunity because they are “religious.” This is true of the sinning Jew who judges the sinning Gentiles. It is true of the sinning Catholic who trusts in the “merits” of Christ and the “saints” to save him while he continues the cycle of sin and confession. It is true of the sinning Protestant who thinks that a new birth experience assures him of Heaven and eternal life while he continues living in present sin.

God does not dismiss the sins of “church people.” No one is exempt from the moral law and God’s just moral rule. Religious ties and spiritual experiences do not shield anyone from the penalty of present, persistent sinning.

Paul makes this very clear in Ephesians 5:5 - 7. “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.”

“Partakers” means more than merely associating with. It implies sharing both in the sins and in the consequences.

Professed believers can be deceived by empty words in this matter only if they are led to believe that because they had a born-again experience once, they are still saved while they continue and persist in sin. Otherwise, the warning to believers would be meaningless.

This section contains three principles of divine judgment. The first is in verse 2. Judgment is “according to truth.” The NIV says “based on truth.” God’s judgment is factual, thorough, just, and impartial. We see this also in verse 11.

According to verses 3 - 5, we are informed that God’s patience is not to be mistaken for indifference, and certainly not for approval. The apostle has in mind God’s long-continued forbearance toward Israel, His covenant people. Continuing self-righteously in sin only increases one’s guilt and ultimate punishment.

The second principle of divine judgment is found in verse 6. God’s judgment will be according to one’s deeds, not religious beliefs, opinions, feelings, rituals, or affiliations. Conduct reveals character. A godly life that results from godly character has God’s approval. A sinful life that results from a sinful character will bring God’s judgment.

Verses 7 and 10 do not teach justification by works. Justification comes “by grace through faith” (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8). These verses here teach that a justified

person will live a justified life. Believers are justified *from* sin, not *in* sin.

Again, verse 12 affirms that all sin will receive God's judgment. The Gentiles will not be judged by the Law of Moses. They sinned outside of that codified embodiment of the moral law. They sinned against natural law, that is, the universal moral law revealed in their own consciences. That is sufficient light to make them morally accountable, and they will be judged according to that light. On the other hand, the Jews sinned against the Law of Moses, and they will be judged by the greater light of that special revelation. So then, the person who knew the Law and lived contrary to it bears the greater guilt and therefore the heavier punishment.

Verse 16 connects with verse 12 and continues the sentence ("shall be judged . . . in the day when . . .").

The third principle of divine judgment is found in verse 16. God's judgment will be through Jesus Christ according to the gospel. The sinning Gentile will be judged by the moral law as it resides in his/her conscience. The sinning Jew will be judged by the Law of Moses. They who have heard the gospel (Jew and Gentile) will be judged by the direct light of the gospel. All judgment will be through Jesus Christ (see John 5:22; Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31). The judgment will reveal the secrets—heart motives, hidden thoughts, concealed purposes and actions—of each person.

By "according to my gospel" Paul means the gospel that he preached, the one and only gospel revealed in Jesus Christ and "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Romans 2:17 - 29

¹⁷Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

²⁵For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

The groundwork has now been laid to demonstrate that the disobedient Jew is also under the judgment of God for his/her sins. The purpose is to demolish the false hope of the self-righteous Jew. Verses 17 - 27 are in the second person singular. The apostle addresses the Jew on a personal, individual level.

Verses 17 - 20 list the Jew's confident claims to superior moral and spiritual knowledge. Notice that the emphasis is on what the Jew *knows* and therefore *teaches* to the unenlightened.

The apostle does not dispute these confident claims. He grants them to be true. The issue is not what the enlightened Jew knows and preaches, but what he practices.

Verses 21 - 24 show that the unbelieving Jew is condemned by his own teaching and

preaching. His moral failure is the same as that of the Gentiles. He was disobeying the very truth he was teaching the Gentiles. This brought the truth into disrepute and dishonored God.

The inspired apostle framed this section as a series of questions, questions aimed at the conscience of the smug, self-assured Jew. The questions are rhetorical and presuppose their own answers. Their purpose is to cut the ground from under him and leave his conscience naked before the Law itself.

This reminds us of the time when the woman taken in adultery was brought before Jesus (John 8). The Lord stooped down and with His finger wrote something on the ground. Then He raised Himself up and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He then went on writing on the ground. The woman's accusers slipped away one by one until no one was left to accuse her. Evidently, what Jesus wrote on the ground exposed their own personal sins and stung their consciences.

One of the questions Paul asks has to do with abhorring idols and robbing temples. The thought is that some Jews were physically militant in their opposition to idolatry, taking Deuteronomy 7:5 as their justification; but, like Achan (Joshua 7), instead of destroying "the accursed thing," they robbed the pagan temples and confiscated for their own use whatever valuable articles they found. The violent behavior of these "temple robbing" Jews is hinted at in Acts 19:37, where the city clerk reminded the crowd that the apostles, Jews themselves, had not been temple-robbers.

So, Paul accuses the hypocritical Jew of loving what the idols were made of while professing to abhor the idols themselves. They boasted of the Law, but by trespassing the Law they dishonored God. Thus the sacred Name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their hypocritical actions, just as The Scriptures stated (see Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:20 - 22).

The passage in verses 25 - 29 defines the true Jew. Verse 25 affirms that "circumcision," that is, living under the covenant that God made with Abraham, does have its advantages. Some of these advantages were implied earlier in verses 17 - 20. Chapter 3, verse 1 says that being a Jew is very beneficial in every way, first of all because the revealed word of God had been entrusted to them (3:2).

Verse 25 says that the privileges that the Jew has under the Law are an advantage only if he keeps the Law ("if" here is grammatically a "condition of the third class," assumed *not* to be true of the person referred to). However, if the Jew *breaks* the Law ("if" here is grammatically a "condition of the first class," assumed to *be* true of the person referred to), all of his advantages under the Law work directly against him. By breaking the Law of Moses, the Jew places himself under its curse. He violates greater light and thus incurs greater condemnation. His covenant relationship is broken and nullified. He is no longer "an Israelite indeed" (John 1:47).

In verses 26 and 27 Paul is referring to the gentile believer who has removed the "body of the sins of the flesh" by the spiritual "circumcision done by Christ" in his heart (Colossians 2:11), and who therefore now keeps the moral obligations of the Law (as verse 29 clearly states).

Verse 27 continues by saying that the physically uncircumcised Gentile who continues to fulfill the moral obligations of the Law (because his heart is now "circumcised" by Christ) shall judge the Jew who had the written Law and circumcision but transgressed it.

In verse 28 the inspired apostle makes an astounding statement. "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, . . ." (NIV).

The Old Covenant is gone. The New Covenant is the only one that is now in force. This changes the definition of the designation "Jew." Now a true Jew is the one who is a Jew inwardly, whose heart is circumcised by Christ and who therefore has "put off the sins of the body of the flesh." The unbelieving Jews are still referred to as "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Corinthians 10:18) to distinguish them from the true New Covenant Jews, whose

“praise” is from God.

“Praise” here is a play on words. Judah means “praise.” The “praise” (Jewish-ness) of the true Jew comes not from human descent or ethnicity, but directly from God through Jesus Christ.

“For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3 NASB).

**From Total Moral Depravity
To Full Justification**

Romans 3:1 - 31

Romans 3:1 - 8

¹What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? ²Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. ³For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? ⁴Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written:

**“That You may be justified in Your words,
And may overcome when You are judged.”**

⁵But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) ⁶Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?

⁷For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? ⁸And why not say, “Let us do evil that good may come”?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.”

The subject continues as Paul poses the question, “What advantage then has the Jew?” This is the logical question to ask in view of the fact (established in Romans 2) that the sinning Jew is under the same guilt and condemnation as the sinning Gentile, and even more so because the Jew has the greater light of the Law and the Prophets.

Yes, the Jew has several advantages. Paul only states the fact here without listing them, giving only the “chief” advantage—they had the oracles of God, the written revelation of the Old Covenant Scriptures. We find a list of the Jews’ advantages in Romans 9:4, 5 (the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law, the service of God, the promises, the fathers, and the human lineage of Christ Himself).

After affirming that the Jews had many advantages, Paul asks the question, “What if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?” (verse 3). He answers the question in verse 4. The answer came right out of David’s penitential psalm (Psalm 51:4).

The point is that the unfaithfulness of the unbelieving Jews did not nullify God’s faithfulness to His covenant purposes. God’s truth stands and His purposes stand no matter what some of the people do or fail to do.

It is futile and wicked to attempt to bring God into judgment and to charge Him with falsehood. God is true, even if that would make every human being a liar. God is true whether others are or not. That is what qualifies Him and Him alone to be the Judge of all. He is justified in His sayings and refutes completely every charge that is brought against Him. God’s commands and actions are motivated by a commitment to secure the highest good (all things considered together) and are conditioned by infinite knowledge and wisdom. This is true of His act of destroying the corrupt human race at the Flood; it is true of His command to Israel to exterminate the hopelessly corrupt culture of Canaan; it is true of the everlasting punishment of impenitent sinners. Given our limited knowledge, we are in no position to judge Him who is perfect in character, knowledge and wisdom. God’s ways and God’s judgments have always been just and they always will be just. Every accusation against a loving and righteous God is slander against His character. It

shows ignorance of Him and His ways and a willingness to believe the worst about Him in spite of all the evidences to the contrary. Even the holiest of saints can honestly question why and how God acts in certain situations, but no one can honestly slander His character.

In verse 5, speaking from a merely human point of view, Paul brings up the specious argument that if our unrighteousness makes God's righteousness stand out by contrast, is not our unrighteousness glorifying Him? In that case, would not God be unjust to punish us for glorifying Him by our sins? The ancient Jews used to play these kinds of speculative, philosophical mind and word games. Of course, it is pure sophistry. It is the "clean spot on a dirty sheet" argument (the dirty sheet makes the clean spot stand out). Paul replies that on that premise God could not judge the Gentiles either.

Paul continues, still speaking from a merely human point of view. Paul employs the same spurious "logic" against those who follow that line of rationalization and yet accuse him of preaching falsehood. Paul is saying, "Okay. If I am preaching a lie, and that makes God's truth stand out by contrast, why are you (by your own 'logic') judging me to be a sinner?" In his argument Paul refers to those who slander him by falsely accusing him of advocating evil so that good will result. This was a gross distortion of Paul's teaching on grace. Even if Paul preached that we should do evil so that good will result (which he did not), his accusers still would not have a reason to judge him, given their own spurious "logic." By accusing Paul they were thus accusing themselves.

Paul declares that such objections by his detractors come from their dishonest and evil hearts; therefore their condemnation is just.

Romans 3:9 - 20

⁹What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

¹⁰As it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one;

¹¹There is none who understands;

There is none who seeks after God.

¹²They have all gone out of the way;

They have together become unprofitable;

There is none who does good, no, not one."

¹³Their throat is an open tomb;

With their tongues they have practiced deceit";

"The poison of asps is under their lips";

¹⁴Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

¹⁵Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶Destruction and misery are in their ways;

¹⁷And the way of peace they have not known."

¹⁸There is no fear of God before their eyes."

¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Are the Jews better than the Gentiles? Paul answers emphatically, "Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin." "Under sin" includes both sin's power and sin's guilt.

The apostle backs up this charge by quoting a series of Old Testament passages that affirm the universal moral depravity and guilt of all human moral agents (that includes Jews) prior to conversion to Christ. Keep in mind that at this point Paul is still addressing

Jews (“we”), and therefore he appeals to them right out of The Scriptures.

Verses 10 - 12 are from Psalm 14:1 - 3; Psalm 53:1 - 3; and Ecclesiastes 7:20.

Verse 13 is from Psalm 5:9 and Psalm 140:3.

Verse 14 is from Psalm 10:7.

Verses 15 - 17 are from Isaiah 59:7 and 8.

Verse 18 is from Psalm 36:1.

We notice the progression of the indictment. It begins by establishing that human moral depravity and guilt became universal. It includes not only all human beings as a group but also every human being personally subsequent to the beginning of moral accountability and prior to conversion. Having established the *universality* of human moral depravity, the apostle proceeds to describe in graphic biblical terms the *totality* of moral depravity. It is like the putrefaction of an open tomb and the deadly poison of asps.

Notice, first is their poisonous speech (verses 13 and 14). Next is their destructive behavior (verses 15 and 16). Last is their inner attitude (verses 17 and 18).

The apostle brings the entire indictment to a climax by stating the obvious: *what was written in the Old Testament law was written to and about the Jews* (verse 19). The curse of the Old Testament law is upon those who are under that law. Therefore, apart from the Messiah, the Jew stands before God condemned, without excuse, with no defense, and speechless, along with the rest of the sinning world. The very Mosaic Law that he rests on and that he thinks gives him a spiritual standing actually condemns him because the Law fully informs him of his sin and its consequences. His greater light under the Law brings greater responsibility.

All shall be judged according to their moral light. The Gentile will be judged by the light of natural revelation and his/her conscience (Romans 1). The Jew will be judged by the light of the Mosaic Law (Romans 2). Of course, in both cases the Jew or Gentile who now has the light of the gospel will be also judged by the light of the gospel. So then, every moral agent is morally obligated by his/her light and will stand before God accountable and liable for the sins committed against that light (see 2:12).

Romans 3:21 - 31

²¹But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

In view of what has been established concerning universal and total human moral depravity, how then can anyone be made righteous before God? The guilty cannot forgive their own sins. They cannot remove their own guilt. Legally, they have no hope. All that is left is the carrying out of the Divine sentence against them.

But wait! There is a way—one way. It is the way that only God could provide and that He *did* provide. It was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. It was completed and

established by Jesus Christ on the cross, and it was validated by His resurrection. God now shows it to us and points us to it.

It is very important for us to understand that Christ's death on the cross did not automatically save everyone. This is the common error of universalism. Christ's sacrifice is *sufficient* for all; it is *efficient* only for those who repent and believe.

Justification from sin is not unconditional. Although we can do nothing to merit it, we receive it only on the conditions that God justly and necessarily requires: repentance and faith. Technically, it is by faith alone because true faith includes repentance. In the act of faith, one turns to the Object of his/her faith—God in Christ; and in turning to God in Christ, the heart (will) turns *from* sin, just as in turning the face in one direction one automatically and necessarily turns the back against the opposite direction.

So then, God offers to make us righteous in Christ, and He actually does so the moment we truly put our faith in Him. We are declared righteous; we are given a right standing before God; and we are brought to a right state of heart (will)—*all by faith*.

This righteousness through faith is apart from the Law of Moses. It is conferred as a free gift from God through Jesus Christ on all who truly believe. Just as all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, even so all who truly believe are “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Grace is unmerited favor; it is receiving what we do not deserve.

God has presented Christ openly and publicly as a propitiation through faith in His blood. “Propitiation” is that which makes possible the gracious mercy and favor of God. A propitiation removes what has stood between God and us. It satisfies God's justice and brings us into His favor. Here it refers to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

This makes it morally possible for God to justify the believer without violating His righteousness and justice. If God were to forgive sin and justify the sinner without something being done that fully satisfies the demands of the broken moral law, He would be grossly unjust. He would be acting in reckless disregard for the moral order and therefore the well-being of the universe. We sinned. The broken moral law demands a penalty to uphold the honor, integrity, and influence of the moral law. Either we must suffer that penalty or an adequate substitute must suffer under that penalty in our place. Christ is that substitutionary Sacrifice. He took our place; now God can fully justify the person who believes in Jesus without violating His own justice. Mercy no longer violates justice. Christ did what the penalty is supposed to do, and much more.

This is how God fully redeemed the sins that were committed *before* Christ came. God had instituted animal sacrifices as an atonement for sins that were committed before Christ's sacrificial death. Those sacrifices were a temporary arrangement. The sins that they atoned for were only “passed over” but not fully redeemed until Christ redeemed them on the cross (see Hebrews 9:15). Thus faith in God's temporary provision was counted as faith in His permanent provision. This means that no one has ever been saved—no one's sins have been fully erased—except in Christ. Christ's death retroactively redeemed the sins of those who had lived by faith and whose faith had been put on their account for righteousness. Christ's death validated their faith.

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross demonstrates the righteousness of God by providing the only way for God to be just in justifying those who believe in Jesus. Of course, this completely excludes human boasting. Salvation by our own works certainly would not prevent boasting; in fact, it would promote boasting, boasting in our good works. But we forfeited any righteousness by works. We lost that possibility by our sins. So then, boasting is excluded by the law of faith. If we must trust Christ for righteousness, it means that we have none of our own. Our righteousness is from God, not of ourselves. Present righteousness by faith continues as we continue to live by faith.

The conclusion? We are justified by faith apart from the acts prescribed by the Law of

Moses. Because God is the God of all humanity, Jews and Gentiles, He offers justification by faith to all. God justifies believing Jews “out of faith” and believing Gentiles “through the faith.” The Jews are justified out of their faith in Jesus Christ; the Gentiles are justified through the same faith. The believing Jews had the promise of righteousness by faith in the witness of the Law and the Prophets; therefore, the revelation of it came to them directly. It came to the believing Gentiles indirectly through the proclamation of the faith by those who preached the gospel to them.

It is done! It is complete! We can add nothing to it.

Do we then nullify the law through the faith? (verse 31). That is, do we do away with the universal moral law, the “royal law,” the law of faith? “May it never be!” On the contrary, we establish law—moral law, the universal moral principles and obligations that were embodied in the Ten Commandments and the other moral precepts of the Old Testament. In fact, genuine faith includes honest heart-obedience and produces holiness. Faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9), works by love (Galatians 5:6), and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

**Abraham: Justification By Faith
Before The Law**

Romans 4:1 – 25

Paul's Epistle To The Galatians was written probably just prior to the Epistle To The Romans. In a real sense Galatians is the "forerunner" of Romans. In both epistles Abraham is the prime example of justification by faith prior to the Law of Moses. Much of the fourth chapter of Romans parallels the third chapter of Galatians, so much so that together they form the two rails of a common "track." For this reason one should carefully and prayerfully read the third chapter of Galatians before studying the fourth chapter of Romans. In both epistles the underlying principle is that justification by grace through faith is *and always has been* the only way to be made right before God.

Romans 4:1 - 3

¹What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Some manuscripts read "what Abraham our father according to the flesh has discovered." Others read "what Abraham our father has discovered according to the flesh." The former reading identifies Abraham as our (Jewish) natural father. The latter asks what Abraham discovered (regarding righteousness) according to his own human efforts.

If Abraham was justified before God by his own works, he would have something to boast about—*really* something. He could stand before God as a person who had never sinned and present his claim for the due rewards of his righteousness as a matter of justice. That would run contrary both to the stated fact of universal human sinfulness (3:1-23), and to the reality of human experience. Therefore, Abraham had no standing before God on the basis of his own works. And, of course, neither do we.

So then, how was Abraham made righteous before God? For the answer we are directed to The Scriptures—not to the Mosaic Law but clear back to Genesis, long before that Law was given.

The record states that Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6 KJV). So then, Abraham was justified by *faith*, real faith, the faith that trusts and obeys (see James 2:20 - 26), the faith "that works by love," as Paul already defined it in Galatians 6:5. Hebrews 11:8 says "By faith Abraham . . . obeyed." Real faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Such real faith justifies, and it alone justifies.

We are saved by faith apart from works, but we are not saved by a "faith" that does not work.

The faith that receives righteousness before God as a free gift of His grace also moves a person's whole being to love and obey the One in whom it trusts.

In verse three we come to a word that is found eleven times in various forms in Romans, Chapter 4. The Greek word is *logidzomai*. It is variously translated as "counted," "reckoned," "imputed," "credited." *Logidzomai* is an accounting term. It means to credit to one's account.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, God does not merely make a

“deposit” of righteousness to “account” to “balance” our sins. He justifies us from all sin and declares us completely righteous before Him.

Romans 4:4 and 5

⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

This is a firm statement of the fact of justification by faith. We are made righteous before God by faith, and only by faith. This follows logically from what has just been said about Abraham.

The person who earns something by working for it can claim it as a right. Whoever owes it to him or her is obligated to “pay up.” Just so, if we could stand before God and demand our eternal reward on the basis of our good works, God would be in debt to us and would be obligated to “pay up.”

Wouldn't that make Heaven an interesting place! All these “righteous” people forever bragging about what *they* did to get there, how much *they* deserve it, and how much better *they* are than most of the rest. God would receive no love, no gratitude, at all. What a miserable place Heaven would become.

No, the redeemed inhabitants of Heaven will forever acknowledge that they are there only because of God's grace and mercy—grace and mercy that they received by faith in Jesus Christ. They will be eternally grateful, and God alone will be glorified.

“But to him who does not work” (verse 5). This does not mean that those who are made righteous by faith do not work, for indeed “faith works by love” (Galatians 5:6). It means that they do not work in order to merit the reward. They put their trust totally and exclusively in God, “who justifies the ungodly.” They know that they could never forgive their own sins and clear their guilt, that they cannot bring themselves into a right standing before God. They had “blown it.” They know that only God can forgive them, justify them, and put them into a right standing before Him and a right relationship with Him and His moral order. Most of all, they have heard and believed the good news—God makes the ungodly righteous, and He does it by faith in Jesus Christ and *only* by faith in Jesus Christ!

That person's faith is credited to him/her as righteousness—instantaneous, full and complete righteousness. Total guilt is removed and replaced by total righteousness.

Romans 4:6 - 8

⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,

And whose sins are covered;

⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

Here again the witness of The Scriptures is cited. Justification by faith is confirmed by David in Psalm 32:1, 2.

This psalm came out of David's deep joy in God's forgiveness after he had experienced the deep agony of his guilty conscience and his broken fellowship with God in the adulterous and murderous affair involving Bathsheba, and after his sincere and thorough repentance and the full assurance that his sin had been forgiven and covered.

In this case David was under the Law of Moses and therefore under the sentence of death that was imposed by that law. The Law condemned him. Where could he go for relief, for mercy, for forgiveness, for *life*?

To God alone! And he did. He threw himself exclusively and completely on God's

offered mercy, and was forgiven.

Abraham was justified by faith *before* the Law of Moses. David was justified by faith *during* the Law of Moses. Today we are justified by faith *apart from* the Law of Moses.

In all cases, God justifies us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins.

Romans 4:9 - 12

⁹Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. ¹¹And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Abraham was justified (made righteous) *before* circumcision. This was the relevant point, a point the Jews overlooked.

Circumcision was the God-instituted sign and seal of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Judaizers of Paul's day were insisting that believers in Christ Jesus had to keep the Law of Moses, especially the sign and seal of circumcision, in order to be saved. Paul refutes that error by pointing out the fact that Abraham was justified by faith alone *before* he received the covenant-sign of circumcision (Genesis 15), and that his circumcision came later as the outward seal of the righteousness he already had received by faith (Genesis 17). Abraham's justification was by faith before his circumcision and certainly long before the Law of Moses.

Because Abraham was justified by faith prior to being circumcised, he became the spiritual "father" of *all* who put their faith in Jesus Christ for righteousness through Jesus Christ, whether they are circumcised (Jews) or not circumcised (Gentiles).

To all (Jews and Gentiles) who believe on God's means of justification, provided exclusively in Jesus Christ, Abraham remains the "father of circumcision." This time it is the true "circumcision" of the heart, not the flesh (Romans 2:28, 29). Abraham is the "father of circumcision" to them who walk and step (military terms) in the same honest, sincere, whole-hearted faith that Abraham himself placed in God when he was still uncircumcised.

This teaches us that faith is more than an isolated act. It is a course of life. By the initial act of the will to put our trust in Christ we step into the continuous "march" of faith. A faith that does not "walk" is dead (James 2:21-26). A *living* faith will work. It will walk with its Savior and Lord in daily living. That proves it is real faith.

Faith both *trusts* and *obeys*. Trust is faith resting. Obedience is faith acting. Faith resting is like stepping from the jetway into the airplane. Crossing that "line" is a huge, single act of faith. It is a commitment of trust for the entire flight. You sit back, fasten your seat belt, and let the pilot and the crew do it all. You depend entirely on the pilot to bring you safe and sound to your destination, even if you have never seen the pilot.

So then, faith both rests and works, trusts and obeys. Faith without works is dead (James). Works without faith are dead (Paul—Galatians and Romans).

The emphasis in Romans (as also in Hebrews 11 and James 2) is on these two essential qualities and how they function together essentially and vitally in genuine living faith.

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness. His faith was an

act of the will that also produced a life of active obedience. So it is with all who truly believe.

Romans 4:13 - 25

¹³For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, ¹⁵because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all ¹⁷(as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²²And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

²³Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

“Heir of the world” (verse 13). The “world-wide” scope of the promise is awesome. It stretches our thinking. The promise was made to Abraham *and to his seed*. Abraham’s “seed” is Christ (Galatians 3:16). The promise goes far beyond Abraham’s physical descendants (many though they be). It certainly extends beyond Israel under the Law of Moses. So then, the world-wide promise to Abraham’s seed—and also the definition of his “seed” —must also extend beyond the Law. It extends to all who are “in Christ” by faith (Galatians 3:29). The promise is not through the Law but through the righteousness that comes by faith. That makes it world-wide in its definition, its application, and its invitation. It also makes it “age-long” —throughout the gospel age—until Jesus returns.

If the eschatological heritage through righteousness belongs to them who are of the Law of Moses and because they are of the Law, faith is canceled out and the promise is rendered useless (idle, inactive. See also Galatians 3:18 on this point). In such a case either faith came too soon and was superseded (canceled out) by the Law, or the promise came too late because the Law came complete with severe penalties that activated God’s “wrath” (judicial opposition and action) against sin.

In other words, the Law of Moses had penalties and the universal disobedience of those who were under the Law triggered those penalties. So the Law brought about judgment, not righteousness. *In a strictly legal sense*, laws and penalties go together. If there is no law, there is no transgression (violation); if there is no transgression (violation), there is no penalty. The Law defined transgression and established the penalty. Those who live under the Law of Moses have already violated it and therefore have incurred its horrific penalty. So then, if true righteousness is to be obtained and established, it must be by some means other than the Law of Moses, or any other legal code that embodies the moral law.

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace (verse 16). In this way the promise (including the promise of the Spirit—Galatians 3:14) is established (firm and

stable) to all the “seed,” that is, to all who truly believe God as Abraham did. Thus Abraham is the spiritual father of all who place their faith fully in God, particularly in His redemptive act in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26 - 29).

Yes, Abraham is “the father of us all” (all true believers in Jesus Christ) right in the very presence of God, “who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (verse 17).

So then, the sovereign decrees of God are the solid foundation of our faith. God calls the non-being into being. The apostle refers back to God’s decree to Abraham, “I have made (set) you a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). It was a “done deal” before it actually came about.

Beginning with verse 18 we consider the depth and the scope of the “Abraham kind of faith.” Remember the solid foundation of our faith—God gives life to the dead and calls what does not exist into being (verse 17). The example given at this point is Abraham and Sarah. God is able to raise up children to Abraham out of stones (Matthew 3:9). That would go far beyond what God did for Abraham and Sarah; it is a declaration of the absolute creative power of God. By tying it in with Galatians 3:29 it ultimately declares God’s power to raise up those who are spiritually dead and by the new birth to make them living spiritual children of Abraham by faith. They are justified and made righteous by the same faith that justified Abraham and made him righteous.

Against hope Abraham believed upon hope (verse 18). That is, against all human certainty, Abraham relied on the higher, divine certainty. That is how he became the father of many nations and ultimately “the father of us all” who believe in Christ (verse 16). This is the ultimate fulfillment of Genesis 17:5.

Verses 19 -21 state that Abraham was not weak in faith, even though he was aware of his own age and the “deadness” of Sarah’s reproductive organs. He did not waver (see James 1:6), but became powerful in faith, giving glory to God. It was firmly and permanently settled in his soul that God was able to perform what He had promised.

So here we see three qualities of Abraham. He (1) was strong in faith, (2) was fully persuaded (assured, carried to full measure), (3) gave glory to God. We see an advanced stage in the maturing of Abraham’s faith. At this point his faith was not fully matured; it was not quite ready for its ultimate test in the command to “sacrifice” Isaac (Genesis 22). Still, it was now much stronger than the earlier days when he set himself to leave Haran and then wandered through Canaan and into Egypt with uncertainty and insecurity. Now Abraham had absolute confidence in the character and ability of God. If God can, He will. He can!

As we read the record of this event in Genesis 17:17, Abraham does indeed appear to waver at God’s promise (“Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” —KJV).

But, although at that point Abraham had doubts about *how* God was going to do this (as he thought about his own and Sarah’s ages), he did not waver in his confidence in God Himself and the *fact* that God could and would do what He promised. His doubts arose when he looked at himself and Sarah. His doubts vanished when he focused on God. It was not faith in his faith; it was faith in God.

In this example we see that true faith—the faith that brings justification, a right standing *before* God and a right relationship *with* God—is a total commitment that rests entirely on who God is and what He says.

All of this is more than ancient history and an interesting personal drama written to commemorate an outstanding spiritual achievement. It was written for *us*. Why? Because we desperately need to be made right with God, and we see in Abraham exactly how God does this. It is by faith! *That* was the faith that God credited to Abraham for righteousness. *That* is the righteousness that God credits to all who truly believe—with this kind of faith. It was the faith that produced Isaac, that produced nations, that

produced a multitude of justified saints. Gospel faith is the same kind as Abraham's faith! "To us who believe" (verse 24). Believe what? Believe whom? "Believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (verse 24). To believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ one must believe in the God who raised Him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a myth. It is not a symbol of some kind of subjective "faith." It happened in time-space history, and *God did it!* We believe the God of Abraham, the One who justified him by faith and also raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Our faith is not only in the fact of the resurrection but also in One who raised Him from the dead.

Verse 25 tells us the *why* of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was delivered up (to death on the cross) for—on account of—our transgressions, and was raised up from the dead for—on account of (for the cause of, to secure)—our justification (see 5:10).

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ His death on the cross would have no saving effect (see 1 Corinthians 15). It was His resurrection that validated His person and therefore His vicarious, saving death. God raised Jesus from the dead. That settles it!

So God justifies us—declares us righteous and makes us righteous—by faith in Jesus Christ, our risen and only Savior. That is and always has been the only way. Even Abraham's faith was ultimately validated by Christ's death and resurrection. Abraham believed God—the only true and living God, the One who in time raised Christ from the dead and thus validated Jesus' claims and also validated the faith of all who truly believe in Him.

Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56 KJV).

For more on the faith of Abraham, see Hebrews 11:8 - 19.

So then, we can rest our faith fully in God. If God can rejuvenate Abraham, regenerate Sarah's womb, produce Isaac, make children of Abraham out of stones if He chooses, and raise Jesus from the dead, *He can save us.*

If you are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), come alive in Jesus Christ. Salvation was *provided for us* at the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ; it is *produced in us* when we believe with all the heart.

At this point we are ready to move right on into Romans, Chapter 5. Believers are reconciled through His death, and fully saved by and in His life (Romans 5:10).

Much MoreRomans 5:1 - 8

¹Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

This is the first set of results—blessings, benefits—of being justified by faith. Being justified means that God treats believers in Christ as though they had never sinned. In a sense, believers have a new past as well as a new present standing. They are not pardoned sinners but justified saints—justified *from* sin, not *in* sin. Justification secures release from the guilt and practice of sin; it places believers into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that secures victory over the power and practice of sin.

1. We have peace with God. Some of the old manuscripts of the Alexandrian and Western texts read this as a subjunctive (“let us have peace with God”). This is clearly a scribal error because it is completely out of harmony with the context. This variant reading involves one letter in Greek and is the result of reading an omega instead of an omicron. In Hellenistic times the pronunciation between the two became much less distinct, opening the way for scribal errors in transmitting the text.

This passage describes what we *have*. We have peace with God. Peace with God includes (a) a right standing with God, the Moral Governor of the universe; (b) moral harmony and compatibility with Him; and (c) an open, intimate love relationship with Him in and through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Because believers have peace with God, we are not on probation or parole. We are fully justified, fully qualified, fully accepted in Christ.

2. We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Our right standing is an accomplished fact. It is a standing in grace, God’s unmerited favor. We entered into this position by faith and we remain there by faith. We are standing in God’s grace and God’s grace is all-sufficient to make us stand. So long as we are standing in grace by faith, we will not fail and we will not fall. See 2 Corinthians 1:24 and 1 Peter 5:12.

3. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Believers have a glorious future set before us and we are rejoicing in the anticipation of it. We have eternal life, a present and everlasting relationship with the Father and the Son (John 17:3). That gives us a reason to be joyful no matter what else we experience in life. Earthly joys cannot compare with it,

and earthly difficulties cannot diminish it. This joy transcends all.

4. We glory in tribulations. Because we are justified by faith and therefore have a glorious future set before us, we can be joyful through the tribulations of life. We do so because we know that the trials and tribulations of life set in motion a process that builds in us the character qualities that prepare us for the full employments and enjoyments of our glorious eternal future. By far, the destiny is worth the difficulty. Tribulation produces perseverance. Perseverance produces proven character. Proven character produces hope (the anticipation of our eternal glory). And this hope, this certainty, does not disappoint (see Romans 9:33 and 10:11). This hope does not disappoint because God's love is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is, God's love has been fully established in our hearts by the Holy Spirit because He has made Jesus so real and personal to us that we have "fallen in love" with Him and so with the Father.

Our love-bond with God through Christ by the Spirit is proof that we have been reconciled to God and are in fellowship with Him. We are joined with Him in the essential quality of His character—love (1 John 4:8, 16). Thus our hope is firmly established and will not disappoint us.

We will return to this theme in Romans 8:28 - 30.

The history of God's "poured out" love is described in verses 6 - 8. We were morally weak and sinful because we had given in and given up to the control of the flesh. The Law of Moses could not break the power of our fleshly appetites once we surrendered to their unreasonable demands (see 8:3). In God's appointed time ("the fullness of the time"—Galatians 4:4), Christ died on behalf of the ungodly. He did not die just for the "righteous" people (in a legal sense); hardly anyone would do that. He did not die for the "good" people (in a moral sense); some might go so far as to dare to do that. God demonstrated the depth and the magnitude of His love for us by doing in Christ what nobody else would even think of doing—*die for the ungodly*, for us while we were yet sinners.

God did the reconciling act in Christ before any one of us was born. Paul could speak of himself and his contemporaries as being sinners before Christ died. It applies to all subsequent generations of sinners. Christ regarded us all as future sinners and died on behalf of us as such. He anticipated the fact that we would sin and incur guilt and condemnation. Although He died for those future sins, they are forgiven only when we repent and believe. God's reconciling act in Christ stands as an accomplished fact for all time and for the whole world. Although it was provided for all, it is effective only *for* those who believe *when* they believe.

Jesus loves us so much that He would rather die than be in Heaven without us.

Romans 5:9 - 11

⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

This passage contains the second set of results—blessings, benefits—of being justified by faith. The first set focused on the present; this second set focuses on the future.

If God loved us with the love of His compassion while we were sinners, how much more He must love us with the love of His approval now that we have been reconciled to Him.

In verse 9 we come to the first "much more." We are now justified by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. That took care of the guilt of the past. Much more we shall be saved through Him from the wrath of God on sin. Through Christ God is fully able to keep us

from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). How God does this is described in verse 10. The “much more” of verse 9 is expanded by the “much more” of verse 10. It is a step beyond reconciliation. Reconciliation was provided by Christ’s death and becomes effective in us by faith. The future qualities and components of our salvation are secured by His life. *Christ’s resurrection life preserves what His redeeming death accomplished.* He ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). That is the foundation of the believer’s assurance.

In view of what God did for us in Christ, what He is doing in and for us now, and what He has in store for us in the future, we rejoice in our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation. We have it *now*. It is an accomplished fact, a present possession, a sure hope. No wonder believers rejoice! The apostle Peter described it fully in 1 Peter 1:3 - 9. Verse 8 says that we rejoice with a joy beyond expression and full of glory.

Our joy is in God—above, beyond, and even in spite of what we experience in this earthly life.

Romans 5:12 - 21

¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. ¹⁷For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.

²⁰Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This passage shows the contrast between what Adam did and how that affected us, and what Christ did and how that affected us.

Since the time of Origen and especially since the time of Augustine, this passage has been cited to support the doctrine of original sin. Such a misinterpretation of The Scriptures would not have happened if the doctrine itself had not been presupposed. This was the result of the influence of Greek philosophy, particularly Neo-Platonism, on Christian theology. Plato taught “the fall of the soul.” Origen inferred the doctrine from the practice of infant baptism. Augustine inferred the doctrine from his own personal experience with moral failure prior to his conversion to Christ, and within the context of his own Neo-Platonic mind-set. Augustine’s successful contest with Pelagius and Coelestius, a success confirmed by the Roman emperor, provided the occasion for the official establishment of the doctrine. [For more on this subject, please see Appendix A, “The Influence Of Greek Philosophy On The Development Of Christian Theology.”]

We are considering this passage from a biblical, Hebrew/moral frame of reference

instead of looking at it through the lens of a Greek/ontological mind-set. That is, we want to understand these words of the apostle in the context of the Bible's clear definition of sin as a voluntary choice, the context in which Paul wrote these words.

We must keep in mind that sin is not a "thing." It is not a mystical, meta-physical "essence." The Bible consistently regards sin as a moral choice, a responsible act of the will.

So then, what does this passage teach? This passage shows the contrast between what Adam did and what Christ did, and the effect of each on humanity. It is a development of the subject of justification, the main theme of the epistle. It sets forth the "much more" effect of Christ's redemptive sacrifice than the effect of Adam's sin.

Adam was the first *man* to sin when he ate the forbidden fruit. Even though Eve ate first, God held Adam responsible. Eve was deceived and fell into transgression; Adam did it with his eyes wide open (1 Timothy 2:14).

Sin (a voluntary choice) was introduced into human experience by one man—Adam. Adam started it. Because in His foreknowledge God saw that sin would become the universal choice and practice, He placed a limitation on the human life span to set boundaries on people's opportunity to progress in sin in this life. So *physical* death spread to all mankind. The fact that all indeed have sinned demonstrates the wisdom of God's preventive action.

From Adam to Moses the moral law had not yet been codified in the Mosaic jurisprudence (the Law of Moses). Therefore, people could not be held guilty of breaking a specific written command. Nevertheless, people still sinned against the universal moral law as it resided in their consciences. In fact, they became so morally depraved that God had to destroy them by the Flood and begin anew with Noah and his family. So from the beginning death reigned over the entire human race. People were born; people lived; people died.

Verses 14 and 15 teach that, in a contrasting sense, Adam was a type of Christ. Adam's offense led to universal sinning and condemnation, and brought universal physical death. Adam was the head of the "old humanity," characterized by sin and death. Christ's obedience to God's redemptive purpose opened God's grace to all (the "many"). Thus Christ is the "second Adam," the Head of the "new humanity" of the redeemed, characterized by righteousness and life.

Verses 16 and 17 declare that the results of what Christ did far exceed the results of what Adam did. The sin of one man resulted in the entire human race being led into sin and condemnation (including condemnation to death). God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ "followed many trespasses and brought justification" (NIV). The fact that the sins of mankind are so many made the gift that much greater. One man's sin brought death; how much more do those who receive God's abundant grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one Man, Jesus Christ. This is the more abundant life that Jesus came to give us (John 10:10). Christ even delivered us from the fear of death that had held us in bondage all our lifetime (Hebrews 2:15).

The result of Christ's one redemptive act overcame the result of Adam's sin.

Verse 18 picks up from verse 12 and continues.

Let us look carefully at verses 18 and 19. No Bible passage is interpreted correctly if that interpretation leads to a conclusion that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Any such interpretation is in error. If this passage is taken to mean that Adam's sin automatically made everyone guilty, consistency necessarily drives us to the inescapable conclusion that Christ's sacrifice automatically saved everyone. It is futile to plead otherwise. The Greek original is very strong: "*just as . . . so also.*" To plead otherwise one has to make an arbitrary assertion contrary to language and logic. We must not apply one rule of interpretation to the first part of the sentence and a different rule of interpretation to the second part of the same sentence. To misinterpret the first part of

the sentences of verses 18 and 19 to teach the doctrine of original sin forces the advocates of that doctrine to the error of Universalism—that everyone will be saved. The Augustinian view of this passage is a stronghold of Universalism.

In this passage Paul says that Adam's sin brought about a tragic universal result, but Christ's obedience (His death on the cross) brought about a glorious universal result. Each affects everyone. Adam opened the door to universal sinfulness and condemnation; Jesus Christ opened the way of salvation to all. Involved in this are universal *physical* death by Adam and universal *physical* resurrection by Jesus Christ. This is taught also in 1 Corinthians 15:20 - 26. Just as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, each in his own order (turn).

Verses 20 and 21 reveal God's purpose in bringing in the Law of Moses. The Law entered that the trespass might increase and expand. The Law showed the sinfulness of sin. It defined the offenses of sin in legal terms and set legal barriers to sin. So in breaking these barriers sinners only multiplied their trespasses.

For example, if there were no traffic lights or stop signs, people would drive through intersections at will. The result would be accidents, injuries, and fatalities. But no law would be broken. No one would incur the penalty of law for reckless driving because there would be no law and therefore no penalty against reckless driving. The effects of reckless driving would be everywhere, of course, and people would know they are doing wrong; but no one would be legally penalized for it.

But when the law is set in place with appropriate penalties, the situation changes dramatically. Traffic signs and signals are all over the city. If people continue to drive as they did before, their behavior is now illegal. What was once merely unwise and reckless behavior is now illegal behavior. The law made them lawbreakers. If they are determined to drive the way they are used to driving, the law only frustrates them and hardens their opposition.

"They're not going to tell *me* how to drive. I'll show them!"

Their continued reckless driving multiplies their offenses, builds their criminal record, and piles penalty on penalty.

Just so the Law of Moses entered the human situation to turn wrong, unreasonable and destructive behavior into real criminal offenses. As a result, the trespass increased. By giving him barriers to break through, The Law showed the lawless the evil of his selfish heart.

But where sin abounded, grace abounded "*much more.*" Grace super-abounded! What Christ did far exceeds what Adam did. Life in Christ overcame death in sin. That is the main theme and the climax of this chapter. Human sin has increased, but God's grace is an overflowing flood that is more than sufficient to overcome sin and liberate from its power all who truly believe from the heart.

Sin reigned in death. It was a death-reign. It enslaved us, ruled us, and drove us to our graves. In total contrast God's overflowing grace reigns in believers through *righteousness*, bringing us into eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The reign of grace to life defeats the reign of sin to death.

So, what reigns in you? Does sin reign in death, or does grace reign through righteousness? If you are still under the law of sin and death, grace is overflowing to you. Receive it now.

A Slave, Dead Or AliveRomans 6:1 - 14

¹What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

In this chapter the inspired apostle uses a common human experience (death) to demonstrate and illustrate a moral and spiritual reality. In fact, in verse 19 he states clearly that he is speaking in human terms because of the weakness of their flesh (that is, their limited human ability to understand). The purpose is to make the point easy to understand, not to complicate it (as many theologians have done).

The point is this: in salvation the believer identifies with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Christ died *for* sin; at salvation we die *to* sin. Christ rose to eternal life; at salvation the new believer rises to live a new life in Him. This is declared in our water baptism. We count the person we used to be *dead*. We bury him/her. We count the new person we are now in Christ to be alive to God (verse 11). We now have a living relationship with the living Christ.

The apostle responds to two silly questions, posed in verses 1 and 15 respectively.

The first question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" is a sophistry that some might raise from the fact that where sin abounded, grace super-abounded (5:20).

Shall we keep on sinning so that more grace will be released on us? Of course, the answer is a strong negative: "may it never be!" That would be like growing and spreading more bacteria so we could develop and distribute more antibiotics. Both are utter nonsense.

Remember, grace reigned through *righteousness* (5:21). Although sin is the reason we need grace, grace leads to righteousness, not to more sin. The reign (triumph) of grace is

demonstrated in the righteousness that is produced in those who receive God's grace.

Paul applies the contrast between death and life to the spiritual (moral, relational) state of the believer. The justified person (5:1) is both dead *and* alive—dead to sin and alive to God.

So the apostle asks the impossible question: “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (verse 2). The “how” is rhetorical. The answer is obvious. We cannot live *in* what we died *to*. We died *to* sin; it is a moral impossibility for us at the same time to live *in* sin (see Galatians 2:20; 3:3; and 1 Peter 2:24).

Paul continues to press the point forcefully by aiming another “laser beam” at ignorance. “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?”

So what does it mean to be baptized “into” Christ and therefore “into” His death?

When we put our faith in Christ, we enter into a personal relationship with Him. We are “in Christ.”

Is this a “baptism?” No.

Is this what 1 Corinthians 12:13 is talking about? No. That is a baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (the Church) at salvation.

Does it mean that we are actually placed into a relationship with Christ by water baptism? No. That happens by faith *before* the new believer is baptized in water. The person does not go down into the water an unbeliever and come up a believer. The person becomes a believer *before* going into the water. The death to sin occurs before the “funeral” (burial with Christ). People do not die by being buried. They die *before* they are buried.

The believer comes into a vital spiritual relationship with Christ by faith before being baptized. His or her subsequent baptism in water is the open proclamation of that fact and its meaning. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5); in water baptism we rinse off (wash away—Acts 22:16) those sins, making an open riddance of them.

What, then, does “into” in verse 3 mean? The Greek word is *eis*. It has a variety of meanings. Its primary meaning is “into.” It also means “in relationship to,” “in reference to,” plus others.

The context of this passage clearly defines the meaning of *eis* here to mean an identification with Christ in His death. As He died *for* sin, we die *to* sin. His death becomes our death. This is also the meaning of the term in Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Verse 4 explains verse 3. Water baptism is the outward expression of our identification with Christ both in His death and in His resurrection. The rite represents the reality, but the rite itself is not the reality.

“Newness of life” (verse 4) is the result of being justified by faith (5:1).

If we have been “united together” with Christ in the likeness of His death (water baptism), we will also be of His resurrection. “Resurrection” here is not referring to the future resurrection of our bodies, although that is ultimately in view (verses 8 - 10). It is referring to the “newness of life” in verse 3 (and also verse 11). If our water baptism signifies that we are truly united with Christ in His death, our life from then on will demonstrate that we are truly alive with Him in the power of His resurrection.

At water baptism the believer unites with Christ publicly as he or she has already united with Christ personally. It is meaningless to go through the water of baptism unless one has truly died with Christ—died to self and sin.

“Knowing this” (verse 6) stands in contrast to “do you not know?” (verse 3).

As believers in Christ, we know this to be an established fact: “our old man was crucified with Him.” Our “old man” is not some mystical, metaphysical “being” living down inside of the believer. Our “old man” is simply the person we were before salvation. The

person we used to be is dead, crucified with Christ. The “body of sin” was not some mystical, Platonic “body.” It was simply the body we used to do our sinning: the mouth that spoke lies and blasphemy; the hands that stole and hurt others; the feet that carried us to the wrong places; the parts of our body that we used in immoral acts; the body that was abused and marred by sin. That sinning body is no more. It was crucified with Christ. It has been abolished, done away with. We buried it in the waters of baptism. From that time on we are no longer slaves to that sinning body. We live in His resurrection.

Because we died to sin, we are now freed—justified—from it (verse 7).

In verses 8 through 10 we look to our future bodily resurrection. Christ’s death was a once-for-all event; so was His resurrection. Both are permanent in fact and in results. Having been raised from the dead, Christ dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. By the death He died, He died to sin once. That is, Christ dealt with the sin issue once-for-all. He died for our sins; He conquered our sins; He liberated us from sin. All that is now past. It is over, done with. Now Jesus Christ “lives to God.” Everything is “God-centered.” Jesus Christ is our living Lord, reigning at the right hand of God the Father, our all-sufficient High Priest who is ever interceding on our behalf. From there He will come again in power.

“Likewise” (verse 11)—in the same way as Christ—we reckon ourselves to be dead to sin (once and for all) but alive to God in Christ Jesus (once and for all). Reckon—*logidzomai*—that accounting term that was so prominent in chapter 4. Count it done. You died with Christ. You buried the body that you used for your sinning. Whenever you are tempted, you affirm that fact. The person who used to do those things is dead, buried—with Christ. The new man—the new person you are now in Christ—is alive to God in Jesus Christ.

Therefore (verse 12), you are not to allow (present, active, imperative) the evil desires of sin to reign (rule) in your mortal body as they once did. Sin has no place there. You reject its appeals. *You are living up to your baptism. You are living the baptized life.* You are both dead and alive—dead to sin and alive to God (Galatians 2:20).

So then (verse 13), we believers are not to offer the members (parts) of our bodies as tools and weapons of unrighteousness in obedience to sin, but to offer ourselves to God as people who have been made alive from the death we were in while we were “living” (so we thought) in sin, and to offer our bodies in obedience to God for Him to use as tools of righteousness for worship and service.

Sin shall not “lord it over” (master, control) believers because we are not under the law but under grace. “Law” is mentioned here and will be addressed more fully in the first part of Romans chapter 7.

If we were under the Law, we would be under the dominion of sin because law is given to curb lawlessness. But believers are not lawless. Sin does not master us because we are under grace. Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age (Titus 2:11, 12). Law did not deliver us from the power and practice of sin; grace did. Freedom from the Law is not freedom *to* sin; it is freedom *from* sin. The person who has been set free from sin no longer needs the Law to restrain him/her.

So then, people who are still ruled by sin are not under grace. Victory over sin is proof that a person is under grace. It is the hallmark of the true Christian.

Romans 6:15 - 23

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you

obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage teaches us that there are two kinds of slavery: slavery to sin and love-slavery to God. Both are voluntary; that is, we choose what or Whom we will serve. Having chosen our “master,” we will serve that master as long as we choose to do so. We can change masters; nevertheless, as long as we choose one master we will serve that master and reject the other. Slavery to sin is miserable bondage; our passions are cruel slave-drivers. Slavery to God is joyful freedom. Jesus brings rest to the soul; His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

In verse 15 we read the second silly question. This also is a sophistry that some might raise from the fact that where sin abounded grace super-abounded (5:20).

In verse 1 the question is whether or not we should continue in sin. Here the emphasis is on individual acts of sin. Shall we commit sins because we are not under the Law but under grace? Again, the answer is a strong negative: “May it never be!”

In verse 16 the apostle asks the same question he asked in verse 3: “do you not know?” This question directs another “laser beam” at ignorance.

The obvious fact the apostle drives “home” is that to whom we yield ourselves slaves to obey, we are that master’s slaves as long as we continue in that choice.

Our choice of the master (end) will determine our choice of the service (means). Continuous, persistent, determined loyalty will continue as long as the commitment of the will to that master continues.

Only two alternatives are given: sin leading to death, or obedience leading to righteousness. No third option is possible because no third mode of moral action exists or can exist. Disobedience is the only alternative to obedience. Sin is the only alternative to righteousness. Self is the only alternative to God.

Faith and sin are mutually exclusive. They are opposites. They cannot co-exist.

To be free from sin is to be a willing, eager, happy love-slave of righteousness. There is no neutrality, no middle ground. It is a true “open middle.” No one can serve two masters; to love and accept one is to hate and reject the opposite.

The apostle Paul is thankful, not that the believers of Rome had been slaves of sin, but that *although* they had been slaves to sin, they were delivered *into* the whole structure of liberating truth (verse 17). The person who is delivered from sin is not released into a moral vacuum, set free to wander aimlessly. Remember, there is no third mode of moral action. As long as we are moral agents we will obey one of two masters. The person who is set free from sin is delivered into the truth, just as a kidnapped child is set free to be “delivered” into the security and fellowship of his or her family.

“Having been set free from sin” (verse 18). Let these words, this emphatic statement, this liberating fact, be deeply carved into our minds and souls! The true believer in Jesus Christ is *free from sin*. Why? Because we *died* to sin (verse 2). Count it done! (verse 11). We had our baptismal funeral and buried the old person (verse 3). Now we are alive in Christ (verse 4). We are happy, eager love-slaves to righteousness. Our commitment to righteousness is true freedom.

“I speak in human terms” (verse 19). At the beginning of this chapter Paul emphasized

that he was using very common and understandable human analogies to convey this essential truth. He did this to answer the two silly questions some might ask (verses 1 and 15). Paul made it simple. People have made it complicated.

The apostle likens the members of our bodies to tools (verse 13). Like tools, the members of our bodies have no will of their own. They are only matter and therefore have no moral character in themselves. They are the slaves of the will and automatically carry out the choices of the will (unless there is physical restraint or paralysis). They might and often do act contrary to the *wishes* of the will but they do not act contrary to the *choices* of the will, as we will see in Romans 7. Sometimes certain parts of the body are spoken of in The Scriptures as sinful or holy. Such descriptions apply to the way they are *used*, not to their substance. Moral character cannot be applied to matter *per se*.

Just as we used to present (yield, offer) the members of our bodies as tools to commit lawlessness progressing to even more lawlessness, even so now we are to present (yield, offer) the members of our bodies as tools to carry out righteous acts resulting in a lifestyle of holiness.

To the people who want all restrictions removed from their pursuit of self-gratification, righteousness is a major obstacle, a frustrating inhibition, an intolerable restraint, a confining bondage. We see it in rebellious teenagers who angrily chafe under the rules and try to press the limits of those rules. We see it in people who were raised with biblical teaching who reach adulthood and throw it all aside so they can “find out for themselves” what the world has to offer. They want to be “free” from God’s righteousness, and popular “quicksand counsel” urges them on.

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption, for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage” (2 Peter 2:19).

By choosing to be “free” from righteousness, they lock themselves into the shackles of their sin.

So verse 21 asks the person who had been down that road and had fallen into that trap, “What fruit [benefit] did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?” “Freedom” from righteousness gained nothing but slavery, shame, pain, and loss.

“But now” (verse 22), an echo of verse 18. What a blessed contrast! Now in Christ freedom from sin and willing, eager, happy “slavery” to Christ gains a productive life of holiness (an echo of the last part of verse 10), and the end (result, outcome) is eternal life.

Sin pays. It pays in death. It pays in full—no deductions.

Eternal life is God’s gift. We do not earn it; if we did, it would not be a gift. It costs you nothing; yet it costs you *everything*—your bondage to your old sinful self. Drop whatever you are holding on to and reach out for God’s gift. Grab hold on eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12). Get a grip on it and hold on for dear life.

Keep in mind that the gift—eternal life—is a personal relationship with the Father and the Son (John 17:3). We must continue in that relationship (1 John 2:24). Eternal life is to be *lived*—both now and forever.

Dead To The Law

Romans 7:1 - 4

¹Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? ²For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. ³So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. ⁴Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

As he stated in chapter 6, verse 19, the apostle is using common human analogies to convey truth in an understandable way. Here he uses another such analogy to show that the believer in Christ is dead to the Law of Moses.

As long as a man is alive, his wife is “bound” to him by the law of marriage (see also 1 Corinthians 7:39). The basic rule is that if she marries another man while her husband is alive, she is an adulteress. If her husband dies, she is legally and morally free to marry another man.

This analogy fits the relationship of the believer in Christ to the Law of Moses.

The Law referred to in Romans 7 is the Law of Moses, not the universal moral law. The moral law is not a set of rules or a piece of legislation that can be changed or repealed. The moral law is the law of love. It exists of itself because of who God is and who we and our fellow creatures are. Because God is intrinsically and supremely valuable and other human beings are intrinsically as valuable as ourselves, we are morally obligated to love God supremely and other people as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). That is reality.

The Law of Moses did not create right and wrong. It was put in place to teach us the reality of right and wrong and to set boundaries on human behavior. It was our “tutor” to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24, 25).

The conclusion of the marriage analogy is in verse 4. The Law of Moses had authority over us when we were “alive” to sin. But now because believers in Christ died to sin (6:2), we also died to the Law of Moses. We no longer need it to enforce righteousness on us. The moral law, embodied in the Law of Moses, is now embodied in our hearts. We count ourselves dead to sin, crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). Sin does not control a dead person; therefore, the Law of Moses has no authority over a dead person. No one puts handcuffs on a corpse.

By His death on the cross Christ ended the Law of Moses for believers. Through His death we died to sin and therefore through His body we died to the Law (see Galatians 2:19 and context). We are no longer “wedded” to the Law of Moses. That “marriage” did not produce life. In a real, spiritual sense we are now “wedded” to the living, risen Christ, and the “offspring” of that living relationship is true righteousness and holiness to God (6:21, 22).

This is an appropriate place to pause and address a pertinent matter. From this point on the New International Version of the Bible (NIV) renders the Greek word for “flesh” (*sarx*) as “sinful nature.” It mentions “flesh” in its footnotes as an alternate reading.

“Sinful nature” is not a translation; it is a theological interpretation based on prevailing Neo-Platonic/Augustinian presuppositions. The editors of one edition of my book, What You Should Know About The Holy Spirit substituted “sinful nature” for “flesh.”

Although “flesh” (*sarx*) means more than just the soft tissue of the human body, it does not indicate some imagined mystical/metaphysical essence that resides in us. In the inspired epistles of the apostle Paul it signifies the passions that arise out of our *human* nature, particularly as those passions involve our bodies, and that secure the voluntary consent and slavery of the human soul (will) to their unreasonable and morally unlawful indulgence. Our human nature is not sinful *per se*, nor are our natural desires sinful *per se*. Jesus also had a human nature; its desires tempted him, too, but He never consented to their unreasonable and morally unlawful indulgence.

Romans 7:5 and 6

⁵For 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. ⁶But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Believers are united with Christ in His death and we are alive with Him in His resurrection. We are dead to sin and the Law and alive over sin and the Law. In this new relationship, this new life, we have victory over sin. Whoever is born of God does not commit (do, practice) sin (1 John 3:9). Believers have been justified and freed from sin. Although the Law of Moses is still instructive to us, we no longer need it to keep us “in bounds.” The Law is for the lawless (1 Timothy 1:9). Believers are not lawless.

Believers no longer live “in the flesh,” that is, voluntary slavery to our fleshly desires. We *were* in the flesh prior to our conversion. According to chapters 8 and 9, people who live in voluntary slavery to their fleshly desires cannot please God. As long as they pursue the unreasonable indulgences of their own desires, they will choose and act accordingly. That is total hostility to God. That is total *moral* depravity.

When we were in that moral condition of willful and unreasonable commitment to self-gratification, the emotions (passions) of sin put the members of our body into action to produce acts of sin, resulting in spiritual and ultimately eternal death. Those passions of sin were aggravated by the fact that the Law prohibited their indulgence. We knew better both by conscience and by precept. To continue in the indulgence of the passions of sin we had to resist the remonstrances of both the Law and our own conscience. That only made matters worse and aggravated our discomfort and misery. That produced the “wretched” person described later in Romans 7.

Now we as believers have died to the sin that held us; therefore, we have been delivered from the Law of Moses and its custody. Dead to sin; dead to the Law. Death released us.

Galatians 5:24 affirms this. “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” This does not mean that Christians are unfeeling stoics. We do not reject normal emotions. We just do not let our desires rule us. We do not feed them and allow them to get out of control. We keep them our servants under Christ.

The only way to be dead to the Law is to be dead to sin. The person who is not dead to sin is not yet dead to the Law. The Law still holds him.

Now we serve God in newness of spirit—truly, willingly, freely, joyfully—and not in the drudgery of a religious duty to the outward observance of the letter of the Law. That produced nothing for God or for us (6:21, 22).

Romans 7:7 - 12

⁷What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness

unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.¹⁰ And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.¹² Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

This passage tells us what the Law of Moses did to us and for us. It begins with another silly question: “is the law sin?”

“Certainly not!” In fact, the opposite is true. The Law taught us (Paul uses the personal pronoun, “me”) right from wrong and did so very clearly and forcefully. The Law of Moses defined sin in specific terms and in so doing awakened in us the light of the universal moral law. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

The Law tells us that sins are not merely “human weaknesses,” “poor choices,” “mistakes,” or inconsequential “bad habits.” They are *sin*—sin against God, against others, even against ourselves—sin that incurs real guilt and serious consequences, especially divine judgment.

Paul uses covetousness as an example to represent the entire range of controlling passions.

From now on through the rest of this chapter, Paul puts himself in the place of the person under the Law of Moses. In describing himself as a person under the Law, Paul is not referring to himself in his present state as a redeemed and regenerated believer in Christ. Clearly, the two are mutually exclusive. This must be kept in mind. Much theological confusion has resulted from the assertion that Paul is speaking of himself as a believer in Christ. Paul never confused people; some of his interpreters certainly have done so.

The sinner, religious or otherwise, is committed to self and self-gratification. That primary, fundamental commitment, that supreme and ultimate end of pursuit, is what makes him or her a sinner. It is a voluntary state, a deliberate set of the soul.

Now, as long as the sinner went along with little to challenge the conscience, he put up little moral resistance. He was “alive.” He lived what he considered to be a “normal” life. He did what was socially acceptable, staying out of trouble and out of jail. He was a comfortable sinner. Without the Law, his sin was “dead”: dormant, undisturbed, unchallenged, un-aggravated.

Then along came the Law of Moses and ended all that. The Ten Commandments awakened his dormant conscience and challenged his behavior. Still, the Law did not change his heart.

What was the result? To overcome the light of the Law, he had to put up more resistance. The commandments of God became the occasion, the opportunity, for sin to assert itself. Inside he became a battleground between his entrenched will and his “Law-enlightened” conscience. He became stubborn and resolute in his commitment to self. His conscience reprimanded him, making him very uncomfortable. So he put up defenses. He resorted to flimsy self-justifying excuses and plastic self-righteousness in an effort to ease the inner conflict. He compartmentalized his thinking and behavior. He slipped into denial. His heart became “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). Light resisted became darkness. But his self-righteousness and moral self-sufficiency evaporated, and he died spiritually. He lost any “spirituality” he imagined he had. He had to face the reality that he was a sinner, totally guilty before a holy God.

In his struggle against his commandment-enlightened reason, sin deceived him and brought about his spiritual death—alienation from God.

Romans 7:13

¹³Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

Yet another silly question. No, the Law did not become death to him. Sin did. The divine commandment was set in place to bring light and spiritual life through the truth. The Law showed him how evil and criminal before God sin really is. It showed the true character of sin. Yet, the more the commandment of God exposed the exceeding sinfulness of his sin, the more his stubborn commitment to his selfishness produced moral and spiritual death in him. Because of his failure to obey the truth, the commandment in effect resulted in his spiritual death—alienation from God.

The commandment itself did not “kill” him; his sin did.

Paul refers to his personal past in Galatians 1:13 and 1 Timothy 1:12 - 16.

Romans 7:14 - 25

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

This is one of the most misunderstood, misinterpreted and misapplied passages in the Bible. We remember from 6:19 that the objective of the apostle Paul in this section was to make the truth plain and understandable by explaining it in practical human terms. Paul used the master/servant analogy to show that when we commit ourselves to serve a particular master, that is the master we *will* serve as long as we are committed to that master (6:16). The only way to stop serving that master is to choose a different master. Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 6:24).

In moral action (the action of the will), if we choose to serve our own desires, our desires will be our master. We are bound to serve them as long as that commitment continues. The longer we serve them, the stronger is their hold on us. The only way to stop serving our own desires is to choose a different Master—Christ! When we choose Him as our Savior and Lord, His indwelling presence and power breaks the hold of our own enslaving desires.

In this passage, for emphasis Paul is putting himself in the place of the unconverted person who is under the Law of Moses (where indeed he once was, but to which he is now dead). He speaks of himself in generic terms, representing the person who is under the Law, to show what the Law does to sinners who attempt to live under the Law. The Law “preaches” to them; it gives them more light; it proclaims the divine requirement and insists that they live up to it. However, unless their heart (will) changes directions (that is, unless the moral law is written in their hearts), the Law only stirs up their sins, defeats

their efforts to do “right,” and leaves them frustrated. Trying to live “right” according to the high standard of the Law while the heart is not right with God is built-in moral and spiritual failure. It is sheer misery.

In this immediate passage (verses 14 - 25) Paul continues to put himself in the place of the unconverted person who lives under the Law of Moses. He demonstrates personally the inner conflict between the Law of God and “the law of sin and death.”

In general this applies to all sinners because every moral agent is under the universal moral law, whether that moral law is embodied in the Law of Moses, the human conscience, or the gospel.

The universal moral law is written in the mind (reason, conscience) of every moral agent. The “law of sin and death” is the commitment of the heart (will, soul) to self-gratification in opposition to the law of the mind. This results in a tension of will against reason, moral defeat, spiritual death and eventually eternal death.

In 7:1 Paul says that he is speaking directly to people who know the law, particularly the Law of Moses. Thus far in the chapter he has been emphasizing the fact that as long as a person is serving his or her own desires, the Law (holy and just as it is) will only make that person miserable. The Law sets the standard of righteousness, but it will not make him righteous. No one can be made righteous by keeping the Law because we have all broken the Law. So that option is out; we have already “blown it.” The person who claims to live by the Ten Commandments has already put himself or herself under its penalty.

So that people will relate personally to this miserable frustration, Paul dramatizes it by placing himself in it, where indeed he *was* prior to his conversion. Paul was eminently qualified to do this because he himself had experienced it fully.

So, why is this passage so misunderstood, misinterpreted and misapplied? Why do speakers and writers make it so complex, convoluted, confusing, and contradictory? The answer is simple: *they mistakenly assume that Paul is describing his experience as a believer.* That is the root of the confusion and the resulting errors.

By no reasonable standard of Biblical interpretation can this passage refer to Paul as a born-again believer. It is impossible for anyone to live in Romans 7 and Romans 8 at the same time. To force this passage to teach the notion of two “natures” in the believer, it is necessary to fall back on the metaphysical mysticism of Greek and middle-eastern dualism, where in fact the notion found its seminal impulse.

In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul does describe himself as the chief (foremost, worst) of sinners. In that passage he is not referring to his present moral and spiritual state as a believer in Christ. He is looking back over his life under the Law, including his murderous persecution of the Church. When he considers his total history as a moral agent, he rightly pronounces himself as the chief of sinners apart from God’s redeeming grace through Jesus Christ.

In Romans 7:14 - 25 Paul is not describing the believer’s on-going experience with temptation. The apostle refers to that elsewhere (*e.g.*, 1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 5:17). Our temptations arise out of our humanity, not from some Neo-Platonic, ontological “thing” (essence) that infects our being. Every one is tempted by being drawn away by his or her own human desires and enticed (James 1:14). Jesus Himself experienced the temptations we experience merely because He was fully human as well as fully divine. The fact that we experience temptations is no evidence of a “carnal nature” in us just as Jesus’ temptations were no evidence of a “carnal nature” in Him. If you are experiencing temptations, welcome to the human race!

The Law is spiritual (verse 14). It is reasonable, right, just, natural, holy and wholesome. The sinner is carnal (lives according to his fleshly passions). Sinners are “sold under sin” because they voluntarily sell themselves to sin (1 Kings 21:20; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 50:1; Isaiah 52:3).

Verse 15 describes the inner conflict between enlightened reason and willful moral

slavery. This conflict results in perpetual moral failure. The person does not understand his dilemma and he does not know how to resolve it. He does not know how to achieve true righteousness or to find peace with God and peace within himself. His enlightened reason and the misery sin brings on him lead him to wish to do otherwise. He knows that his lifestyle is wrong. That in itself is an admission on his part that the Law is good (verse 16).

What he wishes he does not put into practice. What his reason and conscience find hateful is the very thing he keeps on doing. Perhaps he gets drunk one day and calls himself a fool the next, only to repeat the cycle of sin, remorse, resolution, and sin again. Perhaps it is drugs, adultery, pornography, lying, greed, cheating, stealing, pride, boasting, anger, hate, or some other dominating passion. The remonstrance of reason and conscience, the immediate pain he feels, and the misery of his feelings of guilt lead him to resolve to do better, to do what is “right,” perhaps even to become religious. But his heart, the basic set of his soul (will), is not changed. When these feelings give way before the demand of his chosen indulgences, he goes right back to his pattern of behavior. His desires jerk him back and forth between the spasms of conscience and the passions of sin.

It might be that his desire for a “good life”—a happy marriage and home, financial prosperity and security, a sense of self-respect and the approval of others—is the dominant desire that overcomes all opposing desires. Yet his heart is not changed. It is only “enlightened self-interest.” Self still rules the heart. Love of self, not love for God and for others, is what ultimately motivates him. He is still a sinner. He has only rearranged his sins.

Many years ago in Everett, Washington, a man came to me in a desperate frame of mind. He had been attending special revival services in the city. He told me that he had gone forward night after night to pray for salvation, but could get nowhere.

“Why do you want to get saved?” I asked him.

He gave me several reasons, all of them centered on himself.

I said to him, “The devil himself would want to get saved for those reasons. Have you thought about God’s honor and glory, how your sins have dishonored and hurt Him, how you have not loved and obeyed Him?”

He saw the point immediately, surrendered to God, put his faith in Christ, and was gloriously converted.

When the apostle says (verses 17 - 20) that in his bondage to his sins, “it is no more I who do it,” he does *not* assert that he is no longer a responsible moral agent. On the contrary, he is fully responsible for voluntarily and knowingly making himself a slave to sin. The “sin” that “dwells” in him is the inner, voluntary commitment of his will that moves him to continue in the evil practices. The sinner is out of control because he has knowingly surrendered control to his desires. As long as he allows his desires to have the “steering wheel,” they will take him wherever they go, his wishes to the contrary notwithstanding. That is sin, and that choice “dwells” in him, just as all of our choices do.

It is essential that we keep in mind the Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary act of the will. Sin “dwells” in sinners because choices are made within us. If sin “dwells” in us, it is because we put it there. If jealousy, hate, greed, pride, lust, or any form of sin “dwells” in us, we put it there. We chose the evil passions and hold on to them in our souls. We made the choice within ourselves. It “dwells” there as long as we let it. From that choice flow corresponding choices and actions. That sin produces sins.

In verse 18 the apostle says that in his flesh “nothing good dwells.” This is not ground for the erroneous supposition that the body itself or anything inherent in it is evil. That notion is also a relic of Neo-Platonism. The body has no moral character of itself. Substance or “essence” has no moral ability and hence no moral character. It is neither right or wrong, holy or sinful. “Things” cannot make moral choices. What matters is how we use the body (Romans 6:13).

“In my flesh” means the way that he had allowed his passions, physical and otherwise, to have control over him. Sin “ruled the house.”

A reminder: the apostle is putting himself in the place of the person who is under the Law. He is speaking of himself as though he were still that person, even though in reality as a believer in Christ he is dead to the Law (Galatians 2:19) and alive to God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11).

Paul continues (verse 18) that to will (wish, prefer) to do good is present with him, that is, to the person under the Law. This affirms moral agency, moral obligation, and moral accountability. The problem is that the “how to” is not there. He does not know how to put his wish, the preference of his reason, into action. *He hates his slavery, but not his master.*

The sinner lives in perpetual moral failure (verse 19). He has good wishes, harbors hopeful intentions, and forms noble resolutions; but he never achieves them. On the contrary, he continues to practice the evil that he does not wish to do.

Why? Because moral character is not in the “wishing.” As the saying goes, “The road to hell is paved with good ‘intentions’.”

Verse 20 reaffirms what verse 17 already established: the sinner is out of control because he has surrendered control to his desires and knowingly continues to allow them to have control.

There is a well-known illustration that is told as a fact. As the story goes, in some cultures the way people catch monkeys is to hollow out a gourd, put some “goodies” the monkey likes in the gourd, and tie it to a tree or some other object. The hole in the gourd is just big enough for the monkey to reach in to grasp the “goodies,” but not big enough for it to pull the “goodies” out. As the monkey-catcher arrives, the monkey will jump up and down in fear and pull away as hard as possible; but will not let go of the “goodies.” So the monkey-catcher scoops up the monkey. The monkey was trapped because it would not let go of what it wanted.

That is how the devil traps people.

In verses 21 - 23 we see two “laws” in operation. These are the two modes of moral action.

The first is the universal moral law of God. It was embodied in the Law of Moses, especially the Ten Commandments. That is the law of the “inner man,” of reason and conscience. Both reason and conscience naturally approve of the moral law. We know that we ought to love God with all our heart, mind and will, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37 - 40). We know that how we want to be treated is how we ought to treat others. We know that obedience to the moral law (the law of love) promotes what is good and beneficial, and that disobedience to moral law (selfishness) results in harm and hurt.

Sin is not natural. If sin were natural, it would be beneficial. But sin is not beneficial; in fact, it is most destructive. “One sinner destroys much good” (Ecclesiastes 9:18). Sin is totally contrary to the law of nature.

So, reason and conscience approve of the law of God because it is the law of reality. Contemplating its qualities, its symmetry, its beauty, can inspire pleasant and noble feelings in both saints and sinners. However, in the sinner a different, absolutely contrary “law” is at war against the law of his mind (reason, conscience). It is the law of sin, the mode of moral choices and actions that the passions of the flesh demand. The sinner has surrendered to it and he is its prisoner, its captive slave. The members of his body are the tools he uses as he toils in his willing slavery.

Whenever the sinner wishes to do good, evil stands right there to veto it. See Jeremiah 13:23.

The law of sin is also called “the law of sin and death” (verse 24; 8:2). “The wages of sin is death” (6:23). “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is

full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15). Lust is the father of sin and the grandfather of death.

“O wretched man that I am!” (verse 24). He is at war with God, at war with truth and reality, at war with his own reason. Thus he is alienated from God, from himself, and often from others.

“Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (verse 25). Literally, “*Out of the body of this death?*” This is the cry of the person who is sick and tired of sin’s bondage and misery and is desperate to be free.

“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (verse 25). That is the answer, and that alone! God’s great redemptive act through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus Christ sets the believer totally free from sin, not only from the guilt and punishment of sin but also from its power and practice. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Now, it is of utmost importance to know that the latter part of verse 25 is *not* a conclusion. It is a summary of what the apostle said before in verses 14 - 24. “I myself” means the person he had been and that he is characterizing as the person under the Law of Moses, the Law to which the redeemed Paul is now dead and from which he is now free. His statements in Romans 8:1 and 2 confirm that.

The conclusion is in Romans 8, verses 1 and 2. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” There are no genuine believers in Romans 7:14 - 25. They are all in Romans 8. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from the law of sin and death.

So, good news! Believers do *not* live in perpetual sinning. We live in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, if you are still in Romans 7, get out of there and into Romans 8. There is where every true believer in Christ stands.

No Condemnation—No Separation**Romans 8:1 - 4**

¹There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

“There is therefore . . .” Therefore why? What is the reason for the “therefore.” To what does it point back? To what does it connect and from it logically flow?

“Therefore” cannot connect with and follow from the last part of 7:25. *That* certainly would not free anyone from condemnation. As we have already noted, the last part of 7:25 is a summary of the miserable condition of the unconverted person who is struggling under the Law. The apostle Paul took that role upon himself in Romans 7 in order to dramatize it. He was well qualified to do so because he himself had been that very “wretched man” before his conversion.

So then, “therefore” in 8:1 must come directly from the first part of 7:25, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” That is the statement that changed the tone from the dramatic past to the dramatic present. “I thank God” . . . “There is therefore *now*” (emphasis added).

Everything the inspired apostle has written this far in the letter to the Romans has been leading up to what is revealed in Chapter 8. The Gentiles have sinned against the light of natural revelation (Romans 1). The Jews have sinned against the light of the Law of Moses (Romans 2). So then, everyone has sinned and has come under the penalty of death (Romans 3).

God provided forgiveness, justification and righteousness by *faith*, notably exemplified in Abraham prior to the Law (Romans 4), and to all who believe on Jesus Christ (Romans 5). Those who are truly justified by faith died to sin and are now alive in Christ (Romans 6). Because we died with Christ and are alive in Him, we died to the Law also and to the futile struggle to free ourselves from its condemnation (Romans 7).

We now come to the grand climax of this entire subject of justification by faith (Romans 8). Believers no longer look to the Law for righteousness. We look to Christ. What was once embodied in the Law of Moses now resides in us. The moral law—the “royal” law, the law of love, the law of Christ—is fully established in our hearts and lives. Christ has liberated every true Christian not only from the guilt and the penalty of sin, but also from the power and the practice of sin. Jesus is a total, all-sufficient Savior.

No dichotomy exists between justification and sanctification. By its very nature, justification is a sanctifying act. Believers are justified *from* sin, not *in* sin. We are justified by grace through faith alone, but not by a faith that stands alone. We are justified by faith apart from works, but not by a faith that does not work. Saving faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9), works by love (Galatians 5:6), and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Works follow as sanctification continues and progresses according to light in a

person who lives a justified life in a justified standing.

That is why “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” The believer in Christ is not on probation, not on parole. The believer stands justified before God (as we saw in Romans 5:1). God is not “sore” at him or her. On the contrary, God is pleased with him/her. God feels good about the believer, and so the believer can feel good about himself/herself in Christ.

The King James Version continues, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The New King James Version renders it, “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”. Most modern versions omit this clause, regarding it as an interpolation from verse 4. However that might be, the fact *is* clearly stated in verse 4, where the genuineness of the words is not in dispute.

So the truth remains: (1) believers are not under condemnation; (2) believers do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The two directly correlate. One is essential to the other. Both are essential to the truth.

Verse 2 tells us why there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” has freed us “from the law of sin and death.”

Paul has already described “the law of sin and death.” It is the voluntary slavery of the sinner to his/her own fleshly desires. This willingness to be enslaved by selfish desires puts him/her in continuous spiritual death now and eventually into the everlasting second death (James 1:15; Revelation 20:14).

Moses told us what we ought to do and what would happen if we did not do it. But that did not bring about the necessary change of heart (will) in us. The Law told us what to do and more or less left it up to us to do it, but that was no match for the fleshly desires that we allowed to rule us.

The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the law of love—God’s redeeming love toward us and His love dwelling in us by the presence and power of His Holy Spirit. It is “in Christ Jesus.” This is the believer’s position, a position of relationship, salvation and righteousness. That and that alone does what the Law could not do, that is, free us from the law of sin and death.

What the Law could not do, “God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (verse 3). Some suppose that the reference to “sinful flesh” and “sin in the flesh” means that sin is a mystical substance that resides in and permeates our human flesh. First of all, this supposition is contrary to the Bible’s own teaching that sin is a voluntary choice, not a Neo-Platonic essence.

Also, Paul makes clear in 6:12 and 13 that the sin is in how we *use* the members of our bodies, not in the members themselves. Flesh is “sinful” only when it is allowed to be the occasion to sin or when it is used to sin. Our fleshly bodies have no moral character in themselves. The tongue is sinful only if we use it as a tool to sin; it is righteous if we use it as a tool for righteousness (see Proverbs 10:20; 12:18; 15:2, 4; 31:26).

So then, following Paul’s own inspired meaning, “sinful flesh” (literally, “flesh of sin”) in 8:3 refers to the sinful way we used the members of our fleshly bodies before the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus liberated us from the law of sin and death (see 6:6 and 7:5).

The supposition that “sin in the flesh” means that “sin” is an essence that resides “in the flesh” is contrary to the construction of the phrase in the original. If “in the flesh” referred to “sin,” the Greek would read, “the sin the in the flesh.” It does not read that way. Therefore, the word, “sin,” connects grammatically with “condemned.” That is, in His flesh (His incarnation, as “in the days of His flesh” in Hebrews 5:7) Jesus condemned sin by demonstrating that it is not an unavoidable necessity. A. T. Robertson says, “He condemned the sins of men and the condemnation took place in the flesh of Jesus.”

Sin is inexcusable. We are in bondage to it only because we choose to be.

Often we hear the excuse, “I’m only human.” Yes, we are *human*, and that is the very point. We are not mere animals. We are created in the image and likeness of God, moral

agents who are responsible and accountable for our moral choices, character, and behavior.

It is widely taught that, because of the fall, our humanity and therefore our moral agency is impaired. Adam's sin brought physical death on the human race, but it did not impair our moral agency. We cannot excuse our sins by saying that the fall makes us unable to avoid them. Other things can impair our moral agency, such as physical or mental impairments and the impairments we bring on ourselves by our own dissipation and depravity; however, Adam's sin did not in itself predispose us to personal sin. It did not take away or even lessen our moral agency. We are fully responsible for our moral choices. The bondage of the will to sin is a personal choice, and it will continue as long as the choice continues.

Jesus Christ took upon Himself our human flesh and in that same human flesh He condemned sin. In His humanity, Jesus overcame sin in the same spiritual relationship that believers now have in and through Him, and by the same spiritual resources that are now available to all believers in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). God's seed is His word (Luke 8:11).

Verse 4 says that the righteous requirements of the Mosaic Law are fulfilled in those who have been set free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Because in love they walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh, they keep the Ten Commandments without even thinking about them! The love of God, not duty to the Law, is what motivates them. The Ten Commandments are only reinforcing instruction to those who walk according to the Spirit. The person who is kept from committing a sin *only* by the fear of punishment has not been set free by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. He is still under the Law, and the Law was given to restrain the lawless (1 Timothy 1:9).

Romans 8:5 - 8

⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Here is an excellent place to consider the companion passage in Galatians 5:16 - 26.

"I say, then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."

So then, what is our mind set on (Romans 5:8)? Moral action has only two modes: the

flesh and the Spirit. There is no third mode of moral action. The two modes of moral action are mutually exclusive and antagonistic. If we are minding and walking according to the flesh, we are not minding and walking according to the Spirit. If we are minding and walking according to the Spirit, we are not minding and walking according to the flesh. We cannot go in opposite directions at the same time.

No translation of verse 6 improves on the King James and New King James versions. As James 1:15 states clearly, there are two opposing mind-sets, leading to two opposite results.

Verse 7 does not teach that something is wrong with the “faculty” or essence of the mind itself. The wrong is in the voluntary action, that is, in the direction one sets one’s mind. The “carnal mind” is the mind that is set on the gratification of one’s selfish desires. That mind-set, that “minding of the flesh,” is total hostility to God. That conscious, deliberate set of the mind does not and cannot obey God. No one who is living to please self supremely can possibly obey and please God as long as that person persists in that mind set. It is diametrically opposed to God, truth, reason, and the well-being of God and man. Verse 8 says so in no uncertain terms. The sinner’s “purpose driven life” is set in the wrong direction, “hell bent,” and moving as far away from God as possible and as fast as possible.

The person whose mind is set on the flesh, on self-gratification, has chosen the entirely wrong end, is pursuing it with all the means available, and is putting forth whatever actions he or she can on those means to secure that selfish end. That is total *moral* depravity, and the sinner is totally *morally* depraved no matter how many so-called “good works” he or she might do. The supreme motive is totally wrong; therefore, all is totally wrong. Self rules. *Ultimately* it is all for self.

Romans 8:9-11

⁹But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

In Romans 7:5 we read that believers “were in the flesh.” Past tense. Believers no longer live “in the flesh” because they now live in the Spirit. We cannot live in both at the same time; neither can part of us live in one and part of us live in the other. The heart determines the entire character.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” has made us “free from the law of sin and death” (verse 2). So then, the believer’s liberation from his or her slavery to self is not the result of “turning over a new leaf” but by receiving a new life. This new life is in Christ. “He who has the Son has life” (I John 5:12). This new life is in the believer by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Without this living relationship the most a person can become is the “wretched religionist” of Romans 7.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every true believer is mentioned also in verses 11 and 15. It is “the firstfruit of the Spirit” (verse 23). It is stated also in Galatians 4:6, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” It is the “earnest of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 1:22).

Verse 10 reminds us that even if Christ lives in us, our bodies are still mortal. Because of Adam’s sin death spread throughout the entire human race (Romans 5:12). That includes believers. That is why we also who have received the firstfruit of the Spirit groan under the curse on nature and long for the resurrection of our mortal bodies at Christ’s coming (verse 23). Even though believers’ bodies are subject to death, their spirit (human

spirit, preferred reading rather than Spirit) is alive because of righteousness.

God raised Jesus from the dead. At the resurrection He will raise our mortal bodies from the dead by the same Holy Spirit who now dwells in us. The Holy Spirit is not through with His temples, our bodies, no matter what happens to them after we die.

Romans 8:12 - 17

¹²Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

When Christ saved us, He redeemed the whole person: soul, spirit, and body. At salvation the Holy Spirit came to dwell in our body. After that, when Christ baptized us in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit filled us to anoint, empower, and utilize us for effective ministry and service.

Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We are to glorify God in our body (1 Corinthians 6:20). Our body is God’s servant. It is also our servant. We owe it to God and to ourselves to take proper care of our body, to discipline it, and to employ it for good. God sanctified our body (set it apart for His presence and purpose). We are to keep it holy. Even though our body is mortal in this life, God has a purpose for it beyond this life, and we are to live in it with that purpose in view.

Our obligation is to master our body and use it for its God-given purposes. We must not allow our body to master us. We owe God everything; we owe the passions of the flesh nothing. The unreasonable, despotic demands of the body have no authority over us; our allegiance is to Christ.

Verse 13 is an expansion on verse 6. They who lived according to the flesh are *already* spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1; 1 Timothy 5:6,13); therefore, the death mentioned in verse 13 is not present spiritual death, but eternal death, the second death (Romans 6:23; James 1:15; Revelation 20:14).

The person who is carnally minded (who has set his/her mind on the desires and demands of the flesh) is already dead—spiritually dead (verse 6). The person who persists in that pursuit will end up in the second death (“is about to die” is the tense in the original Greek in verse 13). That person is on his way to the death chamber. He is a “dead man walking.”

So how do we live victoriously over the demands of the body? Is it by stoical will power? That will succeed only in subjugating one passion to the demands of another, “higher” passion, but it still leaves the strongest selfish desire in control.

The answer is *the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit*. He is the Spirit of Christ. We must be born again, born of the Spirit (John 3:3, 7). Christ must rule the heart and life from the inside. It is only by the Spirit that we put to death the sinful practices of the body, and not by trading off one selfish desire for another.

Believers do not “suppress” temptation; we *reject* temptation. Suppressing temptation is like having one foot on the brake pedal and the other foot on the accelerator at the same time. Take the “foot” off the “accelerator” and turn the controls over to Christ! His Spirit will rule your “internal combustion” and direct it properly.

Verse 14 defines the truly born-again “sons of God.” Who are they? They are the ones who are led by the Spirit of God. People who are led by the Spirit of God are going in the same direction the Spirit of God is going. They are pursuing the same end, walking the

same path, living in moral harmony and delighting in each other's company. Before that, they were living contrary to the Holy Spirit, resisting Him, going their own way, frustrated, alienated from God. What a contrast!

Believers have not received the "spirit of slavery" that produced the guilty fear that puts people back into the enslaving dread of death (see Hebrews 2:15) and that eventually results in eternal torment (1 John 4:18). We have received "the Spirit of adoption (sonship)," one of the names of the Holy Spirit, by Whom we cry "Abba, Father!" Paul had already written this truth in the inspired Epistle to the Galatians (see Galatians 4:5 - 7).

When we were yet in our sins and walking according to the desires of the flesh, we were spiritually "of our father the devil" (John 8:44), doing his deeds. We were "the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). At salvation the Holy Spirit made us "sons of God" by the new birth, witnessed to our human spirit that we are now the children of God, and brought us into conscious fellowship with our heavenly Father. We are no longer alienated from God, enemies in our minds by wicked works (Colossians 1:21). We are now more than merely the offspring of God by creation (Acts 17:29). We are truly children of God.

Because believers are now truly children of God by the new birth, we are also heirs of God and even "joint-heirs with Christ." Everything that belongs to Jesus *as the Son of God* belongs to believers as the children of God. Some things belong to Jesus Christ as the Second Person of the eternal Trinity; they include His deity (John 8:58) and His pre-incarnate glory with the Father (John 17:5). (Note: there is no Platonic "eternal generation of the Son." The Second Person of the eternal Trinity is not a derived being). These are His alone from all eternity. All the rest He shares with those whom He has redeemed by His blood.

"If indeed"—provided that—"we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (verse 17), glorified together with Him. We will not share Christ's pre-incarnate glory that He had with the Father. That is His alone. The glory that He will share with us is the glory that the Father gave Him. We find the distinction between the two "glories" in John 17:5 and 22.

Suffer together . . . glorified together. What does this mean? It means that if we are to share fully in Christ, we start with being "crucified" with Him (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20). As He died *for* sin, we die *to* sin. We take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). Also, as He suffered trials and temptations, so do we for His sake. He suffered rejection; so do we for His sake. He suffered (and overcame) the temptations of His human flesh; so do we, for "he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

So be faithful. Jesus is with you. He went through it victoriously and He will bring you through it with Him (see Hebrews 2:18).

Suffer together . . . glorified together. What a destiny!

Romans 8:18 - 23

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Verse 17 is a transition. In a sense it is a summation of what is said in verses 14 - 16. It is also the "seed plot" for what follows, the "embryo" that will become fully developed as we move toward the climax of Romans 8.

“For I consider.” *Logidzomai*. We encountered this word already. It is one of Paul’s big words. It appears at least 34 times in the Pauline epistles, including quotations. It means variously to count, reckon, take account, consider, judge, determine.

As used here it means to be a settled fact in itself and therefore a settled fact in the mind of the apostle. And what is the settled fact here? “That the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Notice the contrast between the “about to be” in verse 13 and the “about to be” here in verse 18.

Paul expresses the same truth in 2 Corinthians 4:17, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (see also 2 Timothy 2:10).

The Holy Spirit kept Paul’s focus on the eternal glory awaiting believers in Christ. This focus sustains us when we go through the sufferings of life. Compared to the glory that is about to be revealed in (*eis*) us, our present afflictions seem light indeed.

In verses 19 - 25 we are reminded that the physical creation is still under the curse because of sin. God wisely placed a time limit on mankind’s opportunity to progress in sin in this life. Physical deterioration and death came upon the natural world, including mankind. The human race was required to earn its bread by the sweat of its face (Genesis 3:19). Work keeps people busy and helps to limit their opportunities to get into mischief and trouble.

Even though we have been redeemed from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13), believers suffer along with all creation and all humanity under the curse that still rests on the physical creation. Believers are “part of the suffering creation.”

All of creation is eagerly anticipating the revealing (“manifestation, disclosure”) of the redeemed sons of God, because that is the final drama in Christ’s victory over all of mankind’s enemies. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26 KJV).

When the curse was placed on the physical creation, it had no choice in the matter. The physical laws that lead to deterioration and death began operating generally, affecting living and non-living matter alike. The whole creation was made subject to “vanity” (futility, frustration) as a result of this sovereign act of God. Nevertheless, God’s action was not final and irreversible. Even in subjecting the creation to futility and frustration, God had a sovereign purpose to redeem it through Jesus Christ. That became the creation’s hope, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ was the “firstfruit,” the “earnest,” of that hope. That makes the hope the absolute certainty that the whole creation is eagerly anticipating. That hope is tied directly to the bodily resurrection of believers at Christ’s coming. At that moment all of creation “will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

Meanwhile, as we read in verses 22 and 23, there is a lot of “groaning” going on. The physical creation is “groaning.” In geology we encounter earthquakes, volcanic convulsions and eruptions, and other stresses and upheavals, both present and past. Some of them have been catastrophic. Certainly things have *not* continued “as they were from the beginning of the creation” (see 2 Peter 3:4).

We witness the “groaning” in climatology and its sometimes violent phenomena. We “feel” it in biology and zoology in the sufferings of animals, including the predatory practices that persist in the wild. We “groan” under the effects of the viruses and harmful bacteria that have resulted from the adverse mutational operations of the curse.

The curse engulfs all of us, including believers. We groan right along with the rest of the creation. The big difference is that believers have the firstfruit, the earnest, of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 5:1 - 4).

The resurrection of our bodies is the believers’ *adoption*—the full benefits of our sonship along with Christ. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. *That* is the glory that shall be revealed in (*eis*) us (verse 17).

That is what Paul was inspired to declare in Colossians 3:4. When Christ, our life, shall appear, then you also shall appear with Him in glory.

Adam's sin brought down the curse upon the whole creation, including mankind. Christ's coming and the resurrection of believers will liberate the whole creation from that curse. His coming is the hope of mankind and of the whole creation. No more sin; no more pain; no more sorrow; no more tears; no more death (Revelation 21:4).

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

Romans 8:24, 25

²⁴For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

The believers' hope, our destiny, was mentioned in verse 20. It is the subject of verses 24 and 25. It will be specifically identified in verses 28 - 30.

Believers were saved in this hope and for this hope. We live in it. It is still unseen. If it were seen, it would not be hope; it would be in full view.

In the New Testament, hope is the anticipation of what is absolutely certain. Because it is the *anticipation* of what is absolutely certain, it is still future from our present standpoint. Therefore, from our present standpoint it is still unseen. We are "looking for that blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

Although God has revealed this hope to us, we do not yet see it. For that reason we "with perseverance" wait for it.

Romans 8:26, 27

²⁶Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Just as there are some things we do not yet see, there are some things we do not yet have words for. In this also the Holy Spirit is our Helper.

All believers have the earnest, the firstfruit of the Spirit. We are born of the Spirit; we have the witness of the Spirit; we are led by the Spirit; we shall be raised from the dead by the Spirit.

Yet, we need a fuller dimension of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit operating in us. We need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This baptism in the Holy Spirit is subsequent to salvation. It is the "seal," that in turn is the earnest of our *inheritance* (Ephesians 1:13, 14). That baptism ushers us into the Spirit-filled life, and it is accompanied by the outward witness (by definition a seal is an outward witness) of speaking in other tongues by the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44 - 48; 19:6).

One of the operations of the Holy Spirit in the Spirit-filled believer is *praying in the Spirit*. When we are so deeply burdened that we do not know and cannot articulate what and how we ought to pray but only groan and sigh, the Holy Spirit "takes hold" with our deep sublingual groanings. He shares those same feelings, but He is not speechless. He composes them according to the will of God and releases them to God through us in a prayer language that His vocabulary supplies. God searches our heart; He knows the deep desires (groanings) that are there; and He knows what is in the mind of the Holy Spirit.

When we are praying in the Spirit, we know that we are praying according to the will of God because the Spirit makes intercession for believers according to the will of God (see also 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11). That gives us great faith and full assurance in our praying.

Romans 8:28 - 30

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

The theme of the first eight chapters of the epistle is now moving toward its climax. Even though mankind sinned and came under condemnation, God has a purpose in creating the human race. That purpose has been in the mind and will of God from all eternity. It includes: Christ's death and resurrection; the work of the Holy Spirit to draw people to Christ; calling to Himself and justifying by faith an elect people whom He has foreknown; and preparing His chosen, redeemed people for eternal glory by conforming them to the character image of Jesus Christ.

God predestined whom He foreknew. The same truth is taught in 1 Peter 1:2, [believers are] "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . ." (KJV). Notice, it does not say that believers are foreknown according to the election of God, but elect according to His foreknowledge. This is in agreement with Romans 8:29, which says plainly "whom He foreknew, He also predestinated," not "whom He predestinated, He also foreknew."

Of course, both foreknowledge and predestination are simultaneous in the eternal mind and will of God. One does not precede the other. The point is that God's predestination is conditioned by His foreknowledge. This does not mean that God reacts to what He knows we are going to do. He foreknows *us*, not just what we will do. He knows what He can do with us without violating our free will by forcing us to do it. God's sovereignty is not unconditional and arbitrary. He always exercises His sovereignty in full harmony with His other qualities, including wisdom and moral propriety.

Although God works in time, He transcends time. His purposes are not *determined* by what happens in time; still, they are *conditioned* by what He foreknows happens in time.

For God to create the human race knowing what would happen, He must have in mind something of such absolute and eternal value and importance as to outweigh by far all the evils that God foreknew would happen as a consequence of giving mankind a free will and man's abuse of that free will. It must outweigh all the sufferings of the human race for time and the sufferings of the damned for eternity; it must outweigh the cost to the Son of God to condescend to become man and die on a cross to redeem a massive number of people who are yet relative minority. It must be something that could not be secured by any other way than the course God has taken; for if there had been a better way, certainly a loving God would have taken it.

What is it? It is right here in Romans 8. Because God's foreknown elect are the object of His eternal purpose in both creation and redemption, they are the fulfillment of God's grand design of the ages. They carry within themselves that grand design, that eternal purpose, that glorious destiny.

God has invested everything in His elect, His Church, and He has provided all the resources needed to protect and perfect the investment of His grace. Even though they are experiencing "the sufferings of this present time" (verse 18), and are groaning under the burden that the curse has brought on all the present creation (verse 23), in His sovereignty God is making it all work together for their good and the perfecting of His vital and essential character work in them.

Believers are destined to eternal glory (verses 17 and 18). That is the established, predestined and pre-declared destiny—*hope*—of the elect ("these He also glorified" —verse 30). Believers are already positionally seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians

2:6). As we look forward to our ultimate glory, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God and also glory in tribulations (Romans 5:1-5). [For more on this subject, please see Appendix B, “The Eternal Purpose Of God.”]

Romans 8:31, 32

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

This introduces a series of rhetorical questions, questions with an obvious and definite answer, that move us into the grand finale of the first eight chapters of Romans. The first two questions are in verse 31. The third question is in verse 32.

Sometimes all we see are the immediate circumstances and the people who seem to be controlling our lives and destiny.

Many years ago in another community I was conversing with a fellow pastor. He was going through some difficult “people problems” in his congregation. In my effort to encourage him, I quoted the King James of Romans 8:31, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” He replied, “I can give you a few names.”

The psalmist had to deal with similar yet even more severe circumstances and people. Psalm 118:5 - 9 records how he handled it.

Because God already foreknows everything His elect will ever have to deal with and has already determined how He is going to make it all work together for their good, how can anyone truly harm us? In 1 Peter 3:13 the apostle asks us a positive question, “And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?”

Mere mortals cannot prevent God from making everything work together for our good! God gave us Jesus. Because He gave us the best, with Him He will also give us the rest, *all* the rest.

Romans 8:33, 34

³³Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

These are two more in the crescendo of rhetorical questions.

All whom God foreknew He elected (predestined, chose). All whom He elected He effectively called (the rest rejected His general call; that is why they are not among the elect). All whom He effectively called He justified (by faith, *from* sin and not *in* sin). All whom He justified He glorified (sanctified, purified, cleaned up our act, anointed us, put us through the process of conforming us to the character image of Jesus Christ).

Referring again to Ephesians 1:4, we notice that the elect are chosen to be “holy and without blame before Him.” And again, in 1 Peter 1:2 we notice that believers are elect “in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience.”

In other words, God always elects in holiness. Predestination is not only to heaven; it is essentially to obedience. We read in 8:29 what believers are predestined *to*: “to be conformed to the image of His [God’s] Son.” Nowhere does the Bible teach that our election has nothing to do with our moral state. Predestination is always to holiness. Holiness is an essential component of predestination. God has purposed both the end and also the necessary conditions of election.

God has justified and sanctified believers. In effect, God sanctified believers in justifying them, because He justified them *from* sin (fully—not only sin’s guilt and penalty but also its power and practice). They are walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh. By grace through faith they have been given a holy standing and have been brought into a holy

state.

Who, then, dares to bring charges against God's fully justified saints? Who dares to condemn those to whom there is now no condemnation (8:1)? Christ died for their sins; Christ rose from the dead for their justification (4:25); Christ is their living High Priest, exalted at the right hand of the Father, ever living to make intercession for them!

If they stumble, He will lift them up, restore and establish them. God has invested everything in His elect; they are His people of destiny and they carry in themselves His eternal purpose; His eternal purpose in them is established from all eternity, and it will not fail!

God does not see failure in the future of His elect, the Church. He sees them abiding in Christ, laying hold of His all-sufficient grace, overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony! That is why God put them on display before John the apostle before they were even born (Revelation 7:9, 10).

So, let us as individual believers make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Let us seize the destiny God is calling us to and get a firm grip on the hope that is set before us (Hebrews 6:18).

Romans 8:35 - 39

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ²³⁶As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage begins with the final and climactic rhetorical question. It is triumphant. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” It is followed by an all-inclusive list of supernatural, human, natural, and circumstantial enemies of the elect. Not one of them nor all of them put together can separate us from Christ's love.

The passage refers to things that come *against* believers. Nothing in this passage gives any assurance to people who deliberately turn away from Christ's love and “walk according to the flesh.” Even then, Christ's love for us remains steadfast, and He will do everything wisely possible to draw such people back to Himself.

The passage does give assurance—absolute assurance—to all who are established in God's electing grace and who are thus living according to their purpose and destiny in Christ.

All of the adversaries of the believer that are listed in this passage are part of the sufferings and burdens we now groan under (verses 17 - 26; 2 Corinthians 5:1 - 4). None of these things—no circumstances of life, no effects of the curse, nothing—can separate us from God's love for us in Christ. No one and no thing can conquer us, because through Him we are “more than conquerors,” — *hupernikomen* (“super-conquerors”).

We “overwhelmingly conquer” (New American Standard Version). We “gain a surpassing victory” (Thayer).

A conqueror is someone who fights and wins the battle himself. A *superconqueror* is someone who gains a greater victory, a victory that has been won for him/her by another, in this case Christ Himself. His victory is ours by grace through faith.

When we are going through the stresses and problems of the moment, it is easy to lose sight of our victory in Christ. Even little things can frustrate us, like the student who

groaned, “If God loves me, why can’t I get my locker open?” (The title of a book by Lorraine Peterson).

Verse 36 is a quotation of Psalm 44:22. Paul expresses the same fact in 2 Corinthians 4:11, “For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (KJV).

God has not promised to exempt believers from going through “the University of Adversity.” Christians throughout the centuries have been persecuted and killed. Jesus said it would happen (John 16:2). Our “super-victory” is not in being spared from it but in staying firm and steadfast through it and in spite of it as we keep our eyes on the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17 KJV).

Yes, we are going through it; and we are going *through* it. The love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord is with us all the way.

Verses 38 and 39 cover the entire scope of our adversaries: supernatural, human, natural, circumstantial. Paul expresses his solid and well-grounded persuasion that none of these things can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ.

Yes, Paul was a persuaded believer. At the close of his life he wrote to Timothy, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).

Our persuasion is the same as Paul’s, the same as every “superconqueror’s,” because it rests on the same unshakeable foundation of the never-failing word of the never-failing God; the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead; the God who has given us a glorious destiny, who calls us to live with that destiny in view and to pursue it steadfastly in love, holiness, and faith; the God who will be with us all the way.

NO CONDEMNATION. NO DEFEAT. NO SEPARATION.

God Knows What He Is Doing**Romans 9**

Romans chapters nine through eleven form what is called a theodicy. A theodicy is an explanation and defense of the ways God deals with man. In this theodicy the issue is God's dealings with Israel.

Paul had just established that the Jews as well as the Gentiles are under the power and guilt of sin. The Jews had a special covenant relationship with God with all the obligations, privileges and blessings of that relationship. Yet as a nation they forfeited it by their disobedience. They had the Law Of Moses; yet they did not attain to the righteousness that is embodied in that Law. By sinning under that Law they incurred its penalty instead of its blessings.

As a nation, Israel failed. Does that mean God failed? Was God's purpose in Israel defeated? Were all the promises of God concerning Israel abrogated and voided? Did God's faithful dealings with the covenant people over the centuries come to nothing? Did God arbitrarily change His mind, abandon His purpose to produce a righteous nation, and declare the whole effort a colossal failure?

As we shall see, the answer is a resounding NO!

Romans 9:1-3

¹I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ²that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

Paul begins the theodicy by a triple declaration of his intense burden for Israel. That triple declaration is rooted in the truth of Christ, guaranteed by Paul's personal integrity, and confirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit in his own conscience.

Let it be understood that Paul is not expressing disdain for the Jews. He is expressing grief over Israel.

Although Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, he still carried in his heart a heavy burden and continual sorrow for those who were his fellow Israelites "according to the flesh." That unceasing grief was so great that he was "at the point of wishing" that he could forfeit his own salvation for theirs—take their place in hell and give them his place in Heaven—were that even possible. This brings to mind Moses's same selfless love for Israel (see Exodus 32:31 - 33).

Paul's intense love for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6) drove him to deep intercessory prayer and intense efforts to save as many of them as he could.

Romans 9:4 and 5

⁴who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Paul continues by listing Israel's seven special covenant privileges (see also Romans

3:1, 2). These lead up to the consummation of God's Old Covenant purpose in Israel, and to the reason for the seven-fold privileges He bestowed on them—to be the human, social and cultural matrix for the coming of the Messiah. Their seven-fold heritage culminated in one hope—the Messiah—the God Who is over all, eternally blessed! Amen—it is an eternally established fact. The question of who Jesus is is settled once and for all. All controversy and speculation to the contrary is an exercise in futility.

How blessed indeed Israel was. The greatest blessing of all was that God would bring about the Incarnation—the hypostatic union of God and man in Jesus Christ—in Israel. The humanity of Jesus was Jewish.

Romans 9:6 - 8

⁶But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, ⁷nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” ⁸That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Israel's promised and prophesied destiny was not nullified. God's word cannot fail or be nullified. God's word concerning Israel did not fail to take effect. Rather, it is in full effect.

The key: divine election. This involves the identification of “Israel” as defined by the word of God—the word of promise, as we shall see in verse 9. *Promise* is the defining word and the determining principle (see Galatians 3:29 and context).

Not all who are the physical descendants of Israel (Jacob) and not all who are members of the human polity of Israel are truly *Israel* as God recognizes and designates them. Remember Romans 2:28 and 29. God knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19). God knows His “Israel”—as defined by His word—and all of His sovereign purposes in Israel concerning election, righteousness, and salvation are fulfilled in them. The unbelieving Israelites failed (especially when they rejected the Messiah), but *God did not fail* and neither did His covenant dealings with Israel through the centuries.

God's covenant children—not merely the biological children—have always been the children of promise. The children of the promise are the true “seed” of Abraham.

Romans 9:9 - 13

⁹For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac ¹¹(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹²it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” ¹³As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

This principle (that the promise is determinative) is illustrated by God's sovereign election at the earliest events in the nation's history. Abraham fathered many sons (Genesis 25). The determinative promise to Abraham was that *Sarah* would have a son. What made Isaac unique was the *promise*. Only Isaac was the chosen and promised seed. This election of Isaac excluded Ishmael from *the* promise. It also excluded all of Abraham's other sons from the promise, even though they were Abraham's physical descendants.

The promise given by divine election was narrowed even further. When Rebekah was pregnant by Isaac, God spoke to her that the elder of her two sons (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). See Genesis 25:23. This was before the twin boys were even born, and long before they came to the age when they would be able to do any good or evil.

The reason? “That the purpose of God according to election might stand.” God did not wait to see how Jacob and Esau would turn out before He made His choice. God knew ahead of time what kind of person each one would become, and, being sovereign, He has the right to take that foreknowledge into consideration in His determinative election. He knows where to grant His grace effectively. The point here is that God does not *react* to us, our choices, and our works. He is proactive in His calling.

In verse 13 Paul quotes Malachi 1:2 and 3. God loves all human beings as persons. He desires and works for their highest and greatest good. Some have made themselves hateful to God and so have placed themselves under His total disapproval unless and until they repent.

So, why did God love Jacob and hate Esau before they were even born? Because God foreknew them. He foreknew how each would turn out. He foreknew not only what they would *do* but also what they would *become*.

God's sovereign election is never arbitrary. Election is conditioned by foreknowledge, not the other way around (Romans 8:28 and 1 Peter 1:2).

Romans 9:14

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

Here Paul anticipates a likely question and summarily dismisses it. Based on God's revealed character, the obvious answer is “May it never be!”

The question arises from the mistaken notion that sovereignty equals arbitrariness. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God's sovereignty means that He does not have to ask anyone's permission to do *what* He does, and He does not have to explain to anyone *why* He does it. That does not mean that God does not have sufficiently good and wise reasons for His sovereign purposes and decrees. He most certainly does. Given the natural and moral qualities of God, reason requires us to believe that God acts in full accord with all of His natural and moral qualities, including love, foreknowledge, and wisdom. It is nonsense to assume that God's sovereignty *requires* Him to act arbitrarily in opposition to His character and without regard to His foreknowledge and wisdom.

We have solid ground for complete confidence in God in all things. We must never form our concept of God out of the raw materials of our life experiences. If we do, we will always come up with a false view of God. A *mental* image of God is just as false as a *metal* image. We must build on God's self-revelation. God loves us; He knows what He is doing and what He allows to happen, and why; He makes everything work together for good to them who love Him (Romans 8:28). Settle this in your soul, and nothing that happens in life will shatter your faith.

Romans 9:15 - 24

¹⁵For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” ¹⁶So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” ¹⁸Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

¹⁹You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” ²⁰But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

²²What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³and that He

might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Even though election is according to foreknowledge, it is still sovereign. From the firm negative answer in verse 14, the apostle proceeds (verse 15) to reaffirm divine sovereignty by quoting God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33:19.

God has mercy and compassion on whom He chooses. The fact that it is mercy means that God does not owe anything to anyone. If He did, His favor would be an obligation of justice, not an act of mercy. Grace is getting what we do *not* deserve; mercy is *not* getting what we *do* deserve.

Verse 16 says that God's mercy and compassion on us do not originate in our will and actions. The ground—the origin and originating cause—is God's mercy. Believers cannot boast that they made the first move, that they came to God by their own initiative. Left to ourselves, we would never be saved. In order to save us God had to overcome our reluctance—our stubbornness—by effectively applying the truth to our minds and hearts by His Spirit.

The conclusion is that people are elected to salvation because of what God did, not because of what people do. That is, God did not choose us because we became willing; we became willing because God chose us. Had God left us to ourselves and had the choice been left entirely up to us, we would never have turned to God on our own initiative. God took the initiative in our salvation. God's mercy on us was not His response to our “willing” and “running.”

It is a *practical* impossibility to come to God by our own will while we are in a morally unregenerate state—that is, we cannot do what we *refuse* to do as long as we keep refusing to do it. We have free will. The “will” is the essential voluntary function of the soul. Left to ourselves we invariably use that free will to become voluntary slaves to sin. We come to God only when God in His mercy turns our will by drawing us to Himself, away from the selfish set of our will. To do this God employs the moral, persuasive influences of His Spirit, His church, and His word. He also uses a whole combination of influences and life situations in the difficult task of waking us up and moving us to repentance and faith.

The person who thinks “I'll turn to God when I am ready” is kidding himself/herself—*and worse*. That person has set his or her will in the wrong direction (no, we were not born that way; we did it ourselves). That person is already resisting every gracious appeal of the Holy Spirit, reason, conscience, the church, the gospel, godly family and friends, and every other positive influence. And will that “will” left to itself ever turn to God? That person has two options: dream on and wake up terrified in hell, or wake up *now* and run to Christ.

Yes, the will yields (and eagerly so!), but only after it has been fully awakened and persuaded by God's merciful influences.

Pharaoh.

God's sovereignty in both election and reprobation is further illustrated by what God did to and through Pharaoh. In verse 17 the apostle quotes Exodus 9:16.

The historical narrative says that sometimes Pharaoh hardened his heart and sometimes God hardened his heart. What does it mean that God hardened Pharaoh's heart? Does it mean that God forced Pharaoh to choose and act as he did? At those moments did Pharaoh cease being a free moral agent and become a temporary robot?

Of course not. First of all, God never hardens the heart of anyone who has not already hardened his or her own heart. Pharaoh was already a hardened sinner before Moses and Aaron arrived on the scene. When God “hardened” Pharaoh's heart, He merely withdrew any special divine influences and allowed Pharaoh to be his own sinful self, think his own

sinful thoughts and make his own sinful choices.

It was as though God were saying to Pharaoh, "Go ahead, Pharaoh. Do what you want to do. I won't stop you. In fact, I will use what you are going to do to show My power and declare My Name to all the surrounding nations. I am the One who providentially put you in your position as ruler over Egypt. I know—as I have always known—what a proud, hard-hearted person you would make of yourself. I could restrain you, but instead I will remove My restraint and let you go ahead and be as hard-hearted as you are determined to be. I created your free moral agency, and now I will let you use the moral abilities that I gave you to further your own depravity. I will let your selfish, evil thoughts run loose."

This is called "judicial blindness." God shuts the "eyes" of those who persistently refuse to see. He does this out of love for them. Some people are determined to go to hell. God knew before they were born who and what they would make of themselves. So the more light they have, the greater will be their condemnation for rejecting it. So God deliberately withholds light from them so they will have less light to sin against in this life and less to give account for at the judgment.

So God has good and wise reasons for having mercy on some and hardening others. He knows where to invest the resources of His grace effectively and where not to allow those resources to be trampled under feet.

The conclusion is re-emphasized in verse 18. Yes, both election and reprobation are facts clearly taught in The Scriptures. From Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2 we are told that this is according to God's foreknowledge.

In verse 14 the apostle asks the question, "what shall we say?" and then answers it. Now in verse 19 he anticipates what some objector will say (and many do say). This is not necessarily a "dumb" question. Rather, it arises "logically" out of a misperception of the sovereignty of God.

In response the apostle does not refer back to what he had already established in 8:29—that divine election and by implication also reprobation are according to God's foreknowledge. Instead, he continues to press the truth of divine sovereignty.

"Who are you . . .?" Think about who He is whose justice you are calling into question! Find out something about God; learn who He is; know Him and His character; understand His ways. If you do, you will not question Him.

The question anticipated in verse 19 is a libelous assault on the very character and integrity of God. It assumes that God does not act out of love, that God is arbitrary, that He does not have sufficiently good and wise reasons for what He sovereignly purposes.

The Potter And The Clay.

In verses 20 - 24 Paul refers to the potter and his clay to illustrate the truth of God's sovereignty. The potter can take clay and make a beautiful vase. Out of the same batch of clay he can make a trash receptacle. It is his choice.

The human potter has the right and the ability to make different containers out of the same batch of clay. Likewise, God has the authority to do what He chooses with the human beings He has created. God is the Creator; we are the created. He is the Potter; we are the clay. God can do with us whatever He has chosen. The assumption is that the human "creator" knows what he is doing and why. The assumption is far greater in regard to God, the divine Creator. God knows what He is doing and why.

The analogy of the potter and the clay contains both a comparison and a contrast. Jesus did this in the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow (Luke 18). The comparison is this: the earthly potter and the heavenly Potter each uses the same clay to produce different results. The contrast is this: the earthly potter uses clay from the same batch arbitrarily because no potential difference exists between the clay used for one purpose and the clay used for the opposite purpose. The clay is an inert, passive substance. On the other hand, the common "batch" of human "clay" that the heavenly

Potter uses *does* have a potential difference for the contrasting ways it is used. The human “clay” actively participates one way or the other in its response to the Potter.

On both sides of the analogy the potter/Potter acts sovereignly. The human potter acts arbitrarily in his sovereignty. The heavenly Potter does *not* act arbitrarily in His sovereignty. The natural and moral qualities of the heavenly Potter are fully involved in His purposes and providences. God's foreknowledge wisely and justly conditions His sovereign choices.

Any analogy between the human use of inanimate objects (clay) and God's use of human beings has an inherent limitation. Inanimate objects do not have a will; human beings do. In verse 21 Paul rises above this limitation. A human potter does not have to “endure” (bear with) self-willed resistance and rebellion from the clay he is working with. The exact opposite is the case with God's dealings with human beings. We *do* have a will and we are exercising it vigorously either in loving obedience or selfish disobedience.

In 2 Timothy 2:20 and 21 the inspired apostle again brings up the analogy of the contrasting types of vessels and emphasizes the role of our free will in the matter. “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Thus our free will conditions *how* God in His sovereignty deals with us. God never exercises His sovereignty in violation of or at the expense of the other qualities of His being and His character: love, wisdom, and justice. Also, in the exercise of His sovereignty God never violates the laws of our God-given being by forcing our will. A “will” that is forced is no will at all.

So then, *although* willing to show His wrath and make His power known, in the wise and judicious conduct of His sovereignty God “endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (verse 22).

Verses 22 through 24 form one long question. “What if God . . .?” The “what if” is His sovereign purpose. In His foreknown purpose God anticipated both the character and the behavior of the “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.” He also foreknew the effectiveness of His work of grace in the “vessels of mercy which He had prepared beforehand for glory.” “Vessels” (containers) denotes purpose of use.

The character of the “vessels of wrath” did not take God by surprise. He foreknew them, their character, and their behavior. In His eternal purpose God “prepared” them for destruction because He knew that is how they would prepare themselves. God had to endure them with much longsuffering, enduring even their rejection of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Their only usefulness to God in the overall scheme of things is to give Him an occasion and means to demonstrate His judicial wrath on sin and to reveal His power. That in itself provides a valuable instructive deterrent to any potential future destructive rebellion against Him and His just and benevolent moral rule. Their purpose is to serve as an everlasting warning.

God knew that they would not repent, and He will not force them. So why does God put up with them? Why did God give Noah's generation so many years to repent? Why would He have spared Sodom and Gomorrah if only 10 righteous had been found there? Why did He put up with the Amorites over a 400 year period until their iniquities were full (Genesis 15:16)?

“To show His wrath and make His power known.” Remember, “vessels” signifies usefulness for a purpose. God can even make the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). Even the reprobates (the ones who by their own persistent disobedience seal their own doom in God's foreknowledge) are not totally useless to God.

By contrast, God's sovereign foreordained purpose in saving the “vessels of mercy” gave Him the perfect occasion and means to “make known the riches of His glory.” As God's

just judgment on the vessels of wrath provides a powerful negative deterrent to sin, so His mercy on the “vessels of mercy” provides a powerful positive motivation for eternal loving obedience.

So two things God wants to make fully known once and for all to the universe of moral beings: the full guilt of sin by His absolute judicial opposition (wrath) on those who practice sin, and the riches of His glory on the “vessels” of mercy.

“Called” in verse 24 takes us back to 8:28. It refers not to the universal call of the gospel but to the effective call of the elect (*“the called”*). These are the foreknown elect. These are the product of God's mercy through Jesus Christ. God's saving mercy is contrasted to our own works. That sovereign divine mercy is the theme of the entire Theodicy (chapters 9 - 11).

God's purpose is to reveal the riches of His glory on the “vessels” of mercy. The “called” are the showcase of the fullness of God's love in all of its many-splendored wonder and beauty.

This ties in with Ephesians 3:8 - 11. When Satan and his angels rebelled and also when mankind sinned, the holy angels saw a fearful demonstration of the holiness and justice of God. Such a demonstration of the justice of God without a corresponding demonstration of His mercy would have left them forever with an incomplete and unbalanced knowledge of the character of God. Satan rebelled. Adam and Eve sinned. The human race except for Noah and his family were wiped out by the Flood. Israel seemingly failed. What is God doing? Then God revealed His many-splendored wisdom in the Church. The principalities and powers in the heavenlies saw it and from then on and forever they now have a revelation of the whole character of God that they never would or could have had otherwise.

Verse 24 ties this section to the main subject of the Theodicy. The “vessels of mercy” include all who accept God's mercy in Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. Now we understand that God's dealings with Israel through the centuries were not a series of failures and frustrations interspersed with occasional seasons of temporary renewal. All along God had a purpose. That purpose was revealed in the coming of the Messiah—the Christ. The Jews who received Him received God's mercy and became the heirs of “the riches of His glory.” Out of all Israel they alone received the blessings of Abraham and inherited the promises. They are the remnant of Israel (see verse 27). They do not possess this mercy alone, for God through Jesus Christ opened the door of mercy to all who will believe, both Jews and Gentiles. This fact is emphasized in the prophecies of Hosea and Isaiah.

Romans 9:25, 26

²⁵As He says also in Hosea:

**“I will call them My people, who were not My people,
And her beloved, who was not beloved.”**

²⁶And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,

**‘You are not My people,’
There they shall be called sons of the living God.’**

To demonstrate that this was God's purpose and plan from the beginning, Paul corroborates it by Old Testament passages. He refers first to Hosea 1:2 - 10 and 2:23.

Paul does not quote the entire passage in Hosea. Instead he calls attention to two verses: Hosea 1:10 and 2:23. These verses represent the prophetic message of the passage as a whole.

Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel during its decline and prior to its captivity in 721 B.C. Hosea's own tragic family life reflected and projected God's

heartbreak and grief over Israel. Hosea's wife bore him a daughter to whom God gave the name Loruhamah, meaning "not having obtained mercy." The child's name meant that God would no longer have mercy on the northern kingdom of Israel because of their intransigent spiritual "adultery."

Hosea's next child was a son. God told Hosea to name him Loammi, meaning "not my people." Thus these two children bore names that made them a living declaration that God no longer recognized the apostates in Israel as His people and therefore no longer recipients of His continued mercy.

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered . . ." (verse 10a).

How would this happen? If the unbelieving Israelites are no longer God's people, how can the number of the children of Israel become immeasurable?

The answer is the very point Paul is making in Romans 9. God turned to those who had not been His people and had not obtained mercy. That is, through Jesus Christ God opened the door of mercy to the Gentiles and brought all who believe on Christ (Jews and Gentiles) into the New Covenant as "sons of the living God."

The apostle Peter declares the same truth in 1 Peter 2:9 and 10 when he writes to New Covenant believers, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." Peter's reference to Hosea is clear and definite.

Romans 9:27 - 29

²⁷Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:

**"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,
The remnant will be saved.**

**²⁸For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,
Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth."**

²⁹And as Isaiah said before:

**"Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed,
We would have become like Sodom,
And we would have been made like Gomorrah.**

As further attestation from the prophets, the second Old Testament passages Paul cites are found in Isaiah 10:22 and 1:9. These are strong and definite.

Isaiah 10:22 affirms the "remnant principle" (see 2 Kings 19:30, 31; Isaiah 11:10 - 16; 37:31, 32; Jeremiah 23:3; Joel 2:32; Micah 2:12, 13; 5:2 - 8; 7:18; Zephaniah 3:13). Paul returns to the "remnant principle" in Romans 11 (see 11:5).

So far as covenant relationship is concerned, only a remnant of Israel would be left. These are the ones who receive the Messiah. This "remnant principle" was declared by the Lord Jesus Christ when He warned the unbelieving Jews of His day, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). We hear the echo of this in Peter's reference to believers in Christ as "a holy nation" (1 Peter 1:9). In fact, much earlier Peter had warned his fellow Jews that if they rejected the Messiah, the Prophet whom Moses foretold, they would be cut off from the people, excommunicated from Israel (Acts 3:22, 23, quoting Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19). Stephen also referred to this just before those who heard him stoned him to death (Acts 7:37).

Isaiah 1:9 is cited as even further evidence that God has always regarded the obedient among Israel as His true covenant people. The immoral idol worshippers certainly were not.

Romans 9:30 - 33

³⁰What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³²Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³As it is written:

**“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”**

The conclusion begins with verse 30. The Gentiles historically did not pursue righteousness. They were more interested in philosophy than in morality. They pursued passion, not piety. When the gospel was introduced, the believing Gentiles attained to (overtook and seized) true righteousness. It was not a process of self-improvement. It happened suddenly—*by faith*. The moment they repented and believed the gospel, they were made righteous before God!

Israel? They had been pursuing the law of righteousness but never arrived at it. It was an endless treadmill of external works, a “carrot-and-stick” pursuit.

Why? Verse 32 tells us. They pursued it by works, not by faith. They trusted their own religious and legal observances rather than trusting and obeying God from the heart. They missed the principle of righteousness by faith, even though it was plainly taught in The Scriptures (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4).

Faith in Christ alone for righteousness was a huge obstacle for them. They rejected it and therefore it became their “stumbling stone.” Millions of Jews have stumbled over it—over *Him*, as we see in the passage Paul quoted (Isaiah 28:16).

Jesus said it would happen, as we read in Matthew 21:42 - 44). Peter also quoted the passages in Isaiah that prophesied it (1 Peter 2:6 - 8).

“Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” That is the good news. Jesus Christ will never disappoint those who truly and fully put their trust in Him. God will deliver on every promise He made to those who come to Christ. The riches of His glory are theirs both now and forever, always increasing, never ending!

Believe—Call—Be Saved**Romans 10****Romans 10:1**

¹Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

In all that he writes about Israel's failure to attain righteousness under the Law of Moses, the inspired apostle has no hostility toward the Jews as such. In fact, he himself was a Jew, a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" and a Pharisee (see Philippians 3:4 - 6). He had experienced personally the failure and frustration of the "wretched man" of Romans 7:24, the person whose passions defeated his reason and enslaved him. In Jesus Christ Paul found "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17), and he longed and prayed that his fellow Israelites also would be saved.

By "Israel" Paul means "Israel after the flesh" (1 Corinthians 10:18), his "kinsmen according to the flesh" for whom he was at the point of wishing himself accursed from Christ (Romans 9:1 - 5), in contrast to those who are defined as Jews "inwardly" (Romans 2:29) and "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16; Romans 9:6).

We notice that Paul did not pray for Israel's political freedom, cultural preservation, or national destiny. *He prayed for them to be saved*—to find true righteousness in Jesus Christ. Justification by faith is the theme of the epistle, and in that theme—that context—we find Paul's meaning in all he says in the epistle. This is essential to a right hermeneutic, especially when we come to Romans 11.

Romans 10:2 - 4

²For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Zeal without knowledge. As they directed their religious zeal toward the Law of Moses, the Jews who rejected Jesus the Messiah and only Savior failed to come to the full realization that they are giving their devotion to the very Law that condemns them because of their sins.

Jesus made this fact very clear. He warned the Jews who were hostile to Him, "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:45 - 47). Not only did they break the Law Of Moses and thus incur its penalty; they also rejected what Moses wrote about Jesus (Deuteronomy 18:18), and thus they rejected their own Messiah and only hope of salvation.

Support for a law implies support for its penalties. A person can be justified by the Law only if that person never breaks the Law. Once a person violates the Law, he or she incurs its penalty. Since we have all sinned against the Law Of Moses, and more specifically the universal moral law embodied in it, enthusiasm for the Law is only enthusiasm for one's own eternal punishment.

The person who claims to live by the Ten Commandments does not realize what he or

she is talking about.

One can achieve a certain external “righteousness” by observing the letter of the Law. This is a rightarian legalism that has no love in it. The rich young ruler did this (Mark 10:17 - 22). He did everything “right,” but when Jesus put His finger on the idol in the young man's heart, he went away sad.

Paul himself testified that before his conversion he was blameless “concerning the righteousness which is in the law” (Philippians 3:6), yet at the same time he was a “wretched man” (Romans 7:24) breathing out religion-inspired hate and violence (Acts 9:1).

Religion without righteousness. By living under the Law of Moses and giving their religious devotion to it, the unbelieving Jews ignorantly try to achieve righteousness by their devotion to their accuser. In their futile efforts to establish their own righteousness by works (impossible for those who are already condemned under the sentence of the Law), they totally miss the “God-kind” of righteousness that is by faith (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17). They miss it because they refuse to submit to its basic requirement—faith, faith in the Messiah, faith that surrenders pride and humbly receives the gift.

Christ is the end (*telos*) of the Law so far as righteousness is concerned to everyone who believes. *Telos* means *terminus ad quem*, the terminal point. Christ brought an end to the Law as a means of attaining righteousness (salvation) because the Law failed to do so (Romans 9:31). Christ succeeds where the Law failed. Christ is the “destination” to Whom the Law led us (Galatians 3:24).

Romans 10:5 - 13

⁵For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” ⁶But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ⁷or, “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The Law requires perfect obedience; therefore, the person who chooses to be justified by the Law must never break the Law. That person must commit himself/herself to live by every precept of the Law. No disobedience; no failures. Any violation of the Law incurs its penalty.

The apostle quotes God's own words through Moses (Leviticus 18:5). Paul referred to the same words in his earlier epistle to the Galatians (Galatians 3:12. See also Ezekiel 20:11, 13).

Because all have sinned (Romans 3:23), justification (righteousness) by the Law is no longer an option. We forfeited that possibility. Only one Person perfectly obeyed the Law (both the universal moral law and its embodiment in the Law of Moses). That was Jesus Christ.

That leaves only one way to be justified (made righteous) before God—*faith*—faith in God's provided way. This has always been the only way to be made righteous. We find this principle in the Old Testament. Abraham was justified by faith (Genesis 15:6. See Galatians 3:6 and Romans 4:3). Habakkuk 2:4 says that the just shall live by his faith, a fact repeated three times in the New Testament (Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38).

This is a living faith. By this living faith we are justified before God apart from works (Ephesians 2:8, 9). This living faith also produces works (James 2:14 - 26).

Paul cites Deuteronomy 30:12 - 14 in support of the principle of righteousness by faith. In that passage Moses was referring to the Law. Paul points out that even when he was referring to the Law, Moses stated clearly the principle of righteousness by faith. That is, the Law was not still up in Heaven or far across the sea. It was in their mouth and heart. *It was given to be a confession of faith that comes from the heart.*

The principle of Deuteronomy 30:12 - 14 applies to Christ and has its ultimate meaning in Christ, the living Word. We do not have to bring Christ down from Heaven to bring us salvation. He already did that. We do not have to bring Christ up from the dead. He already arose. Both are established facts, accomplished once-for-all.

Now we have the written word concerning the living Word. It is the word of faith proclaimed in the gospel. As Deuteronomy 30:14 says, it is in our mouth and heart.

What do we confess with our mouth “unto salvation”? *Jesus is Lord!* This is no glib statement. It is a confession of a life commitment, a confession that has cost many people their very lives. They sealed their confession with their blood. Roman soldiers died because they said “Lord Jesus!” instead of “Lord Caesar!” In some cultures today believers makes this confession at the risk and even the cost of their lives. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and “loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11).

Full trust and full confession are no light matter. Both are vital to salvation. Confessing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the most serious confession one can make.

What do we believe in the heart? *God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.* This is not a symbolic “resurrection” with a “spiritual” meaning. It is a real time-space event. It involves the body of Jesus of Nazareth coming out of the tomb on the third day. Anything else is theological “fluff.” This is a heart faith, not merely a head opinion. A heart belief moves the soul (will) and transforms the life.

We cannot believe on Jesus Christ as Savior and not confess Him as Lord. The saving word of faith includes both. It believes both. We believe in the heart and confess with the mouth: *Jesus is Lord!* This is total faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing else is. It is a full trust, a total and open commitment.

Jesus made it very clear. “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. And whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32, 33 KJV). That confession can bring the most serious consequences on earth, consequences that the believer might never be called on to endure but nevertheless is willing to endure. The believer who has to face the firing squad does not have to wait until then to make the decision; the decision was made at the time of salvation. Believers have already settled the issue. Consequences be what they may—*Jesus is Lord!*

Paul quotes the last clause of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 28:16 as further support for the principle that righteousness is by faith. Believers in Jesus Christ are justified by faith and therefore will not be put to shame before God or man.

Righteousness is by faith and not by the Law. This places Jews and Gentiles on the same footing and opens the way of salvation to all. All the riches of Christ are available to all who call on Him in faith. He is “rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4). Romans 2:4 speaks of “the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.” Romans 9:23 says that He has made known the riches of His glory (see also Ephesians 3:16). We have “the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:17; 2:7). Colossians 2:2 speaks of “the riches of the full assurance of understanding.” Colossians 3:16 urges believers to let the word of Christ live in us richly. And Ephesians 3:8 says that the riches of Christ are “unsearchable.”

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33 KJV).

How do we receive the unsearchable riches of Christ? *Call on Him*, for “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (verse 13, quoting Joel 2:32). The promise of justification by faith springs right out of the Old Testament prophets and flows freely to all who will call in faith on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ puts us into a right relationship with God and opens up to us all the riches of God. This is a complete, full, and glorious salvation! It is worth both living for and, if need be, dying for.

Confess—acknowledgement: Jesus is Lord

Believe—commitment of faith.

Call—personal response, personal relationship

Result—salvation!

All four happen together.

Romans 10:14 - 17

¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

**“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”**

¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” ¹⁷So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Action follows belief. Calling follows belief. Because we believed, we called. Calling on the name of the Lord was the logical and necessary response of our faith in Him. We hear; we believe; we call.

How shall people hear? Someone has to bring the message to them. God could thunder the message of the gospel right out of the heavens. He could write the message across the sky in words of flaming fire. He could send angels to bring the message. However, these are not His methods. God uses people to reach people. They who receive the riches of this great salvation should be the very ones who are ready and eager to tell others about it. It has been said that evangelism “is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” People who have found the bread of life and the living water are eager to share the discovery with all who are dying of spiritual hunger and thirst.

True, God in His sovereign grace speaks to individuals in dreams and visions, as He did to Cornelius (Acts 10) and as He often does today in societies that are closed to the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Even in these cases usually a human witness is or has been involved somewhere. In Cornelius's case it was Peter. In closed societies the miraculous visitations were and are usually preceded by some awareness of the faith of Christ, propagated by believers through personal contact or the media.

These inspired words of the apostle Paul echo the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, recorded in Matthew 28:18 - 20, Mark 16:15 - 18, Luke 24:47, and Acts 1:8.

Whether personal or worldwide, evangelism has been committed to believers. God has brought His Church, His people, into full partnership with Himself in this massive undertaking. He could do it by Himself, but that would leave us out, and people who share God's love cannot and will not be silent or idle. The same love that moved God to give His Son for our salvation also moves us to tell the good news to others. If love moves the heart of God, it moves the hearts of those who love God.

God calls willing people to go. He also raises up willing people to send them. Worldwide evangelism is a cooperative endeavor. A church without a missionary vision is a sick church. As it has been said, a sick church needs to be put on a missionary diet. The same is true of sick saints. A missionary diet will restore robust spiritual health.

Again the apostle refers back to the Old Testament roots of New Testament truth. In verse 15 he quotes the gist of Isaiah 52:7. Some of the old New Testament manuscripts

omit the words, “preach the gospel of peace.”

In verse 16 Paul is still focused on the universal message of the gospel. Chapter 1:20 says that the witness of natural revelation to God's “eternal power and Godhead” have been given to everyone “so that they are without excuse.” In addition, cultures and nations that were contemporary with Israel were aware of God's special revelation to Israel and how that revelation contrasted to their own pagan religions and resulting low moral conduct. The message of the Law and the prophets was not hidden.

Also, at the time of the writing of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the gospel had been preached extensively for over two decades. Not all had heeded the gospel and responded to it. This reflected the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Who has believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1 NKJV).

Verse 17 emphasizes the necessity of content—that is, the word of God. God justifies us by faith. Faith in what? Faith in faith? Faith in anything? Faith as a positive attitude and outlook on life?

No. God justifies us by faith in revealed, propositional, and authoritative truth—His word, the message of the gospel of Christ. Saving faith is based on the truth concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The message points us to the Person. We receive Christ because we believe the message; we believe the message because we *hear* the message; we hear the message because someone brought us the message—the good news.

Romans 10:18 - 21

¹⁸But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:

**“Their sound has gone out to all the earth,
And their words to the ends of the world.”**

¹⁹But I say, did Israel not know? First 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.”**

²⁰But Isaiah is very bold and says:

**“I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.”**

²¹But to Israel he says:

**“All day long I have stretched out My hands
To a disobedient and contrary people.”**

In verse 18 the focus shifts back to the universal witness of natural revelation (see Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19 - 21). The term “yes indeed” in verse 18 in the Greek means literally “indeed therefore at least.”

Like a mighty cosmic orchestra, all the witnesses of nature resound throughout the earth, carrying the words (*rhemata*) of natural revelation throughout the inhabited world (*oikoumene*).

In verse 19 the spotlight is turned once again on Israel. If the universal words (*rhemata*) of natural revelation (natural theology) pervade the whole of the inhabited world so that they are without excuse, can Israel, who had also the special revelation of the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, plead ignorance?

“Did not Israel know?” This is a rhetorical question. The answer is obvious. Yes, with both natural revelation and special revelation Israel certainly *did* know. They heard. They knew. They disobeyed.

Now the call of God through the gospel is universal. Many Gentiles as well as some Jews are hearing, believing and being justified by faith in Jesus Christ. What God is doing is provoking the unbelieving Jews to jealousy and anger. Paul himself had so reacted before his conversion. Later he encountered against himself the same strong and even

violent reaction (see Acts 13:45; 17:5; 22:21, 22). This reaction by Israel was not unanticipated. Paul supports this by quoting the prophecy given by Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21.

By reaching out and bringing gentiles into the New Covenant by faith, God is taking to Himself those who had been “no nation” and “a foolish people.” This terminology reminds us of the prophecy of Hosea 1 and 2, referred to in Romans 9:25 and 1 Peter 2:9 and 10. It reminds us also of the words of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 21:42 - 44).

Paul then brings to bear the divine statement boldly proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 65:1 and 2). The Gentiles had not sought the true and living God, the God of Israel, but now in responding to the gospel they have found Him. They had not asked for Him, but now in Christ He has revealed Himself to them. But to His own covenant people God speaks sadly and with a broken heart, “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

The Olive Tree Connection

Romans 11

Romans 11:1 - 6

¹I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ³“Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”? ⁴But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” ⁵Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

The theme of Romans 10 carries right on into Romans 11. In verse 1 Paul asks a logical question: has God cast (pushed, thrust) away His people? That is, has God closed the door of salvation to Israel, the people of His ancient covenant? Has God excluded them from the universal call of the gospel? Have the Jews who rejected Jesus the Messiah forfeited their chance to repent and be saved? The answer is a strong and definite no: “may it never be!” The gospel call is going out to everyone, Jews and Gentiles.

At this point it is essential to understand that the inspired apostle is *not* referring here to Israel's cultural future or national destiny. Whatever that might be, it is not the subject of this text. Remember, the entire Epistle To The Romans is not about prophecy; it is about justification by faith—salvation and righteousness and particularly personal salvation and righteousness. Justification by faith is not only the subject of the entire epistle but also the immediate context of this passage. Every Bible passage must be interpreted within its context. As the saying goes, “a text without its context is a pretext.”

If this passage were referring to the destiny of Israel as a nation, Paul's reference to himself as an example would make no sense at all. It makes perfect sense when we recognize that Paul is speaking of himself as proof that unbelieving Jews can repent and be saved. If Saul of Tarsus (Paul) could turn to Jesus the Messiah and be saved, *any* Jew can.

Here as before Paul goes back to the Old Testament roots of New Testament truth. This time (verse 3) he quotes the prophet Elijah's complaint to God about the unbelieving, Baal-worshipping Israelites of his day (1 Kings 19:10). Then, in verse 4 he quotes the divine response (*chrematismos*, a *hapax legoumenon*). Out of all Israel, God still had 7,000 in Elijah's day who refused to bow the knee to the image of Baal. They were the ones who were true to the Covenant and were living in it. So then, who were the true Israelites, the true covenant Israel, in Elijah's day? The Baal-worshippers? No. The true Israelites were the ones who did not bow the knee to Baal. They were the remnant of Israel at that time.

Paul affirmed the “remnant principle” in Romans 9, especially verse 27. We have it here in Romans 11. We find it again in Revelation 12:17.

This leads us to the salient point (verse 5): “Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” At the time of the writing of the Epistle To The Romans the new covenant Church contained a large number of Jews who had

received the Messiah. These early “messianic Jews” were the remnant of Israel “according to the election of grace.” The same “remnant principle” applies to this day.

Again Paul emphasizes God's gracious election according to foreknowledge. Righteousness is totally by grace. It could not be otherwise in view of the fact that all—Jews and Gentiles— have sinned and therefore come under condemnation. Because election is by grace, it is no longer by our works. Guilty people cannot become “not guilty” by anything they can do. We can repent, and we are commanded to do so as a necessary *condition* of salvation; nevertheless, our repentance does not earn any merit and it does not remove our guilt. Our guilt is removed only by a gracious and merciful act of God through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice on our behalf.

If salvation were by works, grace would no longer be grace. In that case, salvation would be something we earned, something God owed to us on the basis of something we did. That certainly is not the case.

The remainder of verse 6 in the King James Version is not part of the original text. Probably it was a marginal note in an early manuscript that copyists placed into the text.

Romans 11:7 - 10

⁷What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. ⁸Just as it is written:

**“God has given them a spirit of stupor,
Eyes that they should not see
And ears that they should not hear,
To this very day.”**

⁹And David says:

**“Let their table become a snare and a trap,
A stumbling block and a recompense to them.**

**¹⁰Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see,
And bow down their back always.”**

This passage is about Israel's blind stumbling. Paul asks the logical question that arises from the truth that has just been established. “What then?” What is the logical conclusion, with its implications and applications? Israel has not obtained what he (the nation personified) seeks. And what is that? Chapter 9, verse 31 tells us—“the law of righteousness,” a right standing before God in conformity with the moral law. God brought the elect into a right standing and moral state by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:2). Israel never achieved that through the Law.

What has happened, then, to the unbelieving Jews, both in Paul's day and today? They were blinded—hardened. This is “perceptual sclerosis.” It is mentioned again in verse 25.

Who did this? God did, as the apostle establishes from Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. He cites also verses 22 and 23 in the Messianic portion of Psalm 69, one of David's imprecatory psalms. Israel's “table” means what is on the table, what they feed on.

We considered God's sovereign act of “judicial blindness” (hardness) in the example of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Romans 9:17). God is not obligated to overcome willful spiritual imperception. He does so only in grace by His Holy Spirit (John 16:7 - 11). God left the unbelieving Jews to their own “perceptual sclerosis.” The reason is found in the following passage.

Romans 11:11 - 15

¹¹I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. ¹²Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much

more their fullness!

¹³For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

The apostle Peter also speaks about Israel's "stumbling" (see 1 Peter 2:6 - 8). This passage here in Romans is about the restoration of repentant Jews to the covenant relationship. It begins with an anticipated yet shallow question: "have they stumbled that they should fall?" It is answered by a definite "certainly not!" (may it never be).

Salvation came first to the Jews (John 1:11). The gospel was proclaimed first to the Jews (Acts 1:8). The apostles presented the gospel first to the Jews (Romans 1:16). If the Jews in general had accepted the gospel of the Christ, the focus would have remained on them for a longer period of time. This would have built a much broader and stronger base for the eventual evangelization of the (gentile) world. However, that is not what happened. The general Jewish rejection of Jesus the Messiah brought the gospel to the Gentiles early. This had a two-fold effect: the Gentiles received the gospel right away, and the Jews reacted with jealousy (and anger). Provoking the unbelieving Jews to jealousy (see 10:19) was one of God's sovereign purposes in His foreknowledge of what the reaction of the Jews would be. He did so in order to save some of them (verse 14).

God's purpose was not that they should fall (*hina pesosin*), but that through their fall (*to auton paraptomati*—transgression, trespassing, tragic mis-step)—the gospel would go directly to the Gentiles, provoking the Jews to jealousy (*parazelosai*, "excite to rivalry"). The worst thing that could have happened to the unbelieving Jews would be for them to reject the Messiah and be indifferent about it. God's purpose is to save many of them, and to do so he had to make them jealous. Otherwise they would have "slumbered on" in their spiritual "stupor" (verse 8, from Isaiah 29:10) and been lost.

If the fall (*paraptoma*—trespass, falling aside) and failure ("diminishing," loss, defeat) of the unbelieving Jews has resulted in the gentile world receiving the riches of Christ earlier than otherwise, how much more will the fullness of the elect Jews coming to faith in Christ enrich the whole world? Yes, God is bringing Jews to Christ, and they are enriching the Church and the whole world, including "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Corinthians 10:18). We will consider the meaning of the word "fullness" when we come to verse 25.

In verse 13 the apostle speaks directly to gentile believers. Because he is an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 15:16), Paul glorifies his ministry.

Paul wants to provoke the unbelieving Jews to jealousy (verse 11) and save some of them (verse 14). Paul's success among the Gentiles, the mighty miracles, the evident blessing and approval of God, the spiritual and moral transformation of the gentile (as well as Jewish) converts, the joy of the believers' new life in Christ, the establishing and growth of the Church—all of this had the effect of provoking the unbelieving Jews to jealousy. The believers in Jesus, the Messiah, possessed and enjoyed God's favor and blessing, and the unbelieving Jews did not. This stirred them to jealousy and anger. They thought it should belong to them; they missed it and wanted it back. Paul's desire was that this very strong jealous reaction would move some of them to come to the Messiah and be saved.

This leads again to the main point. God did not throw away His people, that is, the Jews whom He foreknew would be saved (verse 2). It is true that the unbelieving Jews were cast away (verse 15: *apobole*, from *apoballo* to throw off or away, a different word from the word in verse 2). Their fall (transgression, tragic mis-step) led to the early evangelization of the Gentiles. What then is the receiving of the Jews who later repent, believe in Jesus, the Messiah, and are saved? It is life from the dead—a spiritual resurrection.

In saving Jews who come to faith in Jesus the Messiah, God receives them back to life. Jews coming to the Messiah is a cause of celebration!

Romans 11:16 - 24

¹⁶For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

¹⁹You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. ²²Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

“Firstfruit” means the first of the dough. This takes us back to Numbers 15:17 - 21. When Israel came into the land of promise, they were to offer up a cake made from the first of their dough as a “heave offering” to the Lord. They were to do this throughout their generations. This first of the dough was “holy,” that is, dedicated to God and offered to Him. It symbolized the fact that the entire harvest was also “holy”; it belonged to God and was blessed by God.

This first of the dough became a type of the first Jews to receive their Messiah, Jesus. Thus it represents the early Jewish believers. If they are “holy,” the whole “lump” (batch) is also “holy.” That is, if God saved the early Jewish believers, He will certainly receive “back from the dead” any and all Jews who also will believe.

“Holy” has several meanings. Its broad definition is “set apart for a sacred purpose.” In some cases it means to be set apart from a common use to a sacred use, such as the “holy” and “most holy” places in the tabernacle and later the temple, the “holy” garments of the high priest, the “holy” utensils used in worship, and the “holy” anointing oil. In the personal moral sense it means to be morally pure before God, set apart from sin and to a personal relationship with God, including one's character and behavior. It is a specific application of the broader meaning of “set apart for a sacred purpose.”

When it says in verse 16 that the “lump” is also holy, it certainly does not mean that every Jew was and is holy in the personal, moral sense. It means that God has a covenant people set apart to Himself for a sacred purpose. That elect covenant people began with Abraham, continued through the following millennia, and will continue until the fullness of the elect come into it.

After applying the type of the first of the dough and the rest of the lump (batch) from Numbers 15:17 - 21, the apostle introduces another metaphor, the olive tree, and develops it at length. “If the root is holy, so are the branches” (verse 16).

God created a “lump” (batch) of dough. It is also represented as an “olive tree.” That is, God permanently established a covenant people. From time to time the arrangements of the covenants and even the covenants themselves have changed. God started with Abraham and established with him and his “seed” the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15 and 17). Later, God established the Mosaic Covenant, the Law (Exodus 24 and 34), then the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 23:4; Psalm 89:3). Finally God established the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, foretold by the prophets (Isaiah 55:3; 59:20, 21; 61:8; Jeremiah

31:31 - 33; 32:40).

The roots of the New Covenant are in the Old. The New Covenant is the fulfilling of the previous covenants. In fulfilling the previous covenants the New Covenant superseded them and by so doing did away with their temporary provisions, particularly the “ceremonial” parts of the Law (see Ephesians 2:13 - 17). Also, what was once written on tablets of stone is now written in the hearts of believers.

God started with a man (Abraham), expanded and extended the Covenant to his family (Isaac, Jacob, the tribal patriarchs), then established it with the whole nation (Israel) that emerged from the family.

Throughout His dealings with His covenant nation, God at times “pruned away” the disobedient. At times judgment came or was imposed on individuals and even large numbers of sinners. God commanded that people who deliberately disregarded Him and His Covenant were to be excommunicated from among the people (Deuteronomy 17:12, 13).

God also brought others into the covenant body, for example Rahab and Ruth. This goes as far back as Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, the wives of Jacob, and the wives of some of the patriarchs themselves. Asenath, the wife of Joseph and mother of Ephraim and Manassah, was an Egyptian.

At one time the true covenant people consisted only of the 7,000 who refused to bow the knee to the image of Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Nevertheless, the promises of the Covenant continued to encompass the nation as a whole “for the fathers' sake” (verse 28. See Exodus 32:13).

When the Messiah came, all who rejected Him were excommunicated from the covenant people. They became branches broken off from the olive tree. Moses prophesied that this would happen (Deuteronomy 18:18 and 19). Isaiah said that a remnant would remain (Isaiah 10:22, mentioned earlier in Romans 9:27). Hosea foretold it (Hosea 1). Jesus warned that it would happen (Matthew 21:43). The apostle Peter declared it (Acts 3:22 and 23).

The “root” (God's covenant purposes, promises, and provisions) of the olive tree goes clear back to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses. That “root” is “holy”—set apart for God's purposes. Therefore, the “olive tree” (Israel) that grew out of that “root” is also “holy,” and the individual branches are “holy.”

God did not uproot the olive tree or cut it down. He changed its constituency. The unbelieving Jews (branches) were broken off and the believing Gentiles were grafted in among the remaining branches (the Jews who received Christ). Now the believing Gentiles are by far the largest number of the living branches in the “olive tree.”

From verse 17 through verse 24 the apostle uses the second person singular, “thou,” addressing the individual gentile believer who might “boast” over the “branches” that were cut off.

In modern English no distinction is made between the second person singular and the second person plural. “You” could mean one person or it could mean many. (In the south of the United States, however, such a distinction does exist; the singular is “y'all,” and the plural is “*all* y'all.”)

Some of the individual branches were broken off of the olive tree and the gentile believers were grafted in and now share in its rich historic covenant blessings and benefits. The gentile believers were of a “wild” olive tree. They had been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise” (Ephesians 2:11 - 13). The gentile believer is not to boast against the branches that were broken off; that is, they were not to take an attitude of spiritual pride and superiority, to glory over them and treat them with disdain. The apostle reminds the boasting gentile believer that he does not support the root but the root supports him in the covenant relationship.

God's plan of salvation has its roots in His covenant dealings with ancient Israel. The

olive tree (God's covenant-based people) has its roots in the sovereign gifts and callings of God that began with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Out of those roots emerged the “olive tree” of His covenant people. Its “trunk” was established and endured through the centuries, even the millennia. The unbelievers were pruned away and the believing Gentiles were grafted in. The olive tree still grows and is being expanded by the addition of gentile believers and the Jews who believe on the Messiah.

The Church began as the remnant of Israel after the unbelieving Jews were broken off (Acts 3:22, 23). At its inception the Church was composed entirely of Jews. The remnant of Israel constituted the Church; it *was* the entire Church at that time. The Church did not “replace” Israel; Israel *became* the Church. The olive tree was still in place, standing with most of its branches broken off.

“You (singular) will say then” (verse 19). The gentile believer Paul addresses is reluctant to give up his disdainful attitude toward the unbelieving Jews. Paul anticipates his retort and answers it. He agrees with what the boasting gentile believer says as a matter of fact, then goes on to remind him that the unbelieving branches (Jews) were broken off because of their unbelief and that he, the gentile believer, stands (perfect tense) by faith (see Romans 5:2). He is not to be haughty, but fear. He is not to be presumptuous and smug in his supposed “security.” He is to maintain a healthy sense of humility and reverence, knowing that if God did not spare the individual “natural” Jewish branches because of *their* unbelief, He might not spare the gentile “graft” for the same reason. He is reminded that individual election is conditioned on continuing in the faith.

Paul urges the boasting gentile believer (verse 22) to look seriously at both God's goodness and His severity. A balanced view will correct his presumptuousness and instill in him a healthy godly fear. God dealt severely with the Jews who fell (*tous pesontas*) because of their unbelief. God showed His goodness to the believing gentile. God's goodness to the believing gentile is conditioned on the believing gentile's continuing in God's goodness. If the believing gentile does not continue in God's goodness, he also will be cut off. Believers are to take such “ifs” seriously and not circumvent them by theological maneuvering.

In verse 23 Paul brings us to the answer to the question posed in verse 1. God will graft back into the olive tree any Jew who does not remain in unbelief. Belief is a personal decision and being grafted back in is a personal, branch-by-branch restoration.

If the gentile believer was cut out of the “wild” olive tree of his or her pagan culture and was grafted contrary to that pagan culture into the olive tree of God's covenant people, how much more will the “natural” branches—the Jews who have Israel's rich covenant heritage (Romans 3:1, 2; 9:4, 5)—be grafted back branch-by-branch when they give up their unbelief and personally receive the Messiah? This is a rhetorical question, one with an obvious answer.

Romans 11:25 - 32

²⁵For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The Deliverer will come out of Zion,

And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

²⁷For this is My covenant with them,

When I take away their sins.”

²⁸Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹even so these also have now been disobedient, that

through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³²For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

Beginning with verse 25 the apostle returns to the second person plural—"you." Gentile believers must not be ignorant of God's hidden purpose now revealed ("mystery"—see Ephesians 3:1 - 7 and Colossians 1:2 - 7). Gentile believers must not suppose that God abandoned His covenant purpose in His dealings with Israel and that He started all over in the Church. True, we are now under the New Covenant. The New Covenant displaced the Old Covenant; however, it is not totally disconnected from the history of the Old Covenant and its roots in the purpose of God. The New Covenant finds its roots in the Old Covenant and is the fulfillment of it. The Church has a rich Jewish heritage. God's revelation to Israel gave humanity a divine worldview and established in Israel a culture that was set apart from all other nations. Believers in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, have inherited that revelation, its worldview and resulting godly culture. Unbelieving Jews have been "pruned" from their olive tree and believing Gentiles have been grafted in.

God has changed the constituency of the olive tree; however, God did not cut it down and plant a new gentile "tree" in its place. Gentile believers must recognize this and not become "wise" in their self-opinion. The gentile branches do not bear (sustain) the root; the root sustains the gentile branches (verse 18).

The historical tendency of the Church to cease being a Hebrew/moral organism and to remake itself into a Greek/philosophical institution has gone far in fostering this wrong thinking. Some of the results of this wrong thinking are evident in the ways a western, gentile "Christendom" has treated the Jews. They lost Paul's yearning to see the natural "branches" restored to the olive tree.

Back To Jerusalem!

The Church forgot her olive tree roots and stock. She needs to recover her "Israel" identity. She must *not* go back to the ceremonies, ordinances, sacrifices, and legalism of the Law, of course. She does need to reaffirm her roots and stock in the olive tree and the sovereign purposes of God that are embodied in that olive tree and that have maintained its continuity from Abraham to the present. Believers in Christ, the Messiah, are "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:16).

By growing wrong "roots" in the prevailing Greek philosophical "soil," the Church in a sense "went from Jerusalem to Athens." Through those philosophical "roots" the Church began to draw into herself the very philosophical poison that Paul warned against (Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:2), and to "graft" elements of the pagan, "wild olive tree" into the true olive tree that God had planted, thus corrupting it. The largely gentile Church assumed that she supported the root, instead of the other way around.

Jesus said of the Jews, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe" (John 4:48). Paul said, "The Jews request a sign" (1 Corinthians 1:22). The signs and wonders that accompanied the early preaching of the gospel were a powerful means to "provoke the Jews to jealousy." God was mightily and miraculously at work among those who followed the Messiah and experienced the empowering of the Holy Spirit that was prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28 - 32). The unbelieving Jews did not have what the followers of Jesus had, and that stirred their jealous hostility. What was established in Jerusalem and emerged out of Jerusalem provided the very power to move the Jews to jealousy and thus save some of them.

By moving away from the "root" of the olive tree, the Church lost most of that power. As a result, it was not able to "provoke the Jews to jealousy" and therefore evangelize them effectively. God is calling the Church to get "back to Jerusalem"—back to its covenant roots, back to the purity of a Hebrew/moral hermeneutic of The Scriptures, back to true holiness, back to the "upper room" experience with all of its power—including the

miracles, signs and wonders that helped bring Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles to obedience to Christ!

Israel's "Perceptual Sclerosis"

"Blindness" (hardness) in part has happened to Israel. That is, it has happened to that part of Israel that has rejected the Messiah, the Christ. This will continue until the full number of the elect Gentiles will be brought in, that is, brought to faith in Jesus Christ and thus brought into the olive tree. We must remember that the subject here is election to salvation, not national destiny. Romans is about salvation, not prophecy. Jesus' words in Luke 21:24 are about another subject, Jerusalem's treatment throughout gentile history, and have nothing to do with the subject of Romans 11:25.

"So" (thus, in this way) "all Israel will be saved." Isaiah 45:15 says "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified" (KJV). So then, "all Israel" means the whole "Israel Of God," those who are justified by faith in Christ. Only the justified are in Israel. Not all descendants of Israel (Jacob) are "Israel" as God defines it (Romans 9:6). The olive tree is still the olive tree. That is, Israel is still Israel in its New Covenant definition as foretold by the prophets.

In verses 26 and 27 Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20 and 21. The New Covenant was foretold also by the prophet Jeremiah (please read Jeremiah 31:31 - 34). *This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus Christ established the New Covenant.* God is not going to make some future covenant with modern Israel by which He will take away their sins. The covenant prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah, the covenant Paul is referring to, has already been established. It is the once-for-all "eternal covenant" (Hebrews 13:20), the *only* covenant by which God removes sin. Hebrews 8:6 - 18 makes that very clear. To say that God will take away anyone's sins by any means other than the once-for-all sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross is a gross insult to Christ and crosses the line into destructive heresy (2 Peter 2:1). It does great harm to the unbelieving Jews by giving them a false hope. It is saying that Christ's blood is insufficient for some and also that it is unnecessary for all if God has some other way to redeem us. God has already established the New Covenant. It is now in full force. There will be none other. There will be no other covenant by which God will take away anyone's sins, Jew or Gentile.

Concerning the gospel (verse 28) the unbelieving Jews became enemies through their unbelief. This brought the gospel to the Gentiles early and directly; so the Gentiles benefited as a result.

Concerning the election—the unbelieving Jews whom God in His sovereign election according to foreknowledge will bring to faith in Christ *during this present gospel dispensation* and therefore restore them into the olive tree—"they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (see Deuteronomy 4:30, 31, 37).

The "veil" is now on the heart of the unbelieving Jew. When a Jew turns to the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil is removed from his or her heart (2 Corinthians 3:14 - 16). It is a personal experience, a personal revelation.

Though the unbelieving Jews are not now in their "olive tree," God has not shut the door of salvation to them. They can be saved and many of them have been, are being, and will be saved. That is why it is imperative that the "olive tree" reach out to its severed "branches" and do everything possible now to bring them to their Messiah (and not wait for God to do so through some special future dispensation).

God's gifts and callings are irrevocable ("without repentance"—KJV). The word is *ametameleta*. It means unregretted and is usually translated "irrevocable," which is its force here. God built His sovereign purposes into Israel, and those purposes are irrevocable. He gave His gifts and issued His call, and they have not been revoked. The olive tree still stands. God is calling the Jews back to it and granting His gifts of grace to all who respond.

Now the situation is reversed. Through the disobedience of the Jews the gospel and God's mercy came early to the disobedient Gentiles, bringing many of them to repentance and justification by faith. Just so the Jews were left in their disobedience so that *now* through the mercy obtained by gentile believers the Jews also may obtain mercy.

Verse 32 demands thorough attention. It ties in directly with Galatians 3:22 "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." We consider these two passages together because they both contain the first aorist active indicative of *sunkleo*, "shut together completely," as in a net (see Luke 5:6). In both passages the King James Version reads "concluded," a use of the word now obsolete in English.

The statement in Galatians refers to "all things" (neuter). In Romans it refers to all human moral agents (masculine). Here is how some versions render the phrase in Galatians 3:22.

- "shut up all men under sin" (NASB)
- "the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (NIV)
- "shut up and imprisoned by sin" (Amplified)
- "confined all under sin" (NKJV)
- "consigned all things to sin" (RSV)
- "imprisoned everything under sin" (ESV).

Here is how the same versions translate the phrase in Romans 11:32.

- "shut up all in disobedience" (NASB)
- "bound all men over to disobedience" (NIV)
- "consigned (penned up) all men to disobedience" (Amplified)
- "committed them all to disobedience" (NKJV)
- "consigned all men to disobedience" (RSV)
- "consigned all to disobedience" (ESV).

Moulton and Milligan give it the meaning, "put them under compulsion to be disobedient or given them over to disobedience." Thayer says "(the Scripture has shut up or subjected, *i.e.*, declared them to be subject)."

We have two essentially different perspectives on this word as it is used in these passages. As we can see, one perspective asserts or at least implies that God compels people to sin. This cannot be the meaning. To charge God with compelling people to sin is an outrageous slander on the character of God. It is totally inconsistent with what God has revealed about Himself and His own definition of sin as a voluntary choice. Also, consistency would tend to lead those who hold this view into universalism.

The other perspective is completely harmonious with both reason and revelation. Paul is his own best interpreter. When he writes in Galatians 3:22 that the Scriptures teach that everything is a prisoner of sin, he is referring to the Old Testament passages that he quotes in Romans 3. Also, by using the neuter gender Paul is affirming what he wrote in Romans 8 about the consequences of sin on the physical creation.

Accordingly, Romans 11:32 simply states that all moral agents (Jews and Gentiles) have sinned and therefore are all under the same sentence. They are now "locked up," as it were, in "death row." The Law cannot save us; therefore we all have only one hope—the mercy of God that is offered now to all through Jesus Christ.

God's mercy is now available to all through Jesus Christ. It is offered freely to all. That does not mean that all will receive His mercy. They who spurn His mercy will be lost. They who accept it will be saved.

Romans 11:33 - 36

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

³⁴For who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has become His counselor?"

³⁵Or who has first given to Him

And it shall be repaid to him?"

³⁶For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

This is the grand doxology of the Theodicy. It bursts forth from the depths of the soul of the inspired apostle as he brings to a climax the combined justice and mercies of God so gloriously displayed in His faithful covenant dealings with mankind, both Jews and Gentiles.

The depth of the riches of the wisdom of God is seen in the gospel. In Christ's redemptive act, the seemingly irreconcilable antithesis between justice and mercy was overcome and the two were joined in perfect moral symmetry. Because of the cross God can now wisely and justly forgive and justify the repentant sinner who puts his or her faith totally and exclusively in Christ's completed redemptive work. God can do so without violating the integrity of the moral law and moral order. No wonder Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24).

The knowledge of God includes His foreknowledge. God's foreknowledge has been so prominent in the Theodicy. God knows what He is doing. He has always known what He is doing, what to do, and why. He is sovereign. God acts, not reacts. He never changes His actions in response to new information, for no information is new to Him.

God's judgments are unsearchable. They are based on the complete and full knowledge of God in every situation and are the result of the full synergism of His love, wisdom, justice, and mercy. God's judgments are always right, all things being considered together—and only God can absolutely consider all things together. For that reason His ways are past finding out (untraceable). One cannot follow His "tracks" to their absolute limit, for they have no limit.

As usual, the apostle undergirds the truth with supporting and corroborating statements from the Old Testament fountainhead of truth. In verse 34 he quotes from Isaiah 40:13. Has anyone fully known the omniscient mind of God or given Him advice? In verse 35 he quotes God's words in Job 41:11. No one has given to God something that He did not already have and that He is under obligation to repay. All of these questions pose utter absurdities.

God is the source of all things. All things come to us through Him by way of His mediating means, both natural and spiritual. All things are given to us so that we will enjoy them, "process" them, refine them, bring them to full fruition, and give them back to Him for His eternal glory.

Our Response To The Mercies Of God

Romans 12

Romans 12:1, 2

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The doctrinal foundation has been laid. In Romans 1 through 8 we followed the journey from universal sin, condemnation and death to justification by faith and a glorious destiny for all who believe. In Romans 9 through 11 we explored the unfathomable riches of the justice, wisdom and knowledge of God in His dealings with the Jews and with all humanity. God “locked up” all sinning humanity in the “death row” of sin's guilt and condemnation so that His gracious offer of mercy through Jesus Christ could be freely offered to all alike as our only hope.

Now we come to our proper and logical response to the abundant mercies (*oiktermon*—“tender mercies,” including deep feelings) of God in Christ Jesus. What is the only right thing to do? How should we live?

The instructions laid out for us are a full course in discipleship. By faith we received the mercies of God in Jesus Christ. We respond by answering Christ's call to follow Him. We adopt His mindset and attitudes (Philippians 2:5 - 8). We learn from Him (Matthew 11:29). It becomes our lifestyle. We are transformed.

The apostle urges us first to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. This is not a sacrifice for sin, as Jesus already offered His body on the cross once-for-all as our sin offering. Ours is a living sacrifice. Paul already explained what that means (see Romans 6:12 and 13). As believers we reckon our bodies dead to sin and alive to God through Jesus Christ. So we present (offer) our bodies to God as instruments (tools) of righteousness, holy and well pleasing to Him. This is our rational, spiritual service of worship (*logiken latreian*), not the sacrificing of an unreasoning, irrational animal.

We were under condemnation and headed for eternal damnation because of our sin. God in His mercy and at the tremendous cost of the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, in agony and blood, redeemed us and gave us life and a glorious destiny. We owe Him *everything*—a total commitment in love, obedience, holiness, worship, and service. His mercies toward us are worthy of nothing less from us.

So then, our first response to the mercies of God is to present our bodies to Him for a new, entirely different purpose to be employed only in a way that is consistent with that new purpose.

This new lifestyle and mode of behavior is the opposite of the lifestyle and mode of behavior of this present age. The lifestyle of this age is driven and fashioned by selfish, fleshly desires. The lifestyle of those who have received the mercies of God is motivated and fashioned by loving devotion to God through Jesus Christ. Believers are not to be conformed to passing fashions of this age, “squeezed” into its ego shaped “mold.”

The renewing of our mind results in the transforming of our life—our character and behavior. This “renewing” of the mind is not some mystical change in the essence of some “faculty” of the mind itself but in its voluntary action, in the way it thinks—its direction,

purpose, attitudes, values, perceptions, desires—as a result of the illumination and persuasion of the Holy Spirit. It is the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2), the entire mindset and value system of Jesus Christ, and it is to be established in our thinking and resulting behavior. Thus the resulting transformation is also moral and voluntary, not metaphysical.

Likewise the apostle Peter writes, “Therefore prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:13 - 16 NIV).

A renewed mind, a mind enlightened and redirected by the Spirit and the Word, is therefore able to test and prove out what is God’s good, well-pleasing and perfect will. These are not three levels of God’s will (one good, one “acceptable,” one perfect). The will of God is just that—His will. It is good, well-pleasing and perfect. It is to be obeyed and will be obeyed in true and loving worship to God.

A renewed mind thinks right. It thinks biblically, logically and realistically; therefore it has the understandings it needs to test and prove out God’s good, well-pleasing and perfect will and live accordingly.

Romans 12:3 - 8

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

One essential characteristic of a person with a renewed mind is sober thinking (thinking soundly, realistically) about himself/herself. We are not to think of ourselves “above that which is written”. (1 Corinthians 4:6. See also Galatians 6:3). We are to think biblically about ourselves, particularly as believers. All of our service to the Lord and to others in the body of Christ (the church) is to be done according to the measure of faith given to each believer by the grace of God. Paul urges this in view of and according to the grace that was given to him (see 1 Corinthians 15:10).

Believers are to know their ministry gifts and to use them. Just as the spiritual “gifts” (*pneumatika*) are considered within the context of the church as the local body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12 - 14), so the ministry gifts here in Romans 12:3 - 8 are also considered within the context of the church as the local body of Christ.

Just as our physical body has many members and all the members do not have the same function, so it is with believers in the body of Christ. We are many, and yet we form one living, functioning “body.” Because Christ is the Head, He is integrating, energizing and directing the whole body. Here we see the body of Christ as a local church with all believers functioning together with their individual God-given gifts.

From what is written in 1 Corinthians, here in Romans and elsewhere, it would be easy to broaden our study and explore what else The Scriptures teach concerning the Church as the body of Christ. Although that is a powerful truth that needs to be emphasized and explored in depth, for our purpose here we confine our attention to the exercise of our ministry gifts within the body of Christ as written in our immediate text.

The gifts (*charismata*) listed here are a representative group. The “spiritual gifts”

(*pneumatika*) are represented by prophecy, the leadership gifts (Ephesians 4:11) by leading and perhaps exhortation and teaching, the practical gifts by service (ministry), giving and showing mercy.

We are to function in the church according to the ministry gifts God has given us. Having a realistic view of our giftings keeps us from pride. It keeps our feet on the ground and our heads out of the clouds. It prevents us from envying others' gifts and ministries. It keeps us from wasting our time and misdirecting our energies and resources in unrealistic pursuits. It helps us maximize our effectiveness and our potential. It keeps us from unnecessary stress, frustration and disappointment. It nourishes healthy relationships. It builds our confidence and gives us a sense of fulfillment. It enhances the effectiveness of the body of Christ as a whole. It honors Christ and glorifies God.

Everything we do in ministry is according to the proportion of the faith God gives us. The ability and the dynamic come from God, not us. Function within that proportion of faith. Do not presume beyond it. God can enlarge it as we are faithful in it.

Romans 12:9 - 16

⁹Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ¹¹not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; ¹³distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

A Renewed Mind Produces Right Attitudes.

It is interesting that Paul links love to the gifts here in Romans just as he does in 1 Corinthians. The "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13 "bonds" chapters 12 and 14 together. In all ministry love is the only acceptable motive. Love is supreme. It is above all else

Verse 9 is about love, hate, and glue. A renewed mind operates in love. Love must be sincere, not pretended. Pretended "love" is not real love; it is hypocrisy, a false show.

Love hates evil. This is not a mere emotion but an act of the will that rejects evil totally and decisively. Accordingly, a renewed mind rejects evil and is "glued" to what is good.

Verse 10 says that a person with a renewed mind will form "fond family feelings" among believers. In honoring others it will give preference to their greater good over a lesser good to ourselves.

Verse 11 says that a renewed mind is a diligent mind. Believers must not be "poky" in whatever demands our zeal and diligence (see Ecclesiastes 9:10). This is true in our service for the Lord and also for man. To the believer nothing is "secular." Everything we do is "spiritual" because it is done as service to the Lord. No Christian should be fired from his/her job because of laziness. Let us keep up to speed and keep our spirit "boiling" and "glowing" as we serve the Lord in everything we do.

Verse 12 says that a person with a renewed mind is to be joyful in our hope, our destiny in Christ. Our hope is the anchor of our souls (Hebrews 6:19). Keeping the hope (destiny) clearly set before us keeps us steadfast in trials and tribulations, and keeps us persevering diligently in prayer. So, let us delight in our destiny, be steady under pressure and steadfast in prayer.

Verse 13 says that a person with a renewed mind is to be generous toward fellow believers who are in need and will pursue hospitality (see 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9). Believers are a worldwide family. Historically, when believers traveled from one place to another, it was customary for other believers to receive them

into their homes and send them on their journeys. This helped strengthen the bond of the worldwide communion in Christ. In our current affluence we have become self-sufficient. We merely get a reservation at a motel. In poor economies hospitality among believers is still a regular ministry of love. If we lose our current affluence, it will become more so for us, too.

Verse 14 says that people of a renewed mind are to respond in love and blessing to those who persecute them. Here the apostle affirms the command of our Lord Jesus: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 KJV).

Verse 15 says that a person of a renewed mind is to empathize inwardly and sympathize outwardly with others in their joys and sorrows. This is a very personal expression of love. It is love in action at a deep, personal level. To do this the believer must maintain a realistic objectivity. Love is intelligent and focused. If the feelings involved in these actions are allowed to get control, they will lead to emotional perversion. Love will sincerely enter into the emotions of each occasion as it shares the joys and sorrows of others; nevertheless, love that acts intelligently and keeps its focus will not allow itself to be consumed by the emotions involved. We can lift up others only if we have our own feet on solid ground. If we allow ourselves to be dragged down into the situation emotionally, we cannot lift up anyone. We become part of the problem itself instead part of the solution.

A minister who conducts a morning funeral of someone who died a tragic death and comforts the deeply sorrowing family, and then officiates at a joyful wedding that afternoon cannot carry the one into the other. The minister is to enter fully, sincerely, yet *objectively* into the morning event, and then lay it aside completely before the wedding. The minister can go back and revisit the former situation later in following up with the bereaved family; however, the pastor must not carry both emotions together. This intelligent objectivity applies to all and not just to ministers.

Verse 16 says that people whose mind has been renewed are to be like-minded. This does not mean that they will all have the same opinions. It means that they are to have a mutually good attitude toward each other and think toward each other as Christ thinks toward them. God wants them to be "likeminded toward one another according to Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5). They are to have mutual attitudes toward one another that are the same as Christ's attitudes toward us. They are not to be "sour notes" in Christ's symphony of love.

We are not to "set our minds on high things." That is, we are not to have an "altitude attitude." We are to "go along with the lowly" (people and/or things).

People who have a renewed mind, "the mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:5), are not to be wise in their own opinions ("beside themselves," as they see themselves. See Proverbs 3:7). They are not to think of themselves and of others above what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6). They will have a realistic, biblically informed self-image.

Romans 12:17 - 21

¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

A Renewed Mind Produces Right Actions.

Verse 17 says that a person of a renewed mind must not “get even.” God did not “get even” with us. We received mercy; so we respond to “the mercies of God” by giving mercy. We read the same instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 and 1 Peter 3:9.

“Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (KJV). “Be careful to do what is right in the sight of everybody” (NIV). The verb is “think ahead.” It means to take forethought; think before we act. Plan ahead to do what is honorable in everyone's view. Be thoughtful not to violate other people's scruples and unnecessarily affront their prejudices. We are not to wander thoughtlessly into situations or give in to impulses that will embarrass us as believers and even Christ. Think it through first. Plan to act properly toward others and in front of others. See also 2 Corinthians 4:2 and 8:21.

Verse 18 says that people with a renewed mind will live peaceably with everyone if it is at all possible and so far as it comes from their own part. We cannot force others to be peaceable toward us, but we can do everything on our part to create peaceable conditions and be peacemakers. We are to do this in marriage, in the home, in church, in our neighborhood, in our workplace, in our community. “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9).

According to verses 19 - 21, people with a renewed mind must not retaliate but leave the ultimate judgment with God. This is the climax of this section that began with verse 17. Paul begins this difficult instruction with the affectionate word, “beloved.”

There is a proper place for redressing wrongs in a Christ-like attitude. When dealing with fellow believers, it is to be done in the caring community of the church (1 Corinthians 6:1 - 8). When dealing with unbelievers, sometimes the courts must decide. Even in those cases believers are to maintain a Christ-like attitude throughout the proceeding. In many cases, however, the only right course of action for a person with a renewed mind is to back away and leave the final disposition and ultimate judgment with God. Give room for “the wrath” (the wrath of God, that is, not our wrath) to go into action and secure justice. It might be right away; it might be sometime later; it might wait until the Day of Judgment. Sooner or later God will vindicate the righteous and bring retribution to the wrongdoer. God's way is best. Leave it to Him. God loves His people. He made the ultimate sacrifice to redeem us, and it makes Him very angry when people mistreat us. Do not worry; God will defend us.

To support this the apostle quotes Deuteronomy 32:35. So does the writer of the Epistle To The Hebrews (Hebrews 10:30). Paul goes on to quote from the Septuagint of Proverbs 25:21 and 22.

Paul begins verse 20 with a strong adversative, *alla*. It is not “Therefore,” but “On the contrary” (NIV). This is in fully accord with the words of our Lord Jesus in His sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5:39 - 45). The apostle Peter points to Jesus Himself as the highest example of His own words (see 1 Peter 2:21 - 23).

Heaping coals of fire on someone's head is a graphic description of producing severe pain in their conscience.

I heard of a lady who said, “I didn't heap coals of fire on his head, but I hit him over the head with a red-hot stove poker!” (Not good.)

If we retaliate in kind, we lower ourselves to their level. We fight on their ground and with their weapons. They know how to handle that. If we give back good for evil, we stay above them. We stand on higher ground and respond with God's far superior “weapons.” They cannot handle that. That is heaping a pile of burning coals on their head. That is God's way to win. It is also God's way for turning an enemy into a brother or sister in Christ.

Verse 21 is imperative. “Stop being overcome” by whatever is evil—the evil people or the evil circumstances. Continue to smother, to bury, to drown the evil in the good that flows continuously and abundantly from your renewed mind and transformed life.

What a way to live! It is impossible to defeat someone who lives God's way.

No, this is not just “the ideal” or “idealism.” It is the truly natural way (the way that conforms to the true nature of things). It is the Spirit-empowered way, the *only* way to live, especially in response to the mercies of God in Jesus Christ. This is discipleship. It is Jesus' way—and His command.

If you are not living this way, you are not responding to the mercies of God. You need His mercy. God is offering it to you now. Reach out by faith and receive it. Present your body, your whole being, a living sacrifice. Let your mind be renewed and your life transformed by the Spirit of God.

Chapter 15

Obedient Citizens. Loving Neighbors.

Pure Saints

Romans 13

As we journey on into Romans 13, we come to three descriptions, three definitions, of people of a renewed mind and a transformed life. These, too, are practical and down-to-earth. They are some of the areas of life where the principles of Romans 12 are carried out in practice. They are part of the sound thinking, love motivated, happy life of the true disciples of Jesus Christ.

Romans 13:1 - 7

¹Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. ⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

As we continue on into Romans 13, we find three more qualities of a person of a renewed mind and transformed life. These also are practical and down-to-earth qualities. Indeed, they are three areas of life where the principles of Romans 12 are carried out in practice. They are part of the sound thinking, love motivated, happy life of the true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Obedient Citizens.

God is the universal moral Governor. His right to govern is based on the *necessity* of moral order and governance for the essential well-being of all. His right to govern is *conditioned* on the fact that He alone is qualified to exercise universal moral governance. This gives God not only the *right* to govern but also imposes on Him the moral *obligation* to govern. It also imposes on all other moral agents the obligation to obey His necessary and therefore just moral authority for the sake of the highest good of all. Refusal to love and obey God is to place one's own self and selfish desires above and contrary to the good and well-being of God and of others. It makes the offender—the sinner—a public enemy and places him/her under the just judgment of the supreme and universal Sovereign.

The fact that God is the rightful universal Sovereign is clearly acknowledged in The Scriptures (e.g., Genesis 18:25; Psalm 58:11; 59:13; 96:13; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 19:6). God rules and judges through Jesus Christ (John 5:22). Jesus Christ is Lord of all (Acts 10:36).

So, how does God govern human affairs here on earth? He governs through human government. Human government *as an institution* is a functional extension and practical application of the moral authority and governance of God. As such, it is ultimately

accountable to Him.

This does not mean that every ruler or every administration of government rules by “divine right” or is even governing right. The history of the world would be far different if every ruler realized his/her obligation to God to govern according to His will and principles, and for His glory and the good of the people. As we know, that is not the reality both of history and of contemporary political life.

Moral order based on moral law is essential and is exercised in society by human government. Anarchy does not work. Anarchy will result in the collision of competing interests and desires. Too many people meet at the crossroads of life and they all want the green light.

Although the principles and instructions contained in Romans 13 applied to the current life situation under Roman rule, they were not written only for that time and *sitz im leben*. They are general and are applicable in every age and every society.

At the time of the writing of the Epistle To The Romans, the Roman Empire was not persecuting the Church. Nero had not yet launched the first of the great imperial persecutions. Even though Roman attitudes and actions toward Christians changed, the principles of Romans 13 did not change. Later these same principles were embodied as inspired apostolic commands also in 1 Timothy 2:1, 2; Titus 3:1; and 1 Peter 2:13 - 17.

So human government is ultimately accountable to God. Every nation is a “nation under God.” “Separation of Church and State” does not mean that the state is to be godless. When human government refuses to acknowledge its ultimate accountability to a moral authority higher than itself (and even “the people”), the seeds of tyranny have been sown. Democracy depends on resources secularism cannot provide and conditions secularism cannot create.

The Church and the State are distinct institutions, each with its own unique function. The State does not rule the Church and the Church does not rule the State. Both are under the authority of God and are ultimately accountable to Him. The Church can and should speak God's truth (the universal moral principles inherent in our nature and relationships and embodied in The Scriptures) to the State and the State can and should require that the Church obey the laws that are established under God for the general good and well-being of society. Tension and problems arise when there is at least the perception that the Church and the State are competing for supreme authority.

Government as such is a necessity. Even totalitarian regimes exercise necessary functions of governance, such as security, safety and public order. The world Paul lived in was under the authority of Rome. The Roman Empire certainly was not a democracy. Nevertheless, Roman authority was a legitimate authority serving a legitimate purpose, albeit imperfectly. Roman authority swept the pirates off the Mediterranean Sea and made the roads safe for travel. Thus it served one of the most basic functions of government.

God allows people to have the form of government that fits their level of knowledge and moral state. When a society sinks into ignorance and vice, God will allow it to come under a form of government strong enough to protect it from its folly and curb its vice. When a society increases sufficiently in light and virtue, and therefore in its capacity for self government, God will allow it to establish a degree of self government commensurate with its degree of light and virtue.

So, in verse 1 Paul affirms that all human governance (authority) comes ultimately from God and is placed under God. For that reason we are to respect it, place ourselves under it, and obey it.

At times obedience to a law that seems unwise and unjust is better than disobedience to law *per se*. In such cases we can work within the law to change the law, if possible. Civil disobedience is justified, even required, only when obedience to an unjust law clearly violates a stated command of God and/or an obvious higher moral obligation (and not merely our own opinion). In that case we ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19;

5:29).

Whoever sets himself (perfect tense) against the legitimate moral authority of government sets himself (also perfect tense) against the *institution* of government itself that God has established and the form of that institution that is in place and functioning in the society where that person lives. People who do so will have only themselves to blame for the severity of the penalty that the law inflicts on their lawlessness.

We notice a contrast (not a contradiction). In Chapter 12 we are forbidden to take personal vengeance but to leave the ultimate vengeance to God (Romans 12:19). In Chapter 13 human government, under God, is divinely authorized to take vengeance (divine “wrath” administered by human government) by imposing the penalties of the law (Romans 13:3, 4).

The purpose of human government is not to be a source of fear to people who do what is good and right but to those who do what is evil. If we want to live without fear of the penalties of the law, believers are simply to live by the moral law, the law of Christ, the law of love. Then we will have the commendation of the ruling authority (see Ecclesiastes 8:4, 5). This is a general and permanent principle. Believers fear rulers only when unjust rulers persecute them.

In exercising the legitimate moral authority of government, rulers are servants of God (verse 4). This is so whether or not they act like it or even realize it and acknowledge it. If they abuse their God-given trust, they might answer to the people and they certainly will answer to God.

If we do evil, we have real cause for fear. The ruling authority “does not bear the sword in vain,” that is, without a reason, a purpose. The ruler is a servant of God (the second statement of this fact) and the sword is the symbol of his executive and criminal jurisdiction. He has the authority and the resources to carry out the penalty of the law.

Verse 4 has been cited to support what is said elsewhere in The Scriptures regarding capital punishment. At the least it is a factual statement about the reality of governmental power. One of the rights of a government that is fulfilling the legitimate obligations of government is the right to use force, even lethal force if necessary, to suppress and punish evil. To deny this right is to deny it the right to exercise a legitimate and essential function of government.

The seriousness of a penalty should be equal to the value of what the law is intended to protect and thus the degree of guilt incurred in the violation of that value. If a penalty is lowered, the governing authority thereby lowers its estimate of the value that is violated. This principle should be taken into account when considering the subject of punishment, including capital punishment.

As believers, we obey the law not because of a fear of consequences, but (*alla*, a strong adversative) because of a good conscience. It is just the way true believers naturally live and act on account of the good, biblically informed conscience that guides us. The more con-science rules, the less government has to rule.

So we also pay taxes (present active indicative, a statement of fact), because the taxing authorities are servants (*leitourgoi*) “attending continually” (*proskarterountes*) in their function. We take our legitimate deductions and pay our legitimate taxes. No follower of Christ is to be prosecuted for tax evasion or refusing to pay taxes. Work to change the tax laws if necessary, but do not join a tax revolt. See Mark 12:13 - 17.

“Render.” Give back, the same word Jesus used. Taxes to whom taxes; toll to whom toll; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

People who have a renewed mind and therefore live a transformed life because of the mercies of God make excellent citizens.

Romans 13:8 - 10

⁸Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has

fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Loving Neighbors.

Verse 8 is a smooth, logical transition. “Owe no one anything” does not mean that we have to pay cash for everything, including our homes. If we keep up our payments on a reasonable contract, we do not “owe” anything. We “owe” when we get behind and do not pay as agreed.

Commercial loans are a necessary part of modern business. What get us into trouble are *consumer* loans. One of the first steps in debt management is to pay off credit cards and then perform “plastic surgery” on most of them. Any that are left should be kept under tight control. It is wise to avoid interest charges by paying credit card charges when due.

This passage includes more than financial obligations. It means to discharge and clear any and all negative personal obligations. Make everything right. Let the only remaining obligation be the positive, essential, all-encompassing obligation of love. The person who loves the other person completely fulfills (perfect tense) law. Love will translate itself into every moral good and reject every moral evil.

This is about our motive. Regarding interpersonal relationships and obligations, every legal requirement of the laws of the Old Covenant in general and the Ten Commandments in particular is “summed up” (comprehended, headed up, comes to a head) in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the teaching of the Law (Leviticus 19:18). It is the teaching of our Lord (Matthew 7:12; 22:34 - 40).

Many manuscripts omit the words “You shall not bear false witness” in verse 9. It is thought that they might have been introduced here from Exodus 20:16 and Deuteronomy 5:20.

Love does not harm those around us. Love accomplishes what law tries to do; therefore, love is the fulfilling of law.

Romans 13:11 - 14

¹¹And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹²The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Pure Saints.

This section is about our conduct. Verse 11 is another smooth, logical transition. Love not only does no harm to those around us but also motivates us to do what is good to those around us.

Because holiness is essential to true happiness (well-being), love seeks the highest good only by holy means. If we truly seek the highest good of others, we will be holy in our associations with them and in our conduct toward them. We will endeavor to influence them for good both by our words and by our example. We will seek to make them truly happy by encouraging them in holy living.

We are urged to keep aware of the time, the time in which we live and also the fact that Jesus Christ could return at any moment. The imminence of our Lord's return is a strong motivation to holy living. It has always been so; it is even more so today. Jesus Himself

urges us to stay awake because we do not know the time of His return (Mark 13). From the signs He gave us, we know that we are in the last days.

It is high time (“already time”) that we (some manuscripts read “you”) be awakened out of spiritual sleep. Since the moment of Christ's ascension, every day has brought us nearer to the end (*eschatos*), the moment of His return. It could have happened in 57 A.D. It could have happened at any moment since. It could happen today. It certainly shall happen.

No matter when we became believers, our ultimate salvation is nearer day by day. When we believed on Christ, we were saved from the guilt and penalty of sin. Moment by moment we are kept saved from the power and practice of sin. When Jesus Christ returns, we will be saved from the presence of sin.

Holiness and sin are as different and as mutually exclusive as “day and night,” and are represented as such in The Scriptures. The dark night of sin is “out of here” (*proekopsen*). The dawn of righteousness “is now arrived” (*eggiken*, perfect active indicative).

In the Bible, “garments” refers to our outward life and testimony. We are called to “cast off the works of darkness.” Let us fling away (*apothometha*) the vile garments of our former moral and spiritual “night life,” the old lifestyle of moral and spiritual darkness (whatever will not stand the light of God's holiness and the light of His word). Leave sin alone. Walk decently, honorably in the moral light of “day.” No reveling. No sex orgies. No unrestrained lust.

So, let us “get out of our pajamas and into our armor.” Take the whole armor of God. Stand. Pray. (See 2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 6:13 - 18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

This is emphasized also in Ephesians 4:17 - 32. Ephesians 4:31 is imperative. All that garbage is to “be hauled off.” We do not see people pleading with garbage collectors to allow them to keep some of the contents of their garbage cans. We do not see people running after garbage trucks begging for their garbage back.

“Walk” is more specific than “live.” “Live” refers to the general direction and course of our lives. “Walk” refers more to where we “plant” our feet, our moment-by-moment steps. “Walk” is a word that Jesus used (John 8:12; 11:9, 10; 12:35). Because Jesus' words became indelibly imprinted in the mind and soul of the apostle John, we find this word (walk) often in his epistles. It is also a big word with Paul.

John and Paul also use the same motif of “light” versus “darkness,” “day” versus “night.” They got it from Jesus.

Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 14. See also Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:12). If Jesus is on the inside, He will transform us on the outside. He will dress us with His righteous character and conduct. He will “dress us for success.”

Verse 14 is the passage that God used to convert Augustine. Do not make room in your thinking and planning to put into practice the passions of the flesh. We are not to be like a man who gets married and leaves his girlfriend but keeps her address and phone number. We are not to be like a man who professes to repent of his drinking but keeps his account open at the local bar. We are not to be like a person who professes to repent of his drugs but keeps a list of his suppliers. Haul it off! No compartmentalization. No double life.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ—and *live*.

Chapter 16

Conscience, Liberty, Forbearance: How To Treat A Weaker Believer

Romans 14:1 - 15:7

Romans 14:1 - 15:7 is about conscience, liberty, and forbearance. Paul writes about this subject also in 1 Corinthians, Chapters 8 and 10. We will take up these three emphases in order.

Romans 14:1 - 13

¹Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. ⁴Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹For it is written:

**“As I live, says the Lord,
Every knee shall bow to Me,
And every tongue shall confess to God.”**

¹²So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Conscience.

A renewed mind maintains a good conscience, a conscience that is informed by the word of God and illumined by the Spirit of God. Every believer must maintain a sensitive conscience. A sensitive conscience is not necessarily a weak conscience. A weak conscience is a sensitive conscience that is burdened with non-moral scruples.

Verses 1 - 6 are about non-moral scruples. In general, non-moral scruples are things that jab the conscience. They might be based on revelation and reality. In that case they are good scruples, moral principles established in the reason and that cannot be violated without incurring guilt.

On the other hand, scruples might be only the result of tradition and legalism. In that case they have no moral character in themselves, and the believer who holds them can and should be liberated from them as he or she grows in light and maturity. Meanwhile and until coming to sufficient light and maturity, the weaker believer must not violate these non-moral scruples. To do so would violate his or her conscience and thus destroy

his or her moral integrity. To destroy one's moral integrity is to incur guilt, even though the scruple has no moral character in itself. In such a case the person who sins against his or her conscience must repent and trust Christ for the cleansing of the conscience and the restoration of moral integrity.

Non-moral scruples usually have to do with food and drink, religious observances, and other external matters.

Legalism tends to foster two opposite bad attitudes: (1) the person who holds the non-moral scruples (the “weaker brother”) tends to judge others who do not hold those same scruples; (2) the person who sees no value in the non-moral scruples (the “stronger brother”) tends to belittle those who are “hung up” on their scruples. Neither attitude is Christian.

A person who comes to Christ carrying a “suitcase” full of non-moral scruples can be a real “pain.” Paul says (verse 1) that believers are to accept such a fellow-believer without making an issue of his/her thinking and opinions. Do not let that individual's personal views become a subject of discussion, debate, and division. Just accept and love that person as he or she is and let God work out the “kinks.”

It is true that whatever we eat or drink, we are to do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and we are to take good care of them. Healthy living, including sound nutrition, is part of our reasonable and spiritual worship service to God (Romans 12:1). At the same time we are not to make a religion out of what we eat and drink (see verse 17). It has been said that some people “get religion” and some people “get nutrition.”

Some believe that it is perfectly all right to eat all kinds of food. Others think it is a sin to eat meat, or at least certain kinds of meat. The person who can eat anything in good conscience is not to belittle the one who refuses to eat certain things. Conversely, the person who refuses to eat certain things is not to judge the person who can eat these things in good conscience. Do not judge anyone whom God has accepted (see Colossians 2:16, 17).

In verse 4 the apostle asks the judging person a very pointed question: “You...who are you to judge another's servant?” Believers are all God's servants. Each one of us is ultimately accountable only to Him. Let God, not us, judge our fellow servants on these non-moral scruples. God knows each one of us and He is able to establish each of His servants and make us stand firm in the faith.

Verses 5 and 6 address the Sabbath question. Observe whatever day you choose. Think it through. Settle it in your mind. If you choose a particular day, observe it to the Lord. If you choose not to observe a particular day but regard every day alike, make that choice “to the Lord.” As we mature in the faith, we might change our thinking; however, we are to live in the light we have now.

We do need to set aside a day each week for rest and worship. That necessity is built into our physical and spiritual being. However, that is not something we are to impose on ourselves and on others as a condition of salvation. The same principle applies to what a person chooses to eat and what a person chooses not to eat. We are to do it as to the Lord and give thanks for what we do eat.

All believers are to live to the Lord. That is, whatever we do we do it as a matter of obedience and service to Him. We do it above all to please Him. In the strictest and highest sense nothing is merely personal and private with believers. We live and act “to the Lord.” We want to please Him in all things. For that reason we are sensitive to how our attitudes and actions affect others.

Live or die, it is all for Christ. He died for us. He rose again for us. He lives for us. He is our Lord. Live or die, we are His.

Yes, we might die sooner because in our ignorance or carelessness we ate too many “triple by-pass specials” at the restaurant. Nevertheless, we still belong to the Lord.

The apostle continues (verse 10) by asking the weaker brother, “why do *you* judge your [stronger] brother?” He asks the stronger brother, “why do *you* belittle your [weaker] brother?” We shall all stand before the judgment seat (*bema*) of Christ (majority text). Paul confirms this by quoting Isaiah 45:23 (oldest reading, Polycarp and Tertullian). Let us not put our fellow believers under our personal microscope. God will evaluate each one of us by His criteria. Every one of us shall give account of himself/herself to God.

In verse 13 the inspired apostle commands us not to judge one another any longer. What then are we to judge? “But [*alla*, strong adversative] not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.” Earlier James addressed this same subject in his epistle (see James 4:11, 12).

Romans 14:14 - 23

¹⁴I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

¹⁹Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. ²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. ²¹It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. ²²Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Liberty.

Liberty is not license to sin. Christian liberty is not the permission to live to please ourselves. Christian liberty is the freedom to live before God in all good conscience without the imposition of a set of extra-biblical rules. Rules can be instructive and they can be protective; however, they never made anyone holy. Holiness in Jesus Christ living on the inside working on the outside according to His word.

Paul refers to the Lord Jesus Himself (see Mark 7:14 - 19) as his authority in stating that no food or drink is ceremonially “unclean” (unsanctified, common) in itself (or possibly “through Him,” as many manuscripts read). Food and drink are only material things. They can be abused and certainly are being abused. Believers are not to abuse them. Still, food and drink have no moral character in themselves. They are neither right nor wrong *except* to the person who reckons them to be unsanctified. To that person they are unsanctified.

So then, how do we exercise our liberty in Christ when our weaker brother or sister holds acquired scruples about these things?

If they who are strong go ahead and eat what they want to eat in all good conscience without regard for how their food distresses their weaker brother or sister, they are no longer walking in love. If by their example they encourage the weaker believer to go boldly and recklessly against his conscience and eat what he believes is a sin to eat, they destroy his moral integrity before God. So the apostle commands us not to destroy him with our food for whom Christ died. Christ died for him. His soul is worth far more than our food preferences. We must not allow something that is a good thing to us to be criticized through our misuse of it.

Here is an appropriate place to review again what is said in 1 Corinthians 8:9 - 13. If

we “beat up on” our brother's weak conscience, we injure Christ (1 Corinthians 8:12).

We are to focus on the essentials of the kingdom of God: righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (verse 17). If we focus on these three essentials of the kingdom of God and serve Christ in them, we will be well pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore pursue the things that bring and maintain peace and the things that build up one another (verse 19 and also 15:2).

We must not tear down what God is building in someone for the sake of our food. We must use our liberty responsibly. We must not cause another believer to transgress his conscience, abandon it, and thus lose his moral integrity before God.

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

Although all things are pure in themselves, they are truly evil (not merely ceremonially “unclean”) to the person who violates his conscience and stumbles.

Verse 21 says that abstaining from any food or drink or anything else that would cause harm to our brother is “good” (*kalos*—proper, fitting, beautiful, virtuous). It shows spiritual “class.”

The last part of verse 21 (“or is offended or is made weak”) is omitted from a few older manuscripts and therefore is absent from many versions. Many manuscripts do include it. For certain it is an echo of 1 Corinthians 8:9 - 13.

“Do *you* have faith?” (verse 22). Paul is speaking to the “stronger brother.” Can you with a pure conscience and therefore with moral integrity eat, drink, or do something that you regard as a “good” to you (verse 16), but that might cause a weaker brother to stumble? If so, keep it to yourself, personal and private.

We sense the apostle's inspired outrage in 2 Corinthians 11:29 “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” Yes, insisting on our personal Christian liberty with reckless disregard for the soul of a weaker believer is indeed outrageous, not only to the apostle Paul but also to other believers—and certainly to Christ. Paul's outrage is the same as that of the Lord Jesus against anyone who causes a little one who believes in Him “to offend” (Matthew 18:6).

So we see that “offend” means much more than merely “I don't like what you're doing; it offends me.” It means to put something before someone they will stumble over and fall into sin.

Verses 22 and 23 tell us that faith is much more than an “easy belief,” more than a casual mental agreement. Faith is an honest commitment to known truth. It is obedience to truth perceived. Moral integrity is essential to genuine faith. Without moral integrity and what proceeds from moral integrity faith is “dead” (James 2:26).

Happy is the believer who does not condemn himself in doing what His pure and enlightened conscience approves. He is free from legalism, free to walk in true holiness in love.

So, as we live in the integrity of faith, we use our liberty to ourselves. We do not flaunt it before weaker believers. If a person was raised a Mormon and believes that drinking coffee is wrong, we do not offer him a cup of coffee. If we go out to a restaurant with him, we do not order coffee. If a person was raised to believe that eating meat is wrong, or that eating meat on Friday is wrong, and still believes that way, we do not set meat before him. If we go to a restaurant with him, we order a vegetable plate. If we invite him to our house for dinner, we serve spaghetti without the meatballs. Our liberty in Christ includes the liberty to be self-denying and considerate for the sake of others and especially for the sake of Christ.

This section ends with a sobering warning. The person who “doubts,” that is, perceives a moral difference between some foods and other foods, absolutely *must* abstain from what he or she perceives to be wrong as long as that perception persists. If that person eats or drinks what he perceives to be wrong, he makes a conscious and deliberate choice to sin;

and sin brings condemnation. Whatever is not of faith (honest obedience to truth perceived) is sin, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). He pollutes his conscience, breaks his moral integrity, and stands condemned (*katakekritai*, perfect tense). He must confess his sin to God, repent, and trust Jesus Christ for cleansing (1 John 1:9). If he is a real Christian, he will do so at once, for he will be miserable until he does. If he does not do so, he has given up his honesty before God, changed his heart, and abandoned faith.

This passage and the passages in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 10 are clear and definite. Let no one be deceived—let no one deceive others—by a convoluted, philosophically derived misinterpretation of Scripture that falsely assures themselves and/or others that they are saved while deliberately violating the very essence of the faith through which alone we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

“Anything done to violate the faith-principle by which one is saved, and by which he lives ([Romans] 1:17; Hebrews 10:35), is sin. One must know beyond all doubt or hesitation in his mind that what he allows is in perfect accord with the Word of God before he acts.”—Finis Jennings Dake, Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, New Testament Section, Page 172. (Dake Bible Sales, P. O. Box 1050, Lawrenceville, GA 30246. Copyright 1963, 19th printing, March, 1988.)

Romans 15:1 - 7

¹We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ²Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. ³For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” ⁴For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. ⁵Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Forbearance.

Forbearance means self-restraint, tolerance, putting up with someone or something—”backing off” some.

This section addresses the question: “how does what I do affect someone else?” Much of this has already been addressed in Romans 14. The opening section of Chapter 15 continues the theme and carries it to its conclusion.

The passage is addressed to the “stronger.” It emphasizes the proper attitudes and actions of the “stronger” toward the “weaker.” We are to put up with and tolerate the weaknesses of others, particularly those who are near to us and part of our lives and fellowship. Protect their conscience; hold them up; support them; build them up (14:19); accept responsibility for their spiritual well-being. We are to value them above our own pleasure. We are to give up some of our own pleasure to bring much greater pleasure to them by doing what is good for them to build them up in their faith. We are all “under construction,” and we are also all in the spiritual “building trades” assigned by God to help build up each other.

In verse 3 Paul points to Christ as our highest example, the supreme example, of self-sacrifice for us. He quotes from Psalm 69:9.

Christ is our example. The word is our guide (verse 4). Paul is referring specifically to what was written in the Old Testament Scriptures. When we studied “the olive tree connection” (Romans 11), we saw that God's purposes in the Old Covenant were not abandoned. Those purposes are embodied, revealed and fulfilled in the New Covenant (see 2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Even though the ceremonial law was abolished in Christ (Ephesians 2:14, 15), and the Old Covenant itself gave way to the New Covenant, what was written there is for our learning, for our “patience and comfort” (endurance and encouragement), and to strengthen our hope (assure us of our certain God-given destiny in Christ).

God Himself is the God of endurance and encouragement because He is the source and guarantor of our hope, our destiny. Paul calls on God to grant believers the “likemindedness” toward one another according to Jesus Christ that he urges us to practice. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to write this truth; it takes the illumination of the Holy Spirit to establish it in our minds and lives.

As we saw, Chapter 14, verse 5 emphasizes individual liberty. Chapter 15, verse 6 emphasizes collective testimony. While respecting individual liberty, the church has the right and even the obligation to establish collective standards of doctrine, practice and behavior. Paul urges believers to speak the same thing and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Personal liberty and collective testimony balance each other. Individual believers who have personal doctrinal views are to uphold their church's collective belief. They are not to cause division even though their views might be right. Likewise, if individual believers have personal liberty in certain matters, they are to uphold the collective behavioral standard of their church. They are to practice their liberty in private according to their faith (Romans 14:2).

Therefore (*Dio*, wherefore) receive (*proslambanesthe*, “take to yourselves”) one another. How? Even as (just as, exactly as) Christ took us to Himself. That sets the high standard for accepting one another as believers. Christ did it fully and freely. He did it to the glory of God. So must we.

Chapter 17

The World-wide Gospel

Romans 15:8 - 33

Romans 15:8 - 13

⁸Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, ⁹and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written:

**“For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,
And sing to Your name.”**

¹⁰And again he says:

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!”

¹¹And again:

**“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!”**

¹²And again, Isaiah says:

**“There shall be a root of Jesse;
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,
In Him the Gentiles shall hope.”**

¹³Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Although many begin this epilogue with verse 7, that verse seems to be a natural conclusion of the previous section. Paul begins by stating that Christ became a servant of the Jews (the circumcision, denoting Old Covenant relationship) in order to confirm (*bebaiosai*) the divine promises that their fathers possessed. During His earthly ministry to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24), Jesus brought about the fulfillment of those promises. By doing so, He established those promises and their results in Himself and in His gospel.

Also, what Jesus did as a servant for the circumcision (Jews) by fulfilling the Old Covenant promises opened the door of God's mercy to the entire gentile world so that the Gentiles who believe on Him would join the Jews who believe on Him in glorifying God for His great mercy (as explained in Romans, Chapters 9 - 11).

To corroborate this Paul quotes four Old Testament passages that state explicitly that the many promises made to the fathers include the promise that God will extend His mercy and His salvation to the Gentiles. Jesus came to serve the Jews and to bring God's mercy to the Gentiles.

In 2 Samuel 22:50 (also Psalm 18:49) David, the physical and also covenant ancestor of Jesus Christ, prophesied that he would give testimony to God among the Gentiles. This is specifically applied to the proclamation of God's mercy in Christ, resulting in great joy and praise to God.

In Deuteronomy 32:43 Moses called on the Gentiles to rejoice with the rest of God's people.

In Psalm 117:1 the psalmist speaking by the Holy Spirit calls on all the Gentiles to praise God and all the people to laud (praise, extol) Him.

The fourth Old Testament quotation is the strongest of all. In Isaiah 11:10 the prophet declared by the Spirit that the Messiah will reign over the Gentiles and that the Gentiles

will find in Him their hope, that is, their salvation. This hope of all believers is “through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures” (verse 4).

Paul concludes the emphasis on hope (the certainty of our destiny in Christ) by invoking the benediction recorded in verse 13. God is the source of our glorious hope (destiny). We believe, and God wants to fill us with all joy and peace in our believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we shall overflow in the hope God has set before us.

Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know the “hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:18). God has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3). We rejoice in this hope (Romans 5:5; 12:12). We are saved in this hope (Romans 8:24). We are called in one grand, common hope (Ephesians 4:4). Our hope does not disappoint, embarrass, shame us (Romans 5:4). This hope is laid up for us in Heaven (Colossians 1:5). Christ in us (believers, Jews and Gentiles) is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). This hope of salvation is our protective helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Let us not be moved away from our hope (Colossians 1:23). Our hope inspires confidence and rejoicing (Hebrews 3:6). Let us be diligent in the full assurance of our hope to the end (Hebrews 6:11). Get a firm grip on this hope; it is the anchor of our souls (Hebrews 6:18, 19).

Romans 15:14 - 21

¹⁴Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. ¹⁵Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, ¹⁶that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. ¹⁸For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— ¹⁹in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ²¹but as it is written:

**“To whom He was not announced, they shall see;
And those who have not heard shall understand.”**

Paul assures the believers of the church at Rome that he is fully confident of their spiritual maturity (verse 14). Their obedience was famous (Romans 16:9). Their spiritual maturity stood out in contrast to the immaturity of the vulnerable believers to whom the Epistle To The Hebrews was addressed (Hebrews 5:11, 12). Those believers should have been able to teach others, but they themselves needed someone to teach them the first principles. They needed to go on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1).

It is no mystery why the church at Rome was strong and mature. Rome was the capital of the empire. It stood at the top of the current hierarchy of cities. It attracted people of intelligence and ability. The church there was built on a strong foundation and contained some strong members. No wonder Paul assured them of his confidence in them. Also, no wonder he addressed this profound theological epistle that has done much to change the world.

Still, because of the grace God gave to him as the apostle to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8), Paul writes (epistolary aorist) with greater than usual confidence on the very points of this epistle. He speaks of himself metaphorically as a “priest” (*leitourgon*) who works about sacred things. Paul is “officiating,” as it were, the presentation of the gospel of God to the Gentiles so that he may bring the gentile believers to God as a well-received, Spirit

sanctified offering to Him as the product of His mercies to us through Jesus Christ.

Therefore (verse 17) Paul has a reason to glory (rejoice) in Jesus Christ (not in himself) in what pertains to God (His eternal purpose in the gospel). Paul magnified his ministry (Romans 11:13).

Paul spoke (wrote) boldly to the believers at Rome on the great doctrinal themes contained in his epistle to them. Now (verse 18) he says he will *not* dare (be bold) to speak of any of the things that God did among the Gentiles that did not involve him personally. Even though Paul was particularly chosen of God to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, he was not the only one who did so. Others were laboring effectively among the Gentiles (*e.g.*, Cephas, Apollos). Paul is confining his personal rejoicing to what God did with his own ministry. (See also 2 Corinthians 10:13 - 18).

With great personal joy and satisfaction Paul reminds them of the geographical scope of his apostolic ministry. It started at Jerusalem and extended to Illyricum (the Yugoslavia and Albania of modern times).

The Gentiles were brought to obedience to Christ by word and deed “by power of signs and wonders” (verse 19). This is still God's prescribed method of effective evangelism. Let us not become self-sufficient and suppose that we can accomplish our evangelistic objectives by word alone. It takes both word (biblical content) and deed (supernatural confirmation).

Paul knew when his mission was accomplished in a particular place. His call was to introduce the gospel and lay the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10 - 12). When he had accomplished that, he had “fully preached the gospel” in that place. The task of building on that foundation and saturating the surrounding area with the gospel was left to others (evangelists, pastors, teachers, believers in general).

As he testified (1 Corinthians 3:9 - 11 and 2 Corinthians 10:13 - 18), Paul did not want to build on the foundations of the gospel that were laid in other places by other workers. He laid the foundation where he went; others built on it. Paul corroborates this by invoking the principle contained in Isaiah 52:15.

Romans 15:22 - 33

²²For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. ²³But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ²⁴whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. ²⁵But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ²⁷It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. ²⁹But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

³⁰Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, ³¹that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. ³³Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul's Purpose And God's Sovereignty.

Paul states (verse 22) that his ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not

named was the reason he had not come to Rome. Now that he had laid the foundation of the gospel in his present region and because he had a great and enduring desire to come to the church at Rome (see Romans 1:9 - 11), he announces his plan to see them on his way to Spain. He also lets them know that he desires them to help send him on his way after he has had a full visit with them.

According to Acts 19:21, Paul had already purposed either in the Holy Spirit or in his human spirit to go to Jerusalem first. To understand and evaluate Paul's determination to go to Jerusalem, it is necessary to know whether it was "in the Spirit" or "in the spirit." Some versions read "in the Spirit," and some read "in the spirit." The NIV simply says "decided." The NKJV reads "the Spirit" in Acts 19:21; in Acts 22:20 it has Paul saying "I go bound in the spirit."

If Paul purposed in the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem, the later command that was given to him through the Spirit to stop going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4) raises some well-known questions.

It does not solve the dilemma to say that "through the Spirit" in Acts 21:4 merely means that the disciples at Tyre were urging Paul to stop going to Jerusalem because of what the Spirit had been saying elsewhere (Acts 20:23). The same Greek construction, *dia tou pneumatos*) "through the Spirit" is found also in Acts 11:28. There the prophet Agabus indicated "through the Spirit" that there was about to be a great famine throughout the (Roman) world. This famine happened in the days of the emperor Claudius Caesar. Certainly Agabus was not merely reacting to something the Spirit said elsewhere.

Paul had already decided to go to Jerusalem. He went to Ephesus and stayed there a total of about three years. While in Ephesus he wrote 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:3 - 9 he talked about his plans.

After his three years in Ephesus, Paul went to Corinth by way of Macedonia. During the three months he was in Corinth he wrote the Galatian and Roman epistles. From there he headed for Jerusalem. His route took him through Macedonia, to Philippi and Troas, and from there by foot to Assos. His team met him there and they continued the journey together by ship. On the way they stopped at Miletus, where Paul summoned the elders of the church at Ephesus. He told them that he was going "bound in the spirit" (KJV, NKJV) to Jerusalem. His determination to go to Jerusalem at this time was so strong that nothing moved him. He was committed "to testify the gospel of the grace of God" at Jerusalem. The Judean believers needed a clear understanding of the gospel of the grace of God to correct their historic legalism, and he saw this as essential to the fulfillment of his ministry (Acts 20:24).

Also, Paul had a large collection from Macedonia and Achaia to take to the poor saints at Jerusalem, and he felt personally responsible to see to it that it got there. The gentile believers had reaped so much spiritual benefit from the believers in Jerusalem and Judea. It was only right and proper that they gentile believers in turn serve them with much needed material things.

From Miletus Paul and his companions sailed on to Tyre. There the disciples said "through the Spirit" that he should stop going up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4).

Later, at Caesarea in the house of Philip the evangelist, the prophet Agabus met him. Agabus was on a special, urgent mission to intercept Paul and warn him of what was going to happen to him. Agabus would not have made such a journey from Judea to Caesarea merely to affirm to Paul what the apostle already knew. Everybody there knew the purpose of the highly respected and credible prophet's trip. Accordingly, they all joined together in urging Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. This included his team (Acts 20:4), Philip the evangelist and his four daughters who had the gift of prophecy, and others at Caesarea.

In spite of everything, Paul would not be dissuaded. They finally said, "The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:14). No, they had not been opposing God's will. They were in one

accord with the Holy Spirit. When they saw that Paul was adamant, they simply gave up and left the outcome up to God. Their hope was in God that somehow He had a way to overrule the consequences of what lay ahead.

Paul was a man of absolute determination in whatever he did. We see this quality in him even before his conversion in his determination to stamp out the followers of Jesus. When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul (Paul) turned around 180 degrees on the spot, “without letting up on the accelerator.” Paul had to be that kind of person, prepared by God, for the arduous life mission God had purposed for him.

Thank God for Paul's faithful determination. The world has been blessed beyond measure as a result. However, in this case his great determination got him into unnecessary trouble. Sometimes if Satan cannot cause us trouble by our weaknesses, he will try to do so by our strengths by pushing us too far.

Paul is confident that he will come to Rome in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel. He holds on to his desire to go to Spain. Now (verse 30) he begs the believers at Rome “through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit” to strive (“agonize”) together with him in prayer.

For what? The answer is in verses 31 and 32. He wants to be delivered from the unbelievers at Jerusalem, and he wants the saints at Jerusalem to accept his service (gift) to them. Remember, many of the Jewish believers did not like Paul.

Did God answer the first part of that prayer? Only in part. Paul escaped with his life. However, Paul could have answered that prayer himself, and even made the prayer unnecessary, by listening to the Holy Spirit and staying away from Jerusalem at this time.

Paul's sense of responsibility was understandable and highly commendable. But Paul had others who were trustworthy and who could have carried the offering, however large, to Jerusalem. Certainly there were believers at Corinth who could be trusted (see 1 Corinthians 16:3). At the time he wrote 1 Corinthians he said that he would go also “if it is fitting” (1 Corinthians 16:4), possibly meaning if the offering was large enough. At least at that time going to Jerusalem was only an option; at some point it became urgent in his spirit.

We learn another lesson here. No matter how strong in spirit a believer might be, including and especially spiritual leaders, it is always wise to listen to the counsel of others, especially those who partner with us in ministry. None of us is too spiritual to listen to godly counsel. Paul was so convinced that he knew the will of God that he could dismiss the prophecies as only advisory information and not applicable to his immediate purpose.

Yes, in general the things Paul planned, he did not plan according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 1:17). That does not mean that Paul was inerrant and infallible in every practical decision. At one time he decided to go into Bithynia but the Spirit would not allow him to do so (Acts 16:7). How would things have turned out differently if he had allowed the Spirit to stop him from going to Jerusalem? Paul was inspired and therefore inerrant and infallible only when he wrote Scripture. Let us not put Paul on too high a pedestal and exalt him above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7).

So Paul arrived at Jerusalem. We do not know if he ever got the chance to preach the gospel of the grace of God at Jerusalem because upon his arrival he followed the advice of the elders of the church, and that got him into trouble (see Acts 21:20 - 36).

Ah, but now we come to the sovereignty of God.

Paul was mobbed, arrested, and thrown into prison. We can only imagine what was going through Paul's mind. Did the collection get to the poor saints? Did they accept it? How could he testify the gospel of the grace of God in Jerusalem now? Is this the end? Is he going to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus, as he declared himself willing to do when he was in Caesarea? (Acts 21:13). What about Rome? and Spain? What about Timothy, Aristarchus, Luke, the others?

Suddenly, on the following night the Lord appeared to him in the prison! “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” (Acts 23:11 NKJV).

So we say, cheer up, Paul! You are going to Rome! Not the easy way, Paul, but you *are* going to get there. You will spend two years in prison in Caesarea (remember the last time you were in Caesarea?). You are going to have *some* boat ride, you and Luke and Aristarchus (yes, they will stick by you). You will be shipwrecked on Malta. That will be an adventure. Publius's father will be healed, and so will many others. A lot of good things will happen as a result of your choice to go to Jerusalem. What would have happened otherwise? Don't worry about it. God is sovereign. He knows how to accomplish His purposes.

Yes, God knows how to make all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28). God's will for our lives is like a freeway. By our own choices we might zig-zag across that freeway. However, *if we love God*, He will get us from point A to point B, sometimes in spite of us. It might be the hard way. So, let's not make it difficult. Let's follow Christ in all things; His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

Nothing takes God by surprise. When Paul went to Jerusalem and got into serious trouble, God did not say, “Oh, oh! What are we going to do now?” Of course not. God is never confused. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows the potential outcome of every possible course of action, and He is never out of possibilities. No matter what happens to the believer, God has already intercepted it and knows exactly how He is going to work it together for our good. We bump our heads now and then. We miss opportunities. But *if we love God*, we cannot lose! He has a sovereign purpose in our lives, and our mistakes will not defeat that purpose.

So, “the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” (verse 30).

Chapter 18

Real People

Romans 16

Churches are made up of real people. They are people of a common faith, a common salvation, a common bond in Christ, a common fellowship. That fellowship includes the simple act of greeting one another. The word "greet" is in this chapter over 20 times.

These greetings express Paul's love for fellow believers, particularly those who had worked with him and helped him. Paul did not make temporary, casual acquaintances here and there. He established a wide circle of close and lasting friendships.

Romans 16:1 and 2

¹I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ²that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

First, Paul commends a lady named Phoebe to the church in Rome. Cenchrea was a seaport village about seven miles from Corinth. Cenchrea had its own church and Phoebe was a servant (*diakonon*) of that church. It is not known for certain whether *diakonon* means that she was a widow who served the church as in 1 Timothy 5:9, 10, or that she was a deaconess in the technical sense according to a possible interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11.

Either way, she served the church at Cenchrea and evidently she carried Paul's epistle to Rome. This might have been a special trip just for that purpose. More likely she was going to Rome for other reasons and carried the epistle with her. She had "business" (matters) and Paul asks the church to receive her and assist her as a fellow believer in the Lord in a way that all believers should receive one another and to assist her any way she might request their help. Phoebe had been a helper to many, including Paul himself, and she was deserving of their respect.

Romans 16:3 - 16

³Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who labored much for us. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

⁸Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

¹²Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and

Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

Even though Paul had not yet been to the church at Rome personally, he knew many of them by name. After all, their faith had been spoken of throughout the whole world (Romans 1:8). They were a mature church (Romans 15:14). They were an urban, cosmopolitan church with Jewish, Greek and Latin names.

Aquila and Priscilla were a husband and wife team. They had been driven from Rome and were in Corinth when Paul arrived to preach the gospel to that city. They were tentmakers by trade and gave Paul employment. When Paul left Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla accompanied him as far as Ephesus. When Apollos arrived in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla straightened out his theology (Acts 18:26). Now they are back in Rome and hosting a church in their home. Later they returned to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:19).

Aquila and Priscilla were dedicated to Paul and his ministry. They had even "risked their own necks" for his life. They had the gratitude not only of Paul but also of all the churches of the Gentiles. If only we had a full biography of this couple. It would be at the top of inspirational reading.

Epaenetus was one of Paul's beloved friends, having been among his first converts in Achaia (some old manuscripts read "Asia").

Mary was an otherwise unknown believer who was commended for all her hard work for others.

Paul calls Andronicus and Junia his countrymen and "fellow-prisoners" of war. This could mean that they had previously spent some time in prison with Paul for the gospel. They were "of note" among the apostles, meaning either that they themselves were outstanding apostles in the general sense of the term ("sent ones") or merely that the apostles held them in high esteem.

Amplias was beloved of Paul in the Lord. That in itself says a lot about him.

Urbane was a fellow-worker with Paul. Stachys also was well-beloved by the apostle. Apelles was "the approved one" in Christ, perhaps distinguishing him from some others by the same name who were not approved. Apelles was "tried and true."

Aristobulus was the deceased grandson of Herod the Great. He had been killed by Nero in A.D. 54. His household now belonged to Nero. The ones Paul greets were "out of" Aristobulus, that is his descendants who were believers.

Herodion (meaning "of Herod's family") was a fellow Jew and countryman, as were Andronicus and Junia (verse 7).

"Them of Narcissus" means the members of Narcissus's family who were believers ("in the Lord").

Paul calls Tryphena and Tryphosa "the toilers" in the Lord.

The beloved Persis (a woman) toiled much in the Lord.

Rufus is called "chosen (elect) in the Lord." Rufus's mother was also a "mother" to Paul. This is probably the same Rufus whose father, Simon of Cyrene, carried the cross for Jesus (Mark 15:21). Mark's gospel was written for the Romans; so this Rufus must have been known to the church at Rome.

In verse 14 Paul greets a group of believers associated with Asyncritus, *et al.* Probably they were all of the same house church.

In verse 15 he greets another group of believers who were probably all of the same house church. Julia was a common name for slaves. The church at Rome was comprised of a number of house churches.

Paul encouraged the believers to greet one another by "a holy kiss" (see also 2 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:26). The apostle urges believers to remain deeply committed to one another and to show godly affection for one another. Tenderness; proper intimacy. Thus a "holy" kiss is distinguished from an improper romantic or a

carnal kiss. Believers in some cultures take this very specifically with men kissing men and women kissing women. In some places believers (men and women) lightly touch cheeks and "kiss" the air. This instruction by the apostle is observed in each culture in its own way. Westerners tend to be more reserved. God's "frozen chosen" need to "thaw out" and warm up. A "hearty handshake" misses the essence of verse 16. A little "sloppy agape" now and then might help somebody.

Romans 16:17 - 20

¹⁷Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. ¹⁸For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. ²⁰And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Paul was always concerned about the dangers posed by those who cause dissension and offenses (obstacles to trip over), contrary to the sound teaching that they had learned. Keep an eye on them. Turn away from them and keep away from them. They serve their own belly (appetites, driving passions). Their "gut" is their god (Philippians 3:19). They use smooth talk and flattery to deceive the naive and unsuspecting. See also Ephesians 5:6.

"Oh, but they are so friendly and nice. They make me feel so good." Watch out. What are they teaching you? What is their hidden agenda? Are they making you dependent on them? Back away from them—clear away.

Paul reminds the church at Rome how well known is their obedience to Christ and His word. He is happy about that for their sakes; nevertheless, he wants them to be simple (unmixed, unadulterated) concerning evil. See Matthew 10:16 and Philippians 2:15.

Verse 20. It is vital to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Satan does his worst dirty work where there is turmoil, strife and division. He gets smashed where believers live in love and unity. The God of peace crushes him under the feet of a loving, united, and obedient church. Furthermore, God does it "shortly" (*en tachei*). We get "tachometer" from this word. A tachometer is different from a speedometer. So *en tachei* means quickly. Satan won't know what hit him.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" is the end of the exhortation but not the end of the epistle.

Romans 16:21 - 24

²¹Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you.

²²I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.

²³Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. ²⁴The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Earlier Paul asked the believers in the church at Rome to greet each other for him. Now he sends greetings to them from the believers in Corinth, particularly his fellow workers.

Tertius was Paul's amanuensis (secretary). He wrote the epistle precisely as Paul dictated it. It is very unlikely that Paul would have sent the epistle without first reading it himself. Even writers who are not divinely inspired do that.

Timothy was one of Paul's close associates. Lucius (Acts 13:1); Jason (Acts 17:5 - 7); and Sosipater (called Sopater in Acts 20:4). All of them were Paul's countrymen.

Gaius must have been fairly well-to-do. He had a house large enough to provide Paul a place to stay and also to host the whole church. We are introduced to him in 1 Corinthians 1:14. He was an early convert of Paul and was one of the few Paul was thankful that he himself had baptized.

Erastus was the city treasurer. At one time Erastus traveled with Paul. In Acts 19:22 we read that when Paul left Ephesus after the uproar, he sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia while he himself stayed in the province of Asia for a while. When Paul was in Corinth, somehow Erastus became the treasurer of the city. He remained in Corinth (see 2 Timothy 4:20). Here he joins Paul in sending greetings to the church at Rome.

Quartus, "the brother." That is all we know about him. Nevertheless, sermons have been preached on the simple but eloquent fact that he was a "brother," and what real Christian brotherhood means.

Several older manuscripts omit verse 24. If it is genuine, it marks either the end of the greeting, or the end of the epistle as some manuscripts place verses 25 - 27 after Romans 14:23.

Romans 16:25 - 27

²⁵Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began ²⁶but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— ²⁷to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

In most Bibles the Epistle To The Romans ends with this grand doxology. It is addressed "to God, alone wise." God's great wisdom in the gospel has been revealed throughout the epistle. God has the power to establish (stabilize) us according to the gospel that Paul preached. See also 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22.

Paul did not originate his "gospel." The gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24) was given to Paul unencumbered by the legalism and ceremonialism of the Law of Moses. It is not culture bound. It is the "the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1; 15:16) for the whole world. The theme of that gospel is the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the precise revelation of the "mystery" (divine secret—Ephesians 1:9; 3:4; Colossians 1:27) that was kept silent since times eternal. It is now made manifest (displayed) through the prophetic Scriptures, and is now made known according to the commandment of the eternal God for obedience to the faith for all nations—

TO GOD, ALONE WISE, BE GLORY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST FOREVER. AMEN.

APPENDIX A

The Influence Of Greek Philosophy On The Development Of Christian Theology

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Early Christians were slow to develop a distinctly Christian philosophy. When they did, their philosophical environment was Neo-Platonic. This mind-set directly influenced the historic development of Christian philosophy and theology.

Flavius Justinus (Martyr), ca. 100 - 164, admired Plato's philosophy and used some Platonic terms, but not necessarily with Platonic meaning. Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr, did not share his teacher's admiration for Greek philosophy; he believed that if the Greeks possessed any truth, they must have received it from The Scriptures.

Theophilus of Antioch, who wrote Ad Autolyicum, esteemed Plato. Minucius Felix, a Latin apologist, held that the philosophers had at least recognized some truths.

It was in the catechetical school at Alexandria, however, that philosophy gained its greatest influence in Christian theology. Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement of Alexandria), born ca. 150 A.D., was the first of what might be called the Christian philosophers. Though he rejected the crude speculations of the Sophists, he held firmly to the belief that philosophy held an element of truth. He taught that the passages of Scripture that declare the insufficiency of human wisdom and that warn against being spoiled by philosophy applied only to empty Sophism and Epicureanism, but not to what he considered the best of philosophy. He maintained that philosophy brought the Greek mind to Christ, just as the Law brought the Hebrew to Him. To Clement, philosophy provided a natural framework for the expression of truth (Stromata I:3, 5, 11).

Having devoted most of Book One and some of the remaining sections of his Stromata to a defense of his philosophical approach, Clement proceeded to build on a Neo-Platonic metaphysical foundation what was intended to be a Christian philosophy. To him, the God of the Christians is the God of Plato, now worshiped by Christians more perfectly than by the Greeks. According to Clement, Plato plagiarized revelation from the Hebrews; this gave the Athenian's highest ideas a flavor of divine authority in the estimation of Clement.

What began in Clement was expanded in one of his pupils, Origen (ca.185 - 254). To Origen, sin is negative, a privation (which makes man the victim of sin rather than its responsible cause).

The prevalence of dualistic ideas provoked controversies in the Church. Tertullian (ca. 155 - 222) vigorously opposed the intrusion of Neo-Platonic philosophy into Christian doctrine. His cry was "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato." Historically, it was the attitude of Clement, not of Tertullian, that won out in ecclesiastical Christianity.

In the Third Century A. D., Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, taught that God, being One, could not appear substantially on earth; therefore He could not have become man in Jesus Christ, but rather filled the man, Jesus, with His Logos and power. Lucian of Antioch, his follower, believed that the Logos became man in Christ; however, Lucian's Logos was a lower, created essence and not fully God.

Arius, one of Lucian's pupils, fully absorbed Lucian's Logos concept. In 311 A. D. Arius was ordained a presbyter in the church at Alexandria. After several years of controversy, Arius was excommunicated. Because many of the clergy sympathized with his views, a struggle was precipitated that threatened to split Christianity. The emperor

Constantine became alarmed. The result was the Council Of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Christ was declared to be of the same substance as the Father. This settled the matter officially, but not historically.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 265 - 340) agreed with Clement of Alexandria regarding the value of philosophy. He believed that Plato had been enlightened by God and was in agreement with Moses.

Augustine (A.D. 354 - 430) spent several years of his earlier life in Manichaeism. He was converted in A.D. 386 and later became Bishop of Hippo. His earlier writings, such as Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, and De Ordine, have a strong Neo-Platonic flavor, which carried through into his later writings. He wrote, "let every good and true Christian understand that truth, wherever he finds it, belongs to his Lord" (Epistle 166).

Augustine taught that the mind of God contains the eternal, changeless Ideas, Forms, or Archetypes of all things. These creative Ideas are independent of matter. They are the rationes seminales which the divine Creative Will developed within time into seen forms (De Ideis, 2). The view that these Ideas are in the Word goes back to Philo and the Stoic Logoi Spermatikoi, and, from Augustine, passed into medieval theology.

To Augustine, created things tend toward non-being; but so long as they exist, they must assume some form. That form is the reflection of the eternal and immutable Form (De Libero Arbitrio 2, 17, 46). Evil is that which tends to non-being and also tends to make what is cease to be (De Moribus Ecclesiae, 2, 2, 2).

Others also contributed to the influence of Neo-Platonism. Boethius (A.D. 480 - 524) wrote a Platonic theodicy, On The Consolation Of Philosophy, which had considerable influence in Christian theology.

Neo-Platonic ideas also influenced Christianity, especially in the west, through the pseudonymous Dionysius The Areopagite, a work dated not earlier than A.D. 500. The author took the Neo-Platonic ideas of Proclus and developed them into an esoteric Christianity. Erigena, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and others carried on the pseudo-Dionysian theme.

Not all leaders of the Latin Church held a high regard for Greek philosophy. Jerome cried, "What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the gospels, and Cicero with Paul?" (The Virgin's Profession).

The influence of the ancient philosophies is evident in various contemporary religious views and practices.

The Platonic concept of God as an impersonal One, pantheistically immanent in nature and of which all visible beings are emanations, the concept of mystical reunion of the human soul with the Divine Mind and the acquisition of esoteric gnosis through meditation, inner mental and psychic development and ecstasy, and the concept of the more or less unreality of material being are all present in the various modern "mind science" sects. In most of these systems, Christ is considered to be some kind of demigod, a second-rate Platonic Logos who has attained to a high degree of liberation from the mundane and achieved an advanced spiritual (metaphysical) state. The Arian view of Christ is vigorously taught by the Watchtower Society ("Jehovah's Witnesses").

Some (but not all) of these concepts are deeply ingrained in the theology of eastern Orthodoxy. This is to be expected because the roots of the eastern Orthodox churches are deeply planted in ancient Greek thought and culture. Some of these roots are found in the ontology of Athanasius (ca. 298 -373). Eastern Orthodox concepts such as the divinization of nature through the Incarnation of Christ, and *theosis* (the process of man becoming divine) are based on Greek philosophy. This philosophical premise leads to an ontological interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4 ". . . partakers of the divine nature . . ." "Divine nature" (*physis*) is automatically assumed to mean the very essence of God rather than His moral character (as the context clearly demonstrates).

It is in morality and ethics that philosophy has had its most far-reaching practical influence in Christian theology. This has developed on the one hand from the Neo-Platonic view of sin, and on the other from the Stoic concept of ethical self-sufficiency.

In Platonism and its subsequent variations the question of the cause and nature of evil was basic. The general assumption that sin and evil are ontological (that they have actual essence) contributed to and forms the basic premise of the doctrine of original sin. To be inherited, sin must have essence, real being; it must consist in some thing that causes evil choice and action, instead of being the moral character of the choice itself. With this mind set it is common to regard sin in the heart as an essence instead of a voluntary choice; hence the term “sinful nature.” This evil essence is regarded as a part of human nature. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today.

It appears that the early framers and proponents of the doctrine of original sin did not use the Bible as their starting point. That is, the doctrine did not emerge on its own out of Biblical exegesis. Even though Tertullian objected to the influence of Greek philosophy on the Church, his stoic psychology was a tributary of the emerging new doctrine. The main stream, however, goes back to its headwaters in Plato and his notion of the fall of the soul. From this and from the ideas behind infant baptism, Origen contributed to the doctrine. But even these in themselves would not have institutionalized the doctrine of original sin in the Church without the concepts of the prevailing philosophical milieu at the time of Augustine.

Largely out of his own personal experience—his struggle with temptation and his life of defeat in sin—rather than out of The Scriptures themselves, Augustine advanced the new doctrine. Being the bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, and being within the sphere of influence and authority of the Bishop of Rome and the developing papacy, Augustine had a strong position from which to inculcate the theology that emerged in his brilliant mind.

Pelagius (ca. 360 - 420) came to Rome from Britain. Coming from the purer form of Christianity that existed at the time in Scotland and Ireland, Pelagius was scandalized by the lack of holiness and the excuse of moral inability, and set out to correct the situation. Pelagius published his objections in the capital city. Coelestius, a pupil of Pelagius, adopted his teacher’s ideas and promoted them aggressively. When Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410, Pelagius and Coelestius moved to Africa. Not long afterward Pelagius went to Palestine.

Coelestius remained in Carthage. A council met at Carthage in 412 and condemned Coelestius on several doctrinal points. In 417 the Bishop of Rome, “Pope” Innocent I, confirmed the condemnation of Coelestius and also censured Pelagius.

The regions ecclesiastically under Rome were strongholds of the new doctrine of original sin. Innocent I was succeeded by Zosimus, who reversed the judgment on Coelestius. An influential council in Africa protested the action of Zosimus. The Roman Emperor Honorius compelled Zosimus to reinstate the condemnation of Coelestius and the censure of Pelagius. The bishops of Italy were required to sign the condemnation. At least 18 refused to sign and were banished from Italy by imperial decree. And so the doctrine of original sin was officially established in the Church, first in the West and eventually in the East (Ephesus, AD 431).

Certainly Pelagius and Coelestius held doctrines that are indefensible; however, so did Augustine and his supporters, notably the doctrine of original sin. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he formulated it and passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today, with all of its pleas of moral inability as an excuse for sub-Christian living.

The supporters of the doctrine of inherited original sin appeal to several Bible passages that have come to be viewed from the presuppositions of an essentially Platonic/Neo-

Platonic frame of reference. That frame of reference is a prism that determines the definitions and connotations of certain Biblical words and phrases, notably “sin.” Because these Biblical passages did not in themselves teach the later doctrine of original sin, they had to be “retrofitted” by *eisogesis* to conform to a Greek philosophical template.

It is important that we consider and understand these Biblical passages from a Hebrew/moral frame of reference instead of a Greek/ontological frame of reference. That is, we will regard The Scriptures in their natural definition of sin and holiness as voluntary moral choices, not ontological (metaphysical) essences. “Spiritual” does not mean “mystical.” It has to do with moral choices and character, and a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Let us start with Job 14:4, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (KJV). This verse is pressed into service to support the doctrine of original sin only because the doctrine it claims to support is first presupposed. Taken in its context and in view of the Bible’s definition of sin as voluntary, this verse can mean no more than this: infants born in a morally and spiritually degenerate cultural environment will themselves become such. They will slide into the prevailing moral depravity by following the course of least resistance. This is made all the more certain by the brevity and difficulties of this life.

Job 15:14, “What is man that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” (KJV). At most these words of Eliphaz teach the same as the previous passage. Every person who is “born of a woman”—that is, the entire human race—falls into voluntary moral depravity because of the combination of influences in that direction (the world, the flesh, and the devil).

Psalms 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (KJV). If taken precisely, the psalmist is speaking of the sinful character of his mother at the time of his conception and gestation. To make this verse teach the supposed “sinfulness” of David’s natural being is to go against God’s own definition of sin as a voluntary and therefore responsible choice. This is the strong poetical language of David’s penitential psalm, expressing the fact that he had been a sinner from the inception of his moral ability and accountability, and that his mother had also been a sinner. He is confessing his generational pattern of sinning, not some supposed sinfulness in his human substance.

We find the same strong poetical language in Psalms 58:3, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (KJV). No one has ever seen a newborn baby get up and walk around the nursery telling lies to its parents, the other newborns, and the nurses! This verse affirms what the other verses we are considering affirm: people yield to temptation from the beginning of their ability to make moral choices. Trace the lifelong pattern of the wicked back as far as possible, and it will be discovered that they began their pattern of sinful choices as early as they were capable of making moral choices at all. To make this verse teach otherwise is to make it teach nonsense.

James 1:14 tells us that temptation comes from our own human desires. These are not evil in themselves, because Jesus Himself had them; otherwise, He could not have been tempted. Temptation does not come from some “indwelling” sinful nature; it comes from our humanity, just as it came from Jesus’ humanity. In infants and small children, desire is developed before reason; couple that with the influences of the world and the devil, and it is no marvel or mystery why people universally sin before being enlightened by The Scriptures, influenced by the Church, and drawn by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 13:23, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to do evil” (NIV). This verse itself refutes the assumptions of original sin. The moral bondage is the result of being accustomed to doing evil, not one’s birth.

John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (KJV). This means that as flesh is produced from parental flesh, so a redeemed, purified, renewed human spirit is the product of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

John 9. The disciples asked if the man had been born blind because of his sins or his parents’ sins. Jesus replied that neither was the case. Later, the Pharisees treated the man with contempt, saying that he had been altogether born in sins. In the first place, Jesus dismissed the rabbinical assumptions of the disciples. In the second place, we cannot base doctrine on an insult by the Pharisees.

Romans 5:12-19, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died because of the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (NIV).

Of course sin was introduced into human experience by one man. Adam started it. Because God saw that sin would become the universal practice, He placed a limitation on the human life-span to set boundaries on mankind’s opportunity to sin in this life. So *physical* death came to all men. The fact that all have sinned demonstrates the wisdom of God’s pre-emptive action.

No Bible passage is interpreted correctly if that interpretation leads to a conclusion that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Any such interpretation is in error. If this passage is taken to mean that Adam’s sin automatically made everyone guilty, consistency necessarily drives us to the inescapable conclusion that Christ’s sacrifice automatically saved everyone. It does no good to plead otherwise. The Greek is very strong: “just as”. . .”so also.” To conclude otherwise one has to make an arbitrary assertion contrary to the fact. This misinterpretation forces its adherents and defenders to the error of Universalism—that everyone will be saved. The Augustinian view of this passage is a stronghold of Universalism.

In this passage Paul teaches that Adam’s sin brought about a tragic universal result, but Christ’s obedience (His death on the cross) brought about a glorious universal result. It states that each affects everyone without going into the specifics of how, beyond opening the door to universal sinfulness and condemnation by Adam and opening the way of salvation to all by Jesus Christ. Involved in this are universal *physical* death and universal *physical* resurrection (the latter taught also in 1 Corinthians 15:21).

Romans 7:7-25. This passage is quite lengthy. Please refer to it in your Bible. By no reasonable standard of Biblical interpretation can this passage refer to Paul’s experience as a born-again believer. It is impossible for anyone to live in Romans chapter 7 and chapter 8 at the same time. To force this passage to teach the notion of “two natures” in the believer, it is necessary to fall back on the mysticism of Greek and middle-eastern dualism.

Paul is *not* describing the believer’s on-going struggle with temptation. To illustrate

and personalize the point, he is putting himself in the place of the unconverted person who is experiencing the war between that person's reason and his or her desires. These are the two laws that are in conflict within every sinner, producing the wretchedness mentioned in verse 24. The result of this conflict between reason and desire in every person who is a voluntary slave to desire is constant defeat, bondage, and spiritual death (death in sin is alienation from God because of one's sin). This is the "law of sin and death."

Sin "dwells" in sinners because choices are made within us. Please keep in mind the Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary commitment to and pursuit of self-gratification (Romans 8:5-7). That commitment "dwells" in us because it is the stubborn set of the soul (the "will"). For example, if greed "dwells" in us, it is because we put it there; we choose the evil passion and hold on to it in our souls.

Sinners are "sold under sin" because they voluntarily sell themselves to sin (1 Kings 21:20; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 50:1; Isaiah 52:3).

The latter part of Romans 7:25 is not a conclusion; it is a summary of what had been said before. The conclusion is in chapter 8:1 and 2—There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from that law of sin and death described in Chapter 7. So good news, believer! You do not live in perpetual sinning. You live in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! So, get out of Romans 7 and live in Romans 8. There is where every true believer stands.

Romans 8:3. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (KJV). Some suppose that the phrase "sin in the flesh" means that sin is a mystical substance that resides in and permeates our human flesh. This supposition is contrary to the Bible's teaching that sin is a voluntary choice, not a Neo-Platonic essence. Also, it misinterprets the Greek. If "in the flesh" refers to "sin," it would read "the sin *the* in the flesh." But it does not. Therefore, "sin" connects with "condemned." That is, in his flesh (His Incarnation, as in "the days of his flesh" in Hebrews 5:7) Jesus condemned sin by demonstrating that it is not an unavoidable necessity. We are not in bondage to it unless we choose to be. In His humanity Jesus overcame sin by the same spiritual resources that are available to all believers in the power of the Holy Spirit. "He condemned the sin of men and the condemnation took place in the flesh of Jesus" (A. T. Robertson).

Romans 11:32, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all" (NASB. See also Galatians 3:22). Both of these passages contain the first aorist active indicative of *sunkleio* ("to shut together completely," as in a net—Luke 5:6). The King James Version reads "concluded," an obsolete use of the word that meant "to shut in, enclose". A.T. Robertson states, "This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew."

There are two essentially different perspectives on this word as it is used in these passages. Moulton and Milligan give it the meaning, "put them under compulsion to be disobedient or given them over to disobedience." Thayer says, "(the Scripture has shut up or subjected, *i.e.*, declared them to be subject)." In Galatians 3:22 the NIV reads, "the whole world is a prisoner of sin," but in Romans 11:32 the NIV reads, "God has bound all men over to disobedience." Both are interpretations of the word *sunkleio*.

To charge God with compelling people to sin is an outrageous slander on the character of God. It leads us to declare with Elihu, "I will ascribe justice to my Maker" (Job 36:3). This cannot be the meaning, as it is totally inconsistent with everything God has revealed about Himself and His own definition of sin as a voluntary choice. Also, consistency would tend to lead those who hold this view of these verses to universalism.

The other view is completely harmonious with both reason and revelation. Paul is his own best interpreter. When he writes in Galatians 3:22 that the Scriptures teach that

everything is a prisoner of sin, he is referring to the Bible quotations in Romans 3. By using the neuter Paul is also affirming what he wrote in Romans 8 about the consequences of Adam's sin on the physical creation.

Accordingly, Romans 11:32 simply states that all moral agents (Jew and Gentile) have sinned and therefore are under the same sentence. They chose it; God let them have it with the all the bondage it brings. They are now locked up as it were in "death row." The Law cannot save us; therefore we have only one hope—the mercy of God that is *offered* to all through Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 7:14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy" (KJV). This and other passages have been misused to teach the monstrous doctrine that babies of unregenerate parents are morally defiled and therefore go to hell (or at least to the imaginary place called "limbo") if they die in infancy. All that this verse teaches us is that by the grace of God the influence of the believing spouse is able to overcome the influence of the unbelieving spouse, create a prevailing godly influence in the marriage and home, resulting in holy children. At the very least, it teaches that the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever is still a valid marriage in God's sight, so that children born as a result of that marriage are fully legitimate.

Ephesians 2:3, "we all . . . were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (KJV). (Notice, "were.") God is never angry with people because of their ontological nature—how and with what they were born. Guilt cannot be predicated of essence (substance). No one is guilty of something that is beyond his or her control. The Bible always teaches that God's wrath rests upon people because of their sinful choices and the resulting deeds and practices, not for their natural being. To teach that God's wrath rests upon people because they were born a certain way is an outrageous blasphemy, a charge against God, Who is the Creator of our natural being (unless one holds to the notion of dualism). It is an offense to His justice and a stumblingblock to unbelievers. "Nature" (*physis*) has the same meaning here as in 2 Peter 1:4. It is the moral nature of sinners, acquired by their own choices, that offends a holy God. "Nature" here can also refer to our corrupt cultural heritage. This concept is found also in 1 Peter 1:18 and 19. Sin is "natural" to sinners only in the sense of the combination of human culture, other influences, and habitually yielding to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. If sin were truly "natural," it would be beneficial, because it would conform to our nature. The fact that sin is so destructive shows that it is totally unnatural.

Second Peter 2:14, "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin. . ." (KJV). This verse teaches that people who pursue the indulgences of the flesh are never able to get enough and so cease. This is a voluntary, never-ceasing bondage to sin. It is a voluntary slavery (see verse 19; also Romans 6:16). The pursuit of the gratification of the flesh is like chasing the carrot on the stick. They who do so can never get enough to provide permanent satisfaction and so end the pursuit.

First John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (KJV). Although this passage is written to believers, it is not written exclusively about believers. It refutes the teaching that "we" (human beings) have no sin (considering one's total personal moral history). All who hold this gnostic error are self-deceived. John is affirming universal sinfulness and therefore the universal need of the Savior. It certainly cannot teach that believers have some kind of "stuff" called sin down inside of them. Here again, such a notion is contrary to the consistent Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary act of the will. Moral depravity is just that—moral, voluntary. It is not depravity of the "will" itself but of its acts, its choices. That is, that part of our human being that makes choices (the soul) is not depraved ontologically (in its essence), but voluntarily (in its commitment to selfish desires and the choices and acts that flow from that commitment). Sinners are not depraved in their being (except as their sinful lifestyle has a

deteriorating effect on them—body, soul, and spirit); they are depraved in their moral choices and resulting lifestyle.

“The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin (Deuteronomy 24:16 KJV).

If sin is an ontological substance or essence instead of a moral choice, if it is a metaphysical principle that causes choice instead of being the evil choice itself, the logical and necessary result is to remove the blame for evil from the human moral agent and place it instead on the metaphysical essence itself. Man becomes the victim of this thing called “sin,” rather than the responsible perpetrator. Human depravity is regarded as metaphysical rather than moral and voluntary. God’s grace is needed to overcome, not voluntary depravity (depravity of choice), but an involuntary helplessness and an inability to choose in any way other than evil. This holds out to communicants no real hope of being rid of sin in this life (because it is said to be inherent in them), and leaves them in a continuous cycle of confession of sinfulness and appeal for forgiveness, even when no actual sins have been committed. They are kept under condemnation for what they *are*, rather than for what they have chosen to do. (“Pray for us poor sinners. But don’t hold us responsible, because we are so helpless”).

Spiritual regeneration becomes, then, a metaphysical rather than a moral change. It is the essence of the will (“heart”) rather than its voluntary direction that is viewed as being changed in salvation. The Holy Spirit’s agency becomes metaphysically generative (following Augustine’s idea of ideogenetic illumination) rather than morally persuasive and efficient. The new birth is viewed as metaphysical (“spiritual”) rather than moral and therefore truly spiritual. The moral change is regarded as the result of regeneration rather than being essential to regeneration itself.

Not only is sin viewed meta-physically, but so are virtues and qualities. We hear God’s attitudes, dispositions, and choices spoken of as having essence. For example, God’s “grace” is swallowed in the Eucharist or is poured into the heart by faith much as light is poured through a window glass.

From Stoicism and Neostoicism evolved a system of ethics and morality in which moral character is ascribed directly to outward actions instead of to the motive from which the actions spring. Moral obligation becomes, not an obligation to love God and others and to act at all times in accordance with that love, but a certain minimum of outward works beyond which a surplus of merit is accumulated. The idea that moral agents are able to accumulate works of supererogation (“surplus righteousness”) has been a prime factor in the practice of praying to saints. It also vitally affects one’s view of the redemptive work of Christ. It is behind the notion that Jesus Himself provided a surplus of righteousness that is dispensed to believers either by faith or by the Eucharist to make up for their moral failures. It tends to the idea that real holiness belongs only to the esoteric few, whose moral surplus will somehow compensate for the moral and ethical deficiencies of the many. Anyone who testifies to a life of victory over sin through Christ is regarded as spiritually proud and self-righteous.

This Christian duality, exoteric and esoteric, has resulted in a paradox, a double standard. High Stoic ethics are essential to Christ and to the initiated elite to provide a reservoir of good works to be distributed by grace to the mass of believers, who are generally deficient and to whom a life of holiness is at best a desirable option. Christ is viewed as assisting the helpless and making up for their unfortunate deficiencies rather than conquering our deliberate rebellion, breaking the power of voluntary sin in our hearts, and giving us victory over sin.

Perhaps a few more thinkers of the caliber and persuasion of Tertullian will yet arise to “free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato.”

APPENDIX B

THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Did you ever wonder why God created the human race?

Just think. Nothing takes God by surprise. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows the potential outcome of every possible course of action.

So before God created Adam and Eve as moral agents (with a free will), He knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew that they would use that God-given free will to disobey Him and introduce into this world human sin with all its horrific consequences.

God saw that the entire human race would follow their first parents down the destructive road of disobedience. He saw ahead of time all the heartache, sorrow, and suffering that selfishness would cause, both for time and for eternity. He saw all the wars, the violence, the injustices, the divorces, the broken hearts and homes, the traumatized children, the immorality and greed, and all the evils that sprout out of the love of money.

Most of all, God saw the eternal consequences of human disobedience. He saw that the majority of humanity—that masterpiece of His creation—would persist in their evil rebellion and be lost forever. And only God knows the full tragedy of even one soul being lost forever in Hell as the just and necessary penalty for moral rebellion; and He saw that tragedy multiplied by the billions.

God knew also that to save a comparative minority would cost Him nothing less than the agonizing death of His Son, Jesus Christ—God in Christ—on the cross.

Knowing all this ahead of time, God went right ahead and created the human race.

Why?

First of all, God is love (1 John 4:8). That means that in everything He does or allows to be done, God's ultimate purpose is to secure the greatest possible amount of good and happiness, all things being considered together. So then, God must be after something so supremely and eternally valuable in itself, to Himself, and to the entire universe that it far outweighs the unavoidable consequences of sin, as awful as those consequences are.

God is also all-wise (Romans 16:27). That means that God has taken the present course of action to secure the supremely valuable objective because, all things considered, it is the best course that His perfect love and infinite wisdom could possibly devise. It only makes sense that if there had been a better way, God would have chosen it. He chose this way because it is not only the best way by far but also the only way.

So then, what can be so supremely and eternally important—that can be secured no other way—that its value far outweighs all the horrible evils God saw would happen in the process? Whatever it is, it must form the grand design of the ages. It must be the very reason for our existence and therefore our highest personal priority.

Whatever it is, it is essential that we know and understand it clearly, lock into it with all our heart and soul, and pursue it with full commitment and steadfast diligence.

So, what is it?

Well, remember that God had a perfect and supremely happy kingdom. All the angels and archangels were in their proper places, everyone loving God, devoted to Him, and obedient to His just and wise administration of the universal moral law—the law of love.

Then something devastating happened, something that effectively introduced “Hell into Heaven,” violating the very nature of Heaven itself. Satan, an archangel, introduced

rebellion into God's perfect and happy kingdom. Against the holy and wholesome will of God, against all reason, and against the well-being of the universe, Satan asserted, "I will!" That declaration terrorized Paradise, and it has been terrorizing the universe of created beings ever since. A massive minority of the angels followed Satan's criminal act.

And so, in a sense, God's perfect kingdom failed Him.

Why?

Because it had one unavoidable weakness: *it was made out of previously untested components*. When the test came, part of it collapsed.

A Fail-proof Kingdom.

But God is going to have a kingdom that will never fail. Everything about God is infinitely valuable—His well-being, happiness, honor, authority. He is worthy of highest love, devotion, and obedience. To deny this to God would be an immeasurable loss, both to Himself and to all beings. He must have a people who will render to Him what is rightfully His, both for His own sake and also for the sake of the universe.

Also, because love is the very essence of His moral character, God must have a people upon whom He can lavish His love fully and forever with absolute safety.

Both require a relationship based on moral character that has been fully developed and thoroughly tested.

So, why didn't God just create a new group of angels to replace the ones that fell?

Because that would be building again out of previously untested components.

Then why not just make do with the angels who remained loyal?

Because the angels had just witnessed an awesome demonstration of the justice of God; but without a full revelation of the mercy of God, that would have given them a less than complete knowledge of the character of God. That full revelation would come in God's great redemptive act in Jesus Christ and in His glorious purpose in the Church (Ephesians 3:10, 11).

Then why not create beings who have no free will and therefore are incapable of sinning?

That would not work, because they would also be incapable of loving and obeying God. They would be robots at worse or mere pets at best. They would be incapable of moral action, thus incapable of moral character, and thus incapable of any real and meaningful relationship with God.

So this time instead of starting at the top, God started at an entirely different point of beginning. God did the most dangerous thing that He could do. He created us in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26). In so doing He endowed us with a free will, knowing full well that we would use that free will to turn against Him, with all the devastating consequences.

Nevertheless, God did not take a chance on an uncertain outcome. Remember, God has perfect foreknowledge. Nothing takes Him by surprise. When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not exclaim, "Oh, no! I didn't know *that* was going to happen! Now, what are we doing to do? Let's go to 'Plan B'. I'll go to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He will die on a cross as the perfect substitute to provide redemption, and then rise again. We will send The Holy Spirit. If some people repent and are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, we will mobilize them into a body called the Church and send them into all the world to tell the rest of humanity. When it is all over, we will see who finally gets to Heaven. Then we will figure out what to do with them."

Of course not! God is not the "Supreme Guesser."

Before the ages began, God saw ahead of time that He could turn the hearts of untold millions to Himself. He foreknew them—not only what they would do but also what He could do with them.

If you love God, God saw you in your former sin and rebellion. He saw you respond to Christ, to His word, to His Spirit. He saw you repent and become a believer. He saw everything you would go through, and He knew exactly how to make all things work together for your good (Romans 8:28). He saw everything the world, the flesh, and the devil would throw at you, and He saw you coming through victorious by laying hold of His overcoming and sustaining grace!

God knew that His grace will secure and stabilize your steadfast love and obedience under the severest temptations and trials, in spite of temporary failures and set-backs. He knew that when those temptations and trials were over and the pressures of the world, the flesh, and the devil were removed, He would have a kingdom *that will never fail*—and you will be a part of it!

That is the meaning of life. *That* is the true purpose of our existence. And it is found only in a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

Your everlasting love and obedience, developed, tested and proven in the fires of temptations and trials—*that* is the supremely and eternally valuable objective God is after. For that God is willing to allow all the unavoidable evils to happen in the process, as immense as they are. For that God sent His son to die on the cross to save us. That should open our eyes to see the value of every believer, and how vitally important it is for us to remain true to Christ. God has everything at stake in us. Let us never lose sight of that fact.

Yes, we will have a free will in Heaven. Otherwise, what would be the purpose of the character building process that is now going on and being perfected in believers? The love, devotion, and obedience that we will give to God forever will be voluntary.

But what guarantee is there that sometime in eternity somebody will not sin and we will have this mess all over again?

We have a wonderful answer in Revelation 22:3. After picturing the glories of Heaven, the passage ends with these words: “and His servants shall serve Him.” In other words, God looks at the totality of eternity future (so to speak) and declares in effect, “I have so won the hearts of my elect and so built my love and my character into them that they will *never fail!*”

God is going to have a fail-proof kingdom!

God has eternal plans for His chosen ones; and if you love God, you are part of those plans!

Second Timothy 1:9 says that God has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (KJV). Think of it! *Before the world began!*

Ephesians 1:4 assures us that God has chosen us in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love “ (KJV).

The apostle Peter says that we are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2 KJV).

Please notice that 1 Peter 1:2 does not say that we are foreknown according to the election of God, but “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.” The “election” does not follow the “foreknowledge” in time, because it all happens together in the eternal mind and purpose of God; however, the election is *conditioned* by God’s foreknowledge. God’s choice is not arbitrary, but takes into account His foreknowledge of our susceptibility to His grace. That in turn guides Him in where and how to invest His grace where it will be effective.

We *do* have a definite choice in our destiny. So, what did God foreknow about you and your susceptibility to His grace? What choices did God from eternity foresee you making right now in this present life in response to His gracious influences, choices that mold

your moral character and determine your eternal destiny? *That* is up to you. That is why we are to make our “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10 KJV).

Believers do not live mundane, meaningless lives. We carry in us the eternal purpose of God! We are the centerpiece of God’s grand design of the ages. For us the worlds were created. In response to all of this, what kind of lives should we be living? What priceless and eternal values should energize us?

Genuine Christians should be the most highly motivated people on the face of the earth. Each day, each moment, is charged with eternal potential and possibilities. The high calling of God demands that we aim at nothing less than being our very best for God. What a challenge! What a high and holy ambition!

The apostle Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know the hope of His calling and “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:17, 18 KJV).

Believers are destined for nothing less than total and eternal fellowship with God Himself. And that requires moral compatibility with Him—conformity to His character. There must be nothing in our character that is incompatible with the character of God, and every moral quality in His character must have its counterpart in ours.

Above all else, God is building character in believers because *character is forever!* What we are to be we are becoming.

The Final Product.

So, what is the final product? What is our destiny?

Here it is in Romans 8:28 and 29. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (KJV).

The elect are predestined not only to get to Heaven but also to be conformed to the character of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. If you love God, God is determined—He has made up His mind—that you are going to be like Jesus, no matter what it takes! God has invested too much in us and the stakes are too high for Him to do a half-way, second-rate job on us. So whatever it takes is more than worth it.

So we can come either the easy way or the hard way. Either way, God is going to do it. So, let’s not make it hard on ourselves. Let’s cooperate with The Holy Spirit, live Biblically, and save ourselves a lot of problems, pain, and paddlings.

This is one reason God did not take us to Heaven the moment we became Christians. He left us here to bring others to Him, of course. He also left us here to go through a *process*. He is building permanent character in us, and He is doing so under the pressures of life. We are in “The University of Adversity.”

Second Corinthians 4:17 says that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (KJV). Notice, it is all working for us, not against us. The NIV puts it this way: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

This present world is an excellent place to develop saints. It provides a fully equipped workshop for building us into the image of Christ. There are so many problems and provocations, so many hassles, so many people getting on our case, so many trials and temptations. Every day is loaded with excellent opportunities to be like Jesus!

But if we are destined to “soar with the saints,” why in the meanwhile do we have to put up with so many sinners?

Well, let us imagine a football game with only one team on the field. No opposition. The team that showed up would make a touchdown every play (that is, if nobody dropped the ball). The quarterback takes the ball from the center, and everybody strolls down the field together. After all, how much personal discipline does it take to walk a hundred

yards? Nobody has to stay in shape. Nobody has to obey the training rules. The team on the field would win every game.

But the victory would be meaningless.

But put an opposing team on the field, looking at you eye-to-eye across the scrimmage line. Now what do you do? You dig in your cleats and give it all you have. You think beyond the goal line, and you are determined to get there in spite of everything the other guys do to stop you. You have been training, working out, staying in shape, learning the rules and honing your skills. Now it is time to *do it!*

But people who love God are already predestined to win. So why try? Why do anything about it?

Okay. Let's imagine that it were possible (though it is not possible in real life) to view the film of the game you are about to play *before you play it*. You watch yourself carrying the ball play after play. You get excited as you see yourself making first downs. You wince as you see yourself flat on your back after being thrown for a loss. The coach sends in the key play. Excited, you watch intently as you take the hand-off. You break tackles. Your team is opening up big holes and taking out the secondary. Only the safety stands in your way, but your momentum carries you past him and into the end zone for the winning score!

So, after viewing the film before the game, what do you do? Do you shrug your shoulders and say, "I know I'm going to win; so what's the use of going out there and playing the game?"

No way! It is time to take to the field. But now you are all charged up and raring to go out there and make those plays. You are full of confidence because you know that, no matter what happens, you are going to win!

For believers this life is a training ground for eternity. Through Christ we are sure to win. Still, we have to experience the training course.

People who die in infancy go straight to Heaven. Jesus said this about little children: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14 NKJV). "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels do always see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10 NKJV).

People who die in infancy and go to Heaven will experience forever the basic joys of Heaven. Also, they will not remain infants. Furthermore, they will grow in their knowledge of God and His truth. However, God will not give a person who died in infancy the same rewards, nor entrust to that person the same positions of authority and degrees of responsibility that He will to those who faithfully and consistently walked with Him and went through the character building process on this earth for 30, 40, 50, 60 years or more.

To become like Jesus means to "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death" (Philippians 3:10 KJV). It means to have the fruit of the Spirit developed and matured in us, because the fruit of the Spirit is the character—the moral nature—of Jesus Christ.

Intimate Relationship.

To be like Jesus we must diligently pursue an intimate relationship with Him. We must spend time with Him, giving The Holy Spirit the opportunity to make Him real to us. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (NKJV).

This is a direct, intimate relationship in The Holy Spirit with nothing between our soul and the Savior—no sin, no clutter of distractions, nothing to put Him "out of focus."

Have you ever watched a potter working at his wheel? As the lump of clay spins

around and around, what does the potter do? Does he or she take a club and beat on the clay, muttering, "I'm going to make a vessel out of you even if I have to knock you into shape!"

No. Instead, the potter applies gentle pressure to the pliable clay. As the clay yields to the master's skillful fingers, under the potter's hand a beautiful vase takes shape.

The Holy Spirit is like that master potter. He applies gentle but effective pressure on us to shape us into a vessel of honor. Our problem is that we are usually too sensitive and responsive to the impulses of our own human spirit. We react too much to our own emotions. That gets us into all kinds of trouble. The bumper sticker slogan, "If it feels good, do it," is a prescription for disaster.

Instead, we need to quiet ourselves before God and learn to be sensitive and responsive to The Holy Spirit. No matter what the provocation, no matter what people say or do, no matter what emotions we feel or how strong they are, the important thing at that moment is not to say what we feel like saying or do what we feel like doing. It is not to assert our rights or set somebody straight. The *most* important thing at that moment is *to be like Jesus*.

The story is told of a sculptor who was commissioned to sculpture a statue of Abraham Lincoln. He brought a block of marble into his studio and began to work on it. He "tap-tapped" here and "tap-tapped" there, chipping off pieces of marble in the process.

A by-stander who was watching the process finally spoke up. "Pardon me, sir. How do you know what pattern to follow?"

The sculptor replied casually, "Oh, that's easy. I just take away everything that doesn't look like Abraham Lincoln."

Sometimes we feel like that block of marble. Will we *ever* be like Jesus? We realize that we have so far to go. But let us remember, we are predestined "to be conformed to the image" of Jesus Christ, and God is not through with us yet. He is working daily to "take away everything that does not look like Jesus."

So if there is anything in your character, your nature, your personality, your behavior that does not look like Jesus, you can be sure that sooner or later The Holy Spirit is going to go to work on it. As He does, go ahead and say "Ouch," but do not pull away. Hold steady and let The Holy Spirit do His perfect work. Keep in mind that He is shaping you for your glorious destiny.

Jesus said, "The disciple is not above his master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (Luke 6:40 KJV). The word, "perfect," means mended, repaired, completed, prepared.

The apostle John wrote, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has his hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3 NIV).

The major instrument that God uses to fashion us into the image of Christ is His word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17 KJV).

And Peter wrote, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4 NASB).

Jesus is the living Word of God. The Bible is the written Word of God. The two match perfectly. The image of Jesus Christ is indelibly imprinted in The Scriptures.

Let us refer back for a moment to 2 Corinthians 3:18. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (NKJV).

There is a saying that goes something like this: "As we as the children of God look into the Word of God, the Spirit of God transforms us into the image of the Son of God."

God also uses the Church and its ministry in this process. Christian growth and

maturity do not take place in isolation, but in relationship. It happens in fellowship with other believers who also share in “the hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:18 KJV). We must not reject Christ’s Church. It is His body and every believer is a part of it. Those irritating saints might be some of the very people God is using to help us become like Jesus!

Ephesians 4:11-16 say that God has given us ministers to prepare us for service, so that the body of Christ (the Church) will be built up, until “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (KJV). We are to “grow up into Him in all things.”

This is the desire of true ministers. The apostle Paul said that the objective of his preaching and teaching was to present every believer perfect (complete, mature) in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

The goal of every true pastor is to be able on the day of Christ to say to Him, “Lord, here is _____ Church. I have fed them Your Word, watched over them, prayed for them, and endeavored to be an example to them. They have been teachable and responsive; and now here they are. I am delighted with them. *They are just like Jesus.*

It is sad that so many professed Christians are right now all they ever intend to be. But those who have caught the vision of the eternal purpose of God join the apostle Paul in declaring, “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!” (Philippians 3:13, 14 KJV).

If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you do not know the real meaning of life. You are missing the purpose of your very existence. You are on the wrong path. Each day you are making and reinforcing choices that are forming the wrong kind of character and preparing for the wrong destiny. The heart that is self-willed, rebellious, and disobedient cannot have fellowship with God. It is totally unfit for the kingdom of God.

If you are not right with God, Satan also has a plan for you; and if you knew what that plan is, it would terrify you. You have the potential of eternal fellowship with God, but you are wasting your time in sin, preparing yourself for the wrong eternity. If you keep going the way you are, you will end up on the “scrap heap” of eternity, a total loss. You could have spent eternity with God, the angels, and the redeemed; but instead you will spend eternity with Satan and demons. What a waste! What an unspeakable tragedy!

No, friend, it is not too late. Surrender your heart to Christ now. Trust Him as your Savior and then follow Him as your Lord. God loves you. He has a glorious plan, and you can be a part of it. Lock into God’s plan. He will give full meaning and purpose to your life.

