

Sermons on Romans-Lowell F. Johnson

Romans by Pastor Lowell Johnson 2013 Sermons

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TO ROME WITH LOVE

Romans 1:1-7

We begin our study of the Book of Romans, which is perhaps the greatest Book of the New Testament. I know that is a big statement, but Romans is without question the greatest theological work of the Apostle Paul. The Book of Romans has made more impact on Christian history than any other book.

The man who was recognized as the greatest theologian and leader of the church for the first 1,000 years of its existence after the Apostles was a man named Augustine. He was a professor in Milan, Italy. As Augustine sat weeping in the garden of a friend, while contemplating the wickedness of his own life, he heard a child singing in Latin a little song that said, "Take up and read. Take up and read." Beside Augustine was an open scroll of the Book of Romans. He picked it up and read the first verses that caught his eye. They were Romans 13:13-14: "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lust." These verses brought about the conversion of Augustine.

A thousand years later, a Roman Catholic monk named Martin Luther, was teaching his students the Book of Romans. He said that his heart was "strangely arrested" by the theme of justification by faith, Romans 1:17. The Holy Spirit used that verse to bring Luther to Christ. Later Luther would say that Romans is "the true masterpiece of the New Testament and the very purest gospel."

John Bunyan, who wrote Pilgrims Progress, used the Book of Romans to show how he became a Christian Pilgrim.

A few hundred years later, an ordained minister in the Church of England was preparing to take the Gospel to America as a missionary. However, even though Wesley was a preacher and was going across the Atlantic as a missionary, he was confused about the Gospel and was seeking a genuine conversion experience of his own. Then, one Wednesday evening, he attended a Bible study in London. He heard someone reading some of Luther's comments on Romans and was brought to conversion to Christ. John, alone with his brother Charles, would be used of God to bring the great Wesleyan revivals to the world.

The Book of Romans has been called "The Constitution of Christianity;" "The Christian Manifesto;" "The Cathedral of the Christian Faith."

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth toward the end of his third missionary journey between 56 and 58 A.D.

Phoebe was given the great responsibility of delivering this letter to the Roman believers – Romans 16:1-2.

The theme of the Book of Romans is The Righteousness of God – Romans 1:16-17.

Romans is all about the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ and the difference He can make when He comes into their life. In fact, the English word "gospel" comes from the Old English "godspell," or as we would say, good news.

Here is a simple outline of the book:

1. The Gospel of God's Good News for sinners: Romans 1-8.

The key word for this section is Doctrinal.

Paul explains how the gospel of Jesus Christ saves sinners, justifies them in the sight of God, unites them with Jesus Christ, and equips them through the Holy Spirit to live victoriously in this world.

2. The Gospel is God's Good News for Israel: Romans 9-11.

The key word for this section is National.

Here Paul takes up the question of Israel's rejection of her Messiah. Does that mean that Israel has been cast off forever? As Paul would say "God forbid!" In these chapters Paul explains Israel's unbelief in light of the doctrine of election and predestination, and shows how Israel as a nation will be brought back into God's plan in the end times.

3. The Gospel is God's Good News for the Saint: Romans 12-16.

The key word for this section is Practical.

Paul lays out the implications of the gospel for believers. He discusses the transformation of the mind, spiritual gifts, love among the brethren, and the disturbing problem of weaker and stronger Christians in the body of Christ.

In the Greek language the first seven verses are all one long sentence. You can't really tell that in English because the translators have broken it up into smaller parts, but in the original, it's all one sentence – 176 words in all. That means the Book of Romans has the longest introduction of any New Testament book.

One reason for this is that Paul was writing to people who did not know him. Paul had never been to Rome before. They didn't know Paul personally, didn't know what he believed, didn't know what he wanted, or why he was writing to them.

The reason Romans is such an important book is that it is filled with Doctrine. What is doctrine? Someone said that doctrine is what you give folks when they are sick. Well, doctrine is what we need to give a sick church or it is what we need to give to a church to keep it from getting sick.

Doctrine is Bible teaching. By proper doctrine our faith can be Defined – Defended – Distributed – Demonstrated.

We don't teach and preach doctrine. We preach and teach Jesus, but we use doctrine to do it.

One other thing by way of introduction: The Book of Romans has often been referred to as the Fifth Gospel. We have four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These gospels are written primarily to the SINNER. Romans is the Gospel – the Good News – to the SAINT.

Here is the outline we will be using for the Introduction of Romans:

- A. The Facts About the Messenger – Romans 1:1
- B. The Foundation of Paul's Message – Romans 1:2-5
- C. The Focus of Paul's Ministry – Romans 1:6-7

I. The Facts About the Messenger Romans 1:1

In Romans 1:1 there is a three-fold introduction:

1. Paul introduces his Master – He is a “Servant of Jesus Christ.” This speaks of Paul's Humility.
2. Paul introduces his Office – He is “called to be an apostle.” This speaks of his Authority.
3. Paul introduces his Purpose – He is “separated or set apart unto the gospel of God.” This speaks of his Mission in life.

Paul is writing with divine authority. As an Apostle, his words carry the authority of God Himself and we are to take his words seriously.

Paul was a man of Dedication.

1. He was saved

He was born in Tarsus around A.D. 1, some four or five years after the birth of Jesus Christ.

He was a Roman citizen and a Jew by birth (Acts 22:28). He was an Israelite (Romans 11:1). He was a Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin (2 Corinthians 11:22) and a Pharisee (Philippians 3:4-5; Acts 23:6; Acts 26:4-5). He was saved by Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) and he considered himself as “the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8).

2. He was a servant

The word Paul uses for “servant” means “bond slave.” There are actually six different Greek words describing servitude:

- Three of them describe involuntary servitude, such as those sold into slavery.
- One means a hired servant – one who gets paid for the time he puts in on the job.
- One word is the word we get our word deacon from. He is one who serves by ministering to the needs of others.

The sixth word is the Greek word “Doulos” or bond slave. That is the word that is used here. According to Exodus 21:1-6, if you

bought a Hebrew servant, he only had to serve for six years and in the seventh year he shall go free for nothing. But, if the slave loved and respected his master and the master treated him with respect, love, kindness, and fairly, a slave could refuse his freedom and could choose to remain with his master forever.

Then, the master would bring the slave before the judges, bring the slave to the door or the door post, and the master would bore his ear through with an awl; and he would serve the master forever.

Like the bond slave in the Old Testament, Paul declared himself a bond slave to Christ. A bond slave had no personal rights, for his life was dictated to him by his master. He was totally sold out to the will of God. He was totally owned by the master; he existed for no other reason than to serve his master. He had no ambition outside that which the master allowed him to have. There would be a total submission of every part of the slave's being to the will of the master.

3. He was selected

Not only was Paul a slave to a new Master, the Lord Jesus, he was also an apostle. The word means an "ambassador" or a "sent one." An ambassador is a person sent out into another country as a representative of the country who sent him out. That means that Paul went out as a representative of Heaven. Ambassadors usually carried with them all the authority of the country which sent him. Paul was a representative of King Jesus and operated under His Divine authority.

Notice that Paul said he was "called" by the will of God. Paul didn't just decide to go into the ministry; he was placed in the ministry by the sovereign will of Almighty God – I Timothy 1:12-14.

You and I are not Apostles, but we are Ambassadors of Heaven ("now then we are ambassadors for Christ" – 2 Corinthians 5:20). When the world sees you and me, let's make sure they see a people who are sold out and committed to the will of God in the world. We are representatives of Heaven; we are salt and light!

4. He was separated (set apart)

We are not only to be separated FROM the world, but we are to be separated UNTO Christ. If we are separated unto Jesus, then we are automatically separated from the world.

II. The Foundation of Paul's Message Romans 1:2-5

A. Jesus is the Promised One Romans 1:2

Paul's message is that the Gospel was promised in the Old Testament. All the prophets spoke about it. Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel all looked forward to it.

That means that the Gospel is Good News, but it is NOT NEW news. In many ways, the Gospel is old news because the prophets predicted that the Messiah would someday come and save His people. That means that the Gospel was part of God's plan from the beginning. Revelation 13:8 speaks of Jesus as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The sacrificial mission of the Messiah is plainly foretold in Isaiah 53:1-12.

B. Jesus is the Perfect One

Romans 1:3-4 spell out who Jesus is. In Romans 1:3, Paul explains that Jesus was born of the seed of David. That's the human side of Jesus. Then in Romans 1:4, Paul explains the divine side, "who through the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."

In these two verses Paul gives us a very clear picture of the two natures of our Lord. According to the flesh He was a descendant of David. On the divine side, He was demonstrated to be the powerful Son of God by virtue of His resurrection from the dead.

Romans 1:3 – His Human Nature

Romans 1:4 – His Divine Nature

Note the key event that demonstrates who He really is, it is our Lord's resurrection from the dead. The empty tomb is the watershed that forever separates Jesus Christ from all other religious leaders. He is not dead. He's Alive today!

Notice the five titles of Christ:

1. The Seed of David
2. The Son of God

3. Jesus: His human name
4. Christ: The Anointed One; Messiah – His official title
5. Lord: The title of His Exaltation as Victor over death and the grave

III. The Focus of Paul's Ministry Romans 1:5-7

Paul says that he was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles or the nations. Paul was a Jewish Christian who was serving as the very first foreign missionary, and his mission field was the nations of the world.

Paul's message was the Gospel; his field was the world; his goal was winning men to faith in Jesus Christ.

1. The Romans are Called to be Saved Romans 1:6

He reminds them that they have received the sovereign call of God to be saved. Look at just some of the glories of salvation: sin taken away, claimed by God, declared righteous by God, brought nigh to God.

2. The Romans are Called to be Saints Romans 1:7

Literally, they are called saints. They are “beloved of God.” Bible sainthood is not a category reserved for a few super-Christians; nor do you have to be dead for a long time before you become a saint. The Bible says all believers are saints the moment they trust Christ.

Are you a saint? We must make some kind of response to Jesus; and your response determines your destiny. Your choices are to Receive Him or Reject Him.

A HEART TO HEART MINISTRY

Romans 1:8-15

Ministry starts in the heart; not in the head. That is the secret of Paul's success. He had a heart for people. People came first with Paul. Paul never forgot that Christ came to save people.

Romans 1:8-15 is Paul's very personal statement about his own deep interest in the believers at Rome. It's worth noting why Paul felt it necessary to begin his epistle in such an intimate way.

Paul had never been in Rome when he wrote this letter. That's atypical for Paul, because he usually visited a city (like Thessalonica or Corinth), then left to continue his travels, and later wrote a letter back to the believers in that city (i.e., I Thessalonians, I Corinthians). But that's not what Paul's doing here. Since Paul had never been to Rome, he felt a special obligation to introduce himself to the Roman believers.

How else would they know him? How could they decide whether or not to trust him? To say it another way, how do you convince people you really care about them when you've never met them face to face? So, Paul writes about his deep feelings for the Roman Christians, in order to win their confidence and to help them know how much he cared for them.

In Romans 1:8-15 we see Paul's heart unveiled. Before he jumps into the heavy theology, he writes a few lines sharing his personal concern for the Church at Rome. And in so doing, we learn not only what Paul's heart was like, but also the secret of a heart to heart ministry.

What kind of heart did Paul have? These verses provide five answers.

I. A Grateful Heart Romans 1:8

Paul begins with a compliment. The very first words out of his mouth are positive words of affirmation. The text says, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.” What a positive, hopeful, and uplifting way to begin. Don't you know that the Romans felt encouraged when he said that he had heard about their faith. Maybe they hadn't heard about him, but he had heard about them.

So, Paul begins by expressing his heartfelt gratitude for the Church at Rome. And when he says, “Your faith is being reported all over

the world,” do you suppose he is exaggerating slightly? Yes, I'm sure he's exaggerating, but he's doing it for a reason. He could have said, “A few people are talking about your faith here and there, but there are still a lot of people who don't know who you are.” That would have been technically true, but what good would it have done? So, Paul says, “Everywhere I go they are talking about the committed Christians in Rome.” No wonder the Romans were ready to hear his message.

There's a very familiar principle at work here: People tend to become what you believe them to be. If you say to a child, “You're stupid,” he'll struggle forever in his classes. If you treat a man like a criminal, he'll soon prove it by robbing you blind. But if a husband says to his wife, “you're the most beautiful woman in the world to me,” his wife will be transformed before his very eyes.

II. A Praying Heart Romans 1:9-10

Paul prayed for the Romans. He prayed for them “constantly” and called God to be his witness of that fact.

How do you suppose that made the Romans feel? Don't you think it made them feel tremendously honored to know that the Apostle Paul had prayed for them – even though he had never met them?

To be truthful, I would rather have someone say, “I'm praying for you” than “I love you,” because if they are really praying for me, I already know they love me. If you pray for someone regularly, you will begin to love them. You cannot love without praying or pray without loving. The one leads to the other.

III. A Longing Heart Romans 1:11-13

J. B. Moffatt translates “I long to see you” like this: “I am homesick to see you.” Homesick? Paul had never been to Rome. How could he be homesick for a place he had never visited? The answer is, he prayed for them so much, and thought about them so much, that he felt as if he already knew them. Rome didn't seem like a foreign country to Paul; it seemed like home to him.

Paul says that he wants to come to Rome and minister to the saints by using his spiritual gifts in order to build them up and make them strong. That's a noble calling, and if that's all Paul did, that would be ample reason to make the trip. “I long to see you, my heart is hurting to see you, that I might preach to you and build you up.” That in itself is a noble purpose.

But that's not all Paul says. It's as if verse 12 corrects verse 11. It's as if Paul is thinking to himself as he writes, so he adds something new in verse 12. Notice he says, “That you and I may be mutually encouraged.” That adds an entirely new dimension. How do you think that made them feel? Paul the great Apostle said, “I'm looking forward to seeing you, not just so that I can give you something, but so that you can minister to me.” This is a ministry of concurrent encouragement. It's what happens when I minister to you and you minister to me. It's the heart of what Christian ministry is all about. You give something to me and I give something back to you. Ministry is not a one-way street. It's a two-way street, with blessings and encouragement constantly being shared both ways.

Paul is teaching that every man is my teacher because every man has something I need to learn. I must be a student of all – from the youngest child to the oldest person, from the richest to the poorest, from the most mature to the most immature – because every person, no matter how unlikely, has something they can teach me. In Christ, I teach every person and every person is my teacher. I have something to give to each person and each person has something to give to me.

In the body of Christ there can be no big shots and little shots. Nobody can say, “I don't have to listen to you, but you have to listen to me.” No! Every man must be my teacher and I am a teacher of every man.

IV. An Indebted Heart Romans 1:14

“I am a debtor” or “I am obligated.” In the original language, the word speaks of a solemn moral obligation. It means that Paul did what he did because he felt a holy and sacred obligation. Paul felt a moral indebtedness to the Gentiles to preach the gospel to them.

Paul is saying, “I am coming to Rome because I have a deep moral obligation to go there.” But in what sense did he mean that? Paul had never been to Rome; he knew very few people in the church. How could he be indebted to them? The answer is, Paul's true indebtedness was to God. God had given the gospel. How could Paul ever hope to repay the Almighty? What could he offer that God would accept? There was nothing he could directly give back to God. But there was one thing he could do. He could have what God had given him and share it with someone else! In that sense, Paul was indebted to the people of Rome even though he

had never met them.

There are several ways of incurring debt:

1. If you borrow money from someone, then you are obligated to pay the money back.
2. But a second way is to be given money for someone by a third party. If someone entrusts us with something to give to someone else, we are obligated or in debt to that person to pay them what is owed. It is a matter of stewardship or trusteeship.

If the gospel has come to us – and it has – we have no right to keep it to ourselves. We were won to Christ by the gospel and we are to win others by sharing the gospel with them.

If God has shown you mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, He has placed you in His debt.

Christians say, “I pay my honest debts.” Do you? We have not done so until we have shared what we have received from the Lord with others.

People who owe money to others and neglect to pay it back are called thieves. Maybe you thought sharing the gospel was optional for you, but God says it's an obligation. God doesn't charge us for salvation, but we have a duty, an obligation, a responsibility to share the gospel with others.

You may say, “But I don't know how to share the gospel.” Then start learning, because God requires it.

II Kings 7:9. There was a famine in the days of Elijah in Israel. Four leprous men who sat at the gate of Israel said, “Why do we sit here til we die? We will go to the camp of Syria. They may kill us, but we are going to die here anyway.” When they got to Syria, they found that every man had fled because God had caused them to hear the noise of battle. The lepers went in, found all the food they wanted and more. They thought of their brothers in Israel who were hungry. They said to one another, “We do not well if we do not tell.”

“Am I a soldier of the cross, A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause, or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies on flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize, And sail thro' bloody seas?

Sure, I must fight if I would reign; Increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word.”

V. An Eager Heart Romans 1:15

“I am ready or eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome.” It is a strong word that means something like “ready, willing, and able.” Paul was so eager to come to Rome that he couldn't wait to get there.

“So as much as in me is.” With every ounce of intellect, ability, and energy, until I'm exhausted.

Let us labor for the Master from the dawn to setting sun.
Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care.
Then when all of life is over and our work on earth is done,
When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

So little time, so much to do! What is the passion of your life? What are you living for? What are you indebted to? What are you eager to do? Are you still twiddling your thumbs and wasting your life on things that really don't matter? Or have you gotten excited about the most important thing in the world – sharing Jesus Christ with those who do not know Him? Are you involved in heart to heart ministry – sharing God's love heart to heart to heart?

A GOSPEL WORTH SHARING

Romans 1:16-17

Certain texts of the Bible are so familiar to us as Christians that we don't even remember learning them. It is as if we have known

them all of our lives. We learn them the first days of Sunday School. We Know them, we Love them, their words are Etched on our Hearts. They are the "Great Texts" of the Bible. John 3:16 certainly falls into that category, as does Romans 8:28 and Psalm 23. You might add to these Psalm 103:1, Isaiah 53:6, and Romans 3:23 and 6:23. Romans 1:16-17 also belongs in that category.

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" and "The just shall live by faith." These words form the theme of the Book of Romans. This is what the Book of Romans is all about. This is the text that launched the Protestant Reformation and it is this text that most clearly explains the difference between evangelical Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church.

After introducing the Messenger, the Message, and his own Motives in the first 15 verses of this book, the Apostle Paul turns the spotlight on the Gospel that he is going to write about. In these two verses we see a clear declaration of God's Power and Purpose in the Gospel message.

Paul begins by saying, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." Why should he be ashamed? Perhaps a little understanding of that culture will help us to understand why some might have been ashamed of the Gospel and the preaching of the Gospel Message.

1. Because of the Moral Condition of Rome in that day.

Nero was the Emperor of Rome. He was a wicked, degenerate man, and the people of Rome were just like their leader. The city of Rome was a cesspool of sin and wicked living. The Gospel Paul preached was diametrically opposed to everything Rome was. The world is opposed to God's Gospel and ridicules it when it talks about trusting Christ as Savior, because such a thing would lead to godly, righteous living. They would ridicule anyone telling them to give up their sinful life-style and to begin living clean, holy lives.

2. Because Paul was a Jew.

Jews were considered by many to be a sub-human race. They were fit for nothing but to be despised, mistreated, and enslaved. Rome was a proud and powerful people. The Gospel was identified with a poor Jewish carpenter who was crucified. Crucifixion was the lowest form of execution given to a criminal. Why put your faith in a Jew who was born to die?

3. Because the Gospel Paul was preaching was almost unbelievable.

Think of it, the Savior Paul was preaching was a male member of the despised Jewish race. He claimed to be the nation's Messiah. He also claimed to be the Son of God, even God Himself; yet, He claimed to be a man. His death was different than other men in that He died on a Roman cross, a symbol of shame, but in dying this death, He was said to have died for all men.

And, if that wasn't enough, this man claimed to have risen from the dead the third day after His death. To many people, the claims of the Gospel were just too bizarre to believe.

We should never be ashamed of Christ or the Gospel of Christ; yet, all of us from time to time are afraid to be identified with Christ.

- There was a time when Peter was ashamed of the Lord – Matthew 26:69-75.
- Apparently, Timothy was at times ashamed to speak for the Lord – Second Timothy 1:8. "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord."
- As for us, God has called us to courage; not to being afraid or ashamed of speaking for Christ – Second Timothy 1:7 "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."
- Jesus gave a strong warning to those who would not have the courage to identify with Christ and His Gospel. If we are ashamed of Jesus, one day He will be ashamed of us – Mark 8:38 "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

With all of these things in mind, Paul wanted to make his commitment to the Gospel message clear. What was it about the Gospel that invigorated him and kept him going for God? Paul reminds us that we have A Gospel Worth Sharing.

I. The Power of the Gospel

God could have revealed His power against sin in any way that He chose. He could have wiped men from the face of the earth. But it is a blessing to notice that when the Lord moved to do something about sin, He exercised His power in sending men the Gospel of grace.

Nowhere is the power of God so visible as it is in the Gospel of Christ. Think about it! When God takes a lost sinner and saves him by His grace and makes him a new creature, that is a powerful thing. God could have sent us all to Hell, but He instead chose to

send us His love wrapped up in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

The Greek word for power that Paul uses here is the word we get our English words dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic. The Gospel is powerful. God does mighty work through the Gospel.

Sin is like cement that hardens around our feet, cripples us, and renders us incapable of walking with God. We try to step out of sin's cement, but we're locked in. Then the Gospel of Christ comes along and, like dynamite, blows to smithereens the grip that sin has on us. It also blasts the steel walls of resistance we built against Jesus to keep Him out of our lives.

The Gospel is not only like dynamite, but it is also like a dynamo. The power of dynamite is over in a few seconds, but the power of a dynamo is continuous. Once the Gospel dynamite breaks down the spiritual walls we built to keep the Lord out of our lives, the Gospel dynamo plugs us in to the current of the Holy Spirit and He gives us a dynamic power to overcome sin, love our enemies, and speak boldly for Christ.

How does this power work? What does the Gospel do? It saves sinners. What else will save sinners? Not science, not education, not religion, not moral reformation. The Gospel, and only the Gospel, saves sinners.

Sometimes when we see the word "salvation," we think only in the past tense. But here Paul is thinking of salvation in all three tenses – past, present, and future. The Gospel has the power to Forgive Sins (Past), Impart New Life (Present), and Admit into Heaven (Future). No other power on earth can do that!

II. The Purpose of the Gospel

Why did God go to such lengths for men? Why did He give up His Son to die on the cross for the sins of humanity? The primary answer is simply that He loves us. However, there is more to it than that. God's plan and God's purpose in giving the Gospel message is "Salvation."

The word "salvation" is a very important word. It means "safety preservation, deliverance." It carries the idea of "being rescued from all harm and danger." God's desire in saving sinners is to forever deliver them from spiritual death, spiritual defilement, spiritual deception, and spiritual destruction. God's purpose in giving the Gospel is to change man's destination in eternity and his life here on earth as well.

The Gospel is the Good News that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture; He was buried; He rose again, according to the Scriptures." Why should anyone be ashamed of this Good News?

Left to ourselves, we are in desperate trouble, because we are at odds with God, with other people, and with ourselves. In the future we must face God's just wrath and condemnation

But there is good news. God has intervened to rescue us through the work of His divine Son, Jesus Christ. First, He has reconciled us to Himself. Christ has died for us, bearing our sins in His own body on the cross. Second, He has reconciled us to others; we are now set free to love others as Jesus loves us. Third, He has reconciled us to ourselves; in Christ Jesus (and by the power of the Holy Spirit) we are now able to become what God has always meant for us to be.

Salvation delivers us from the guilt, power, and pollution of sin. We are brought back into communication with God after our sins had separated us.

III. The Plan of the Gospel

How is the Gospel message of salvation activated? Notice that it is "to everyone that believeth."

Biblical salvation does not involve complicated religious rituals or exercises. Salvation is the product of faith and faith alone! (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 2:5).

This is the point where many people stumble. People like to do things for themselves. They like to feel that they have a part of everything in their lives. However, in the matter of salvation, the sinner can have no part. It is all of God, all the way. Salvation comes to the person who is willing to simply receive the message of Christ by faith.

The Gospel declares God's way of salvation and not man's way. The world's way of salvation has countless schemes and self-help programs, but these are all foolish and inadequate. The message of the Gospel is:

- Not Behave, but Believe
- Not Achieve, but Receive
- Not Attain, but Obtain
- Not "you can do it," but "Christ has done it."

Christianity is God reaching out to save perishing men and women; not sinners reaching out to seize God.

The Gospel is Shared by Faith and Received by Faith. Four times the phrase, "The just shall live by faith" is found in Scripture (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

Many Christians try to live the Christian life by their "feelings." If they "feel" happy, they smile and say, "I know I'm a child of God, because I can feel His joy!" But the next day they don't feel too joyful, so they doubt their salvation.

The Bible warns us, "Do not live your Christian life by your feelings. Live by Faith!"

From the first day we accept Christ until the last breath we breathe, we are to live by faith. We receive God's righteousness by faith at our conversion, and then we show righteousness by faith every day of our lives.

Colossians 2:6 – We receive Christ through faith, so we must continue to live in Him through faith. "From first to last we live by faith!"

IV. The Pledge of the Gospel

"To everyone who believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." This great, saving Gospel message is for every single person in the world. No one is beyond the reach of the Gospel of Grace. Anyone can be saved by God's precious grace!

V. The Product of the Gospel Romans 1:17

The product of the Gospel in the life of the believer is "righteousness." Man is not righteous and he cannot produce righteousness by self-will or his own works. But when faith is placed in the Gospel message and Jesus Christ is believed on in the heart, God takes the sinner and declares him to be righteous. What man cannot do by effort, God does by His power.

Simply stated, everything man looks for in religion: peace with God, acceptance by God, a right relationship with God, etc., is all given to the believer when he receives the Gospel message. That is a message worth sharing!

The key word is righteousness, which means to have a right standing in God's eyes. It is a legal term that means to declare "not guilty" and "to declare innocent of all charges." Righteousness provides for us what we could never provide for ourselves. On our own merits we stand condemned before Almighty God. Who is there among us who would dare say, "I am good enough to go to Heaven?" Righteousness is what we need, but do not have. Therefore God, knowing that we could never be righteous on our own, has provided a righteousness which comes down to us from heaven above. It is not earned or deserved, but is given to us by God as a free gift.

Faith is complete reliance upon another person to do that which you could never do for yourself.

How much faith does it take to go to Heaven? The answer is: not much AND ALL you've got! If you are willing to trust Jesus Christ with as much faith as you happen to have, you can be saved. But if you're holding anything back, thinking that maybe you need to do something to help save yourself, forget it! Saving faith is putting your trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone. In order to do that, you have to stop trying to save yourself.

GOD'S WRATH AGAINST SIN

Romans 1:18-23

The theme of the Book of Romans is The Righteousness of God Through Faith in Jesus Christ.

But before Paul could talk about the Righteousness of God, it was needful for him to talk about the Unrighteousness of man without Christ.

Until man knows he is a sinner, he cannot appreciate the gracious salvation God offers in Jesus Christ. God condemns sin in every man outside of Christ. God provides righteousness for sinful man ONLY through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22).

Let me ask you to mark four phrases in Romans 1:

1. The Glory of God Romans 1:19-20, 23 ("the glory of the incorruptible God").

God reveals His eternal power and divine nature in His creation.

2. The Wrath of God Romans 1:18

God reveals His wrath against the sin of those who suppress their knowledge of the creator.

3. The Righteousness of God Romans 1:17

God reveals that His way of putting sinners right with Himself is through the Gospel.

4. The Power of God Romans 1:16

God reveals His power by saving all those who believe the Gospel.

I. Man's Rebellion Toward God Romans 1:18

"The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven." That word "wrath" grabs our attention. We are accustomed to hearing about the LOVE of God and the GRACE of God and the MERCY of God and the GLORY of God and even the HOLINESS of God. But the wrath of God? We hardly ever mention it. There aren't many hymns about God's wrath. We'd much rather sing "Jesus loves me, this I know." But you can't read Romans 1 without coming face to face with the wrath of God.

What is the wrath of God? There are two words in the Greek translated wrath:

1. "Thermos" The word refers to a sudden explosion of anger. This sudden outburst of anger is what we sometimes call "losing our cool" or flying off the handle." This word is never used of God. God is never in a rage.

2. "Orge" This is not a sudden angry outburst, but refers to a settled hostility that remains constant over a long period of time. The wrath of God does not have in it the ugly, sinful, hateful nature that is manifest in human anger.

The anger of God is only the reaction of the love of a holy God in the presence of sin.

Notice, too, that the reaction against sin is not from God alone: ALL of Heaven reacts with God against all sin.

Here is a working definition of God's wrath: God's wrath is His settled hostility to everything that contradicts His holiness. As long as God is God, He cannot overlook sin or stand by indifferently while His creation is destroyed. God cannot dismiss lightly those who trample His holy will. He cannot wink when men mock His name.

God's wrath is revealed in response to man's rejection of the truth. "Revealed" is in the present tense because it describes something that is always going on. The problem doesn't start with God; it starts with man. Man rejects and God responds.

What is it that causes God and all of Heaven to react in wrath?

1. All ungodliness of Men Romans 1:18

"Ungodliness" is sin against God because of a lack of reverence toward God. It deals with our Attitude toward God; our respect or lack of respect for God; our regard or disregard of God. God reacts against all lack of reverence whether it be for His Person, His Word, His Servants or His House.

2. All unrighteousness of Man Romans 1:18

Unrighteousness is sin against men. It refers to sinful actions toward man. When man's attitude toward God is not right, then his actions toward man will not be right.

What causes us to be ungodly toward God and unrighteous toward man?

We "hold" or "hold down" the truth in unrighteousness. The word "hold" is very important. Referring to a helmsman steering a boat against the current, it means "to suppress." In other words, the current wants to take the boat a certain way, but determined to go the

opposite way, the helmsman “holds” the rudder in such a way that he might go his way instead of the way of the current. So, too, the wrath of God is revealed against those who are determined to go their own way regardless of what they know is true.

II. Man's Revelation of God Romans 1:19-20

What is the “truth about God” that all men “hold down” or “suppress?” What truth is so universally obvious that everyone knows it?

It is the revelation of God in nature that everyone sees and knows. The truth or revelation of God in nature is clear enough so that no one can miss it and universal enough so that no one can claim to be ignorant of it.

Paul basically says three things about the nature of this revelation of God in nature:

1. This Revelation is clearly Seen Romans 1:19-20

Twice Paul says that God has revealed Himself to man and made it plain to every man: “What may be known of God is manifest (evident) in them; for God has shown it to them” (verse 19) ... His invisible attributes are clearly seen” (verse 20).

When Paul twice says that it is “plain to them,” he is referring to the impact on the conscience. Men know there is a God because their conscience tells them so.

2. This Revelation is Always Available Romans 1:20a

Paul takes his argument a step farther. This plainly-seen revelation of God in nature has been available “since the creation of the Lord.” Everyone knows something about God. No one could miss the truth about God because God made the truth about Himself as plain as day.

3. This Revelation is both Known and Understood Romans 1:20b

“Clearly seen” means that everyone has seen something of God's handiwork in the world.

“Understood” is ever stronger. It means that the revelation of God in nature strikes the heart of every man. Note: Paul is not saying that nature contains a revelation about God which every man may see. Rather, Paul is saying that every man actually sees the revelation and every man actually understands it to some degree.

The reality and basic character of God are known to men because they “PERCEIVE” Him through the things He has made. Something about God gets through to every person. No one can say to God, “I don't know you” or “You didn't make yourself or your truth clear.” To summarize:

1. The truth about God is clearly seen in creation.
2. The truth is available to every person.
3. The truth “gets through” to every person.

That explains why every culture on earth has some concept of a Supreme Being. Man was made to look for answers outside of himself. He is incurably religious in that sense.

- The French philosopher, Pascal, said that inside the heart of every man there is a “God shaped vacuum.”
- Augustine said, “Lord, you have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.”
- Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God has put “eternity in the hearts of men.” God put that longing inside the human heart to cause men to look at Him.

Exactly what is it about God that is so clearly revealed in nature that no one can miss it? There are two facts about God that every person knows.

- There is an All-Powerful God Who created the world.
- That All-Powerful God is the Supreme Being of the universe.

These truths are so obvious that no one can miss them. Let me illustrate. Suppose you were to visit my house while I was not there. How much could you learn about me and my family just by looking around? Well, you would see a table filled with Bibles and commentaries on the Bible.

There may be evidence of a half-written sermon. Look in my closet and you will find suits and ties. You might guess I was a Pastor. Look further and you will find cameras and walls covered with pictures of children and you might guess that someone who lived here might be into photography.

The world is God's house. He has left clues everywhere about the kind of God He is. Look at the Grand Canyon and you can tell He

is a Great God. The changing colors of the Great Smoky Mountains proclaim His creativity. The galaxies shout out, "He is there!" The wildflowers sing together, "He is there!" The rippling brooks join in, "He is there!"

No one can miss the message. God has left His fingerprints all over this world. The hymn made famous by George Beverly Shea says it well:

O Lord, My God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed!
When through the woods and forest glades I wonder,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How Great Thou Art, How Great Thou Art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How Great Thou Art, How Great Thou Art!

If everyone knows the truth about God, and if everyone suppresses the truth they know from nature, where does that leave the human race? Everyone is left without excuse. The indictment is so complete that it allows for no exceptions and no special cases. Everyone is without excuse. And that is why everyone stands under the wrath of God.

That leads to three sobering conclusions:

1. Since God has clearly revealed Himself to all men, no one is truly innocent in His eyes. All are guilty to a greater or lesser degree. Those who hear the Gospel and reject it are infinitely more guilty before God than those who never hear at all. The most fundamental principle of judgment is that God judges according to the light men receive. Those who receive only the light of creation will receive much less punishment than those who saw and rejected the bright light of the Gospel of Christ.

2. Since Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, those who do not believe in Him are lost forever.

- There is no other way to be saved – John 14:6.
- There is no other name by which we must be saved – Acts 4:12
- There is no other foundation than the one laid in Jesus – I Corinthians 3:11

3. Since the Church was commanded to preach the Gospel to every person, it is our own fault that after 2,000 years, so many people have still never heard the Good News.

III. Man's Rejection of God Romans 1:21

So how did we get to where we are now? Paul has told us that mankind has the knowledge of God made clear in the conscience and in creation and that something about God gets through to every person, so how do you explain homosexuality, abortion, the worship of sex and money and all the other wickedness we see around us today?

All men know something about God, but left to himself, every person suppresses the truth he knows. That means the problem with the human race is not lack of knowledge, but the problem is ignoring the knowledge we already have. Truth always demands a response. No one can be neutral in the spiritual arena.

Man's rejection of God is seen in two areas of life: They gave God No Glory and No Gratitude.

Man first neglected known truth and then man became indifferent to known truth and then man, having rejected the truth, desperately search for anything to replace truth. That lead to moral blindness. Their foolish hearts became darkened.

IV. Man's Reaction to God Romans 1:22-23

When man turns on the Lord and closes his eyes to the truth of God, he really thinks he is wise. But God says while they think they are so smart, they are nothing but fools.

Sinners and the world have it backwards! Look at I Corinthians 1:25-31. To the world's eyes the Christian is the biggest fool in existence! He misses out on all the pleasures of the world. He places his faith in a Man who died 2,000 years ago, but looks for Him

to return at any time.

From God's perspective, however, the wisest decision any person has ever made is to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I would rather be perceived to be a fool than to live in sin and prove that I am a fool at the end of the road.

Romans 1:23 says that when man says "No" to God, he then turns around and invents things to worship! Talk about foolish! What the Lord is telling us is that man is a religious creature. If he doesn't worship God, he will manufacture a god to worship. If that doesn't scratch his itch, he will find something else to worship.

That's what a man does when he is left to himself! However, notice the downward spiral: Man, birds, animals, and reptiles. It's just the opposite of what some people believe about evolution. Notice that when man steps away from God he doesn't evolve, he devolves. He doesn't progress upward, he regresses downward. Life without God is a life that is on a downward path. Walking away from God proves that you are a fool!

THE RESULTS OF MAN'S REBELLION

Romans 1:24-32

We are still dealing with the theme of God's divine wrath against sin. In this passage we find the results of man's rebellion against God told in clear, precise language.

Let me call your attention to three terms used in our text. They are: "God also gave them up" (Romans 1:24); "God gave them up" (Romans 1:26); "God gave them over" (Romans 1:28). These phrases tell us that there is a limit to the patience and long-suffering of God.

Here is a sobering thought: When man makes his choice to abandon God, God will also choose to abandon man!

Someone paraphrased Romans 1:28 this way: "Since man didn't think it Worthwhile to know God, He gave them over to a Worthless mind" or "Since they Rejected God, He let them become moral Rejects" or "Since they Refused to know God, He let their minds become Refuse."

Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse called this the most terrible passage in all the Bible. I believe he could be correct.

Look again at the three phrases:

- Romans 1:24 – "God gave them up"
- Romans 1:26 – "God gave them up"
- Romans 1:28 – "God gave them over"

Barclay renders it "God abandoned them." J. B. Phillips says, "They gave up on God. So, God gave them up." The Greek word is "Par edok en." It is a very strong word, meaning that act of God whereby He hands over the human race for judgment because of their sins. Paul is telling us what happens when men turn away from God. It's as if God has said, "All right. If you want to turn away from me, I'll let you go. I won't try to stop you. But you will have to face the consequences of your own actions."

This passage tells us that man chooses sin over God because sin is bound up in his own heart. Here we see the downward progress of the human race as it steadily moves away from God. Each step takes man further away from God and deeper into moral depravity. Each time the three-fold phrase – "God gave them up" – is used, it describes a further stage in man's turning away from God. Stage one is bad, Stage 2 is worse, Stage 3 is worse still. In the end society has turned all moral values upside down.

What is the judgment of God when men turn away from Him? God "gives them up" to their own devices and lets them follow their own desires. God "abandons" the human race by letting men reap what they sow. When man "abandons" God in their thinking, God "abandons" them. Why? Because God is a Perfect Gentleman. He respects the freedom of the human will. If a man or a woman decides to live without Him, He says, "Fine. You can live without me. In the end, you'll be sorry. But if that's your decision, I'll respect it."

What are the results of man's abandoning God?

I. Idolatry Romans 1:24-25

Romans 1:24 begins with the word "therefore," which points us back to verses 21-23, and the Five Fatal Steps to Idolatry.

1. Men are indifferent to the truth they know.

2. Their minds become confused.
3. Their hearts are darkened so they no longer know the difference between right and wrong.
4. They think they can live without God.
5. They turn to idolatry.

Romans 1:25 gives a good definition of idolatry: “exchanging the truth of God for a lie and worshiping created things rather than the creator.” When man abandons God, man starts on a downward path.

When Paul set out to trace this downward moral path of man, he concentrated on sexual sins. Why? Perhaps it is because the damage done in the area of sexual sin is so obvious. He could have chosen to use other types of sins, but the downward path is easier to see using sexual sins.

The word “uncleanness” (Romans 1:24) is moral and physical defilement and impurity with another person. When there is no restraint from the hand of God, then moral uncleanness takes over.

Two sexual sins come to the forefront in this first downward step: Fornication (sex between two unmarried people or premarital sex) and Adultery.

Notice the phrase, “through the lust of their own hearts” (Romans 1:24). We are warned not to yield to the lust of the “flesh,” but notice that Paul speaks of the lust of the “heart.” The lust of the heart is much deeper rooted than the lust of the flesh.

Then Paul says, “To dishonor their bodies between themselves” (Romans 1:24). The word “dishonor” means to abuse or to regard lightly. Man’s body was created to house the Holy Spirit and thereby honor God but man, because he would not honor God, changed the body into that which dishonors God and doesn’t bring glory to God.

Since man refuses to live by God’s Law, he invents his own law! The result is that man also invents his own gods. The chief god usually being “self.” Man needs a god that will condone his sinful behavior! So, he lives for himself and his invented gods.

II. Immorality Romans 1:26-27

Idolatry always leads to immorality. It shouldn’t surprise us that immorality leads on to homosexuality. Sex by itself never satisfies man. Sex is never enough to fully satisfy man’s lust, so his mind can always imagine new and different perversions and he keeps pushing the limit to see how far he can go.

But there is a law of diminishing returns. He has to do more and more to satisfy his sexual thirst. Eventually the desire crosses the line into homosexuality.

But this shouldn’t surprise us. Whenever men turn away from God, terrible things begin to happen in society. Long-held standards disappear. Things once considered out-of-bounds now become commonplace. Evil no longer seems evil. No one knows the difference between right and wrong. In such an atmosphere, homosexuality is first tolerated, then accepted, then praised, and finally enshrined as the ultimate freedom.

Notice in Romans 1:26-27: “God gave them up to vile affections (degrading and vile passions) ...to that which is unseemly (unthinkable, shameful acts).”

When thinking about this issue from a biblical perspective, three facts came into very clear focus:

1. Homosexuality is a willful choice, not a biological imperative.

Everything the Bible has to say about homosexuality begins with this FACT: Homosexuality is a Choice, a learned behavior, a chosen path, a personal lifestyle decision. Read Romans 1:26 and 27 again.

Homosexuality is a DELIBERATE “EXCHANGE” of the natural for the unnatural. It is a willful “abandonment” of what is right in favor of what is wrong.

But that’s not all. Not only is homosexuality a willful choice, it is one that completely reverses the natural order of creation. It reverses God’s plan for the human race established in the Garden of Eden. It is thoroughly “unnatural,” literally it is “against nature.”

We can take it further. Paul says the sin of homosexuality involves “shameful lust,” it leads to “indecent acts,” it is “perversion” which leads to a “due penalty” from God. Paul says homosexuality is a terrible sin, degrading, indecent, perverted, evil and wrong.

But more than anything else, homosexuality is a willful choice. No one can truthfully say, “I was born homosexual.” No one. Anyone

who argues otherwise is either ignorant of the Bible or has deliberately perverted its teaching.

You can talk all you want to about genetics, absent fathers, over-protective mothers, and even sexual abuse. Some of those things may indeed create a Predisposition to this sin but the fact remains: Every single act of homosexuality is a personal choice. And it is a moral choice for which God will hold you 100% accountable.

Some homosexuals blame genetics. They talk about the size of the hypothalamus (hy-po-thal-a-mus) in their brain. So, what is that? It is the part of the brain that forms the floor of the third ventricle and regulates many body functions, such as temperature. Those ventricles are four small continuous cavities or hollow places within the brain. Some homosexuals say that when these cavities are enlarged, it somehow causes them to be homosexual. NO! Even if there is a predisposition to homosexuality, the fact remains that every act of homosexuality – whether in word or deed or in lustful thought – every single act is a person's moral choice.

2. Widespread homosexuality is a specific sign of a godless society.

Paul was writing to the Romans. In the day of Rome's grandeur, she collapsed because of the sin of homosexuality. Thirteen of the last fourteen rulers in Rome were homosexual. Yet, Rome never reached the level of homosexuality that has come to be known in America.

As a society moves away from God, one mark of its drift into judgment is widespread homosexuality. This is exactly where America is today. On every front we are told that homosexuality is good and right and normal. Those who oppose it or who dare to speak out against it are called homophobics, bigots, or hatemongers.

All across our country gays and lesbians are coming out of the closet – not in disgrace and shame they deserve, but to the cheers of the crowd, even to the approval of many people in the mainstream. It's good, they say, to come to grips with who you really are. It's time to get rid of the restrictions of the past which treated homosexuality as a sin. It's time we all accepted gays and lesbians as decent, upright, law-abiding, God-fearing, moral people.

What's worse, the churches of America have largely caved in on this issue. Hardly a week passes that I don't hear about another church that is ordaining gays and lesbians to the ministry. And anyone who dares to challenge the status quo is ridiculed for his fundamentalism.

Across our country a group of apostates called the "More Light" movement, have reinterpreted the Bible in order to justify admitting evil as evil can possible be. It is not Christian; it is a godless position. What's sad is that so many church leaders have said, "We don't know whether homosexuality is right or wrong." Paul would call that a sign of a depraved mind.

We don't have to decide whether something is right or wrong when God has already spoken on the issue! If God says homosexuality is wrong, it doesn't matter what anyone else says; IT'S SIN!

Where are the churches and pastors who will stand up and proclaim the truth of God on this issue? Why are so many pastors ready to preach the love of God and slow to preach the judgment of God? Are they afraid of losing their jobs? Are they afraid the gays and lesbians won't like them? Don't they know the difference between right and wrong? We've been silent on this issue for too long.

Here is where churches and pastors feel the pressure. Here's a faithful member's son or daughter or grandchild who has gotten involved with homosexuality, and they want to join the church or get involved in the music program or youth program. What are you going to do: Accept them or reject them? Satan knows it takes courage to make a decision in a situation like that. No matter what decision is made, some are going to be offended. Some are going to get their feeling hurt. Some are going to get angry and cause problems. What if we don't accept the sinful person? We might lose the faithful members if we offend them. Who had we rather offend – God or the "faithful member?"

Paul says homosexuals and those who condone such sin is under the judgment of God. Did you notice in Romans 1:27 that homosexuals receive "in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet?" ("Suffering in their own bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrong doing and going astray, which was their fitting retribution," AMP).

That means that homosexuality is a self-punishing sin. It punishes those who practice it. First, there is the emotional penalty of confusion, self-hatred, and sexual uncertainty. Then there is the physical penalty of Sexually Transmitted Disease, especially AIDS. These diseases are a reminder that God will not be mocked. Those who break His Laws will eventually pay a high price.

There is no greater misnomer in the English language than to call homosexuals "Gay." There's nothing gay about them or

about the way they live. They are anything but gay and their life is a long trail of tears, heartache, anger, frustration and guilt. Each day is evil because they have chosen to do evil. Tomorrow holds no promise except the promise of more pain.

But to leave the matter there would be incomplete and misleading. The Bible does more than condemn homosexuality; it also shows the way out.

3. Homosexuality is a sin, but it is a sin that can be forgiven – I Corinthians 6:9-11

Paul specifically says that homosexuals will not go to heaven or inherit the Kingdom of God. Those who persist in choosing that lifestyle will eventually end up in Hell.

But they don't have to end up there. Paul says, "Such were some of you." He said, "You were." Not "You are." They have been "washed" in the blood of Jesus, and "justified" by God's grace, and "sanctified" by the Holy Spirit. Jesus forgave them, declared them righteous, and changed them from the inside out. That's what the Gospel can do!

III. Iniquity Romans 1:28-32

Paul is talking about a society with all the restraints removed. A "reprobate mind" means worthless thinking. It is an unfit mind, a depraved mind, one without distinctions between right and wrong.

What a frightful and terrible condition! A mind so depraved that it begins to think what is bad is actually good and what is good is actually bad. The Bible calls such folks living this lifestyle, lost or spiritually dead.

Paul gives a list of 21 sins (23 in the KJV) that shows the total depravity of man. They all basically show a disregard for others.

These kinds of folks, Paul says, deserve death. They not only continue to do these things, but also approve of those who practice them. Paul says:

- They know what they are doing is wrong.
- They do wrong anyway.
- They encourage and praise other wrongdoers.

1. Unrighteousness – Injustice. Any action not in line with the righteousness of God.
2. Wickedness – Speaks of depraved and evil purposes which hurt others.
3. Covetousness – Greed. Never satisfied with what you have.
4. Maliciousness – Delights and takes pleasure in doing others harm.
5. Envy – Jealousy over what others have.
6. Murder
7. Debate – Strife, contention, quarreling, fussing, fighting.
8. Deceit – Means to ensnare or deceive with the use of words.
9. Evil-Mindedness – A readiness and willingness to see and believe the worse in folks.
10. Whisperers – Slandorous gossip spread in secret.
11. Backbiters – Unlike whisperers, the backbiter slanders and accuses in public.
12. Haters of God – Slanders God. They hate God's holiness, justice, and sovereignty.
13. Despiteful – Take pleasure in insulting others and putting others in their place.
14. Proud – Arrogance, haughtiness, high opinion of themselves, contempt for others.
15. Boasters – Seekers of admiration, makes themselves look good before others.
16. Inventors of Evil – Thinks of new and creative ways to do evil without getting caught.
17. Disobedient to Parents – Rejection of parental control; disregards parents.
18. Without Understanding – In a moral or spiritual sense; no respect for the things of God.
19. Covenant breakers – Untrustworthy; will not keep their word.
20. Without Natural Affection – Heartless; no concern, care, or love for family.
21. Unmerciful – Ruthless, without compassion.

We have now reached the bottom. We call evil good and good evil. We have totally reversed societies values. We celebrate evil in public. We are fully aware of God's death penalty for these crimes; yet we go right ahead and do them anyway. That, my friend, is the bottom!

GOD'S IMPARTIAL JUDGMENT

Romans 2:1-16

Let's compare and contrast Romans one with Romans Chapter two:

1. In Romans 1 Paul primarily addresses the Gentile world who were outside the Law of God.

In Romans 2 Paul addresses the Jews who had received the Law of God.

2. Romans 1 declares that the Gentiles are lost and are separated from God because they are ungodly, unprofitable, guilty before God and deserve the judgment and wrath of God. Not only to they DESERVE the judgment and wrath of God, they will FACE the judgment and wrath of God.

But now in Romans 2, Paul tells the Jews something that they do not believe and is hard for them to accept. He tells the Jews that they are no better off than the Gentiles, because they are guilty before God as well and that they too deserve the judgment of God and that they too will face the wrath of God.

You can almost see the Jews as Paul tells the Gentiles that they are all sinners and in that condition they will face the wrath of God. I think the Jews were smiling, saying, "That a boy, Paul, you tell those sorry dogs (that's what Jews called Gentiles – Dogs) – they deserve to experience the wrath of God. May God fry them in His wrath. They deserve everything they get."

The Jews of Paul's day rejected the idea that they were lost and subject to God's wrath. The unbelieving Jew believed they were going to Heaven because of their RACE and it had nothing to do with faith or a saving relationship with Christ. The unbelieving Jews felt like they were safe and secure and headed for Heaven, simply because they were Jews. Paul said, "No! The Jews are just as lost and just as separated from God as the Gentiles and they, too, were headed for God's judgment and wrath just like the Gentiles."

3. In Romans 1 Paul declares the Gentiles UNRIGHTEOUS; in Romans 2 Paul declares the Jews SELF-RIGHTEOUS. The Gentiles were depraved sinners; the Jews were moral sinners. It's not easy to convince a moral man of his guilt, because moral men truly believe they are better than other people.

Paul says several things to the Jews about God's judgment toward them.

I. The Plausibility of God's Judgment

Paul gives some reasons why God must judge the Jews.

A. Because of their Blindness Romans 2:1

The Jews had knowledge of God's Law and meticulously observed the Law OUTWARDLY, and because of that, they judged others who committed sin openly. But Paul said that although the Jews may not sin outwardly like the Gentiles, they sinned inwardly in their hearts.

The Jew may not go to the same excess of wickedness as the Gentiles who committed sinful acts openly, but they were blind to the fact that if they committed the same sins as the Gentiles in their hearts, they were just as guilty of the sin in their life. Sins of the heart that never manifest themselves outwardly may not be as bad in man's sight, but in God's sight, they are just as guilty.

Jesus reminds us that looking upon a woman to lust after her in the heart is the same in His sight as adultery. Having hatred in our heart against someone is the same as murder in God's sight.

The Jews, who had the same sins in their hearts that the Gentiles committed openly, were setting themselves up as judges of the Gentiles when they sinned openly.

The Jews were INDIGNANT at the sins of the Gentiles, but were INDULGENT of the same sins in their hearts. Someone has wisely said, "Fault in others I can see, but praise the Lord, there's none in me." The truth is, we hate the sins in our lives that we see in others. We are more likely to point out our inward sins in the lives of others when they commit them openly.

Paul says that the Jews will be judged for being judgmental. God will judge the Jew in the same way he judges the Gentiles. They are just as guilty in God's sight, but worse, they are hypocrites.

B. Because of their Hard Hearts Romans 2:5

The word “hardness” is the word we get our word “sclerosis” from. It has to do with the hardening of the arteries. Hardness of the heart carries the idea of being stubborn and cold-hearted toward others. God wants our hearts to be tender, teachable, and warm.

C. Because of their Impenitent Heart Romans 2:5

The heart of the Jews is hostile and unrepentant toward God and unwilling to change. They refuse to repent and accept God's pardon of sin through Jesus Christ.

In Romans 2:8 Paul says that they are also self-seeking and do not obey the truth.

II. The Principles of God's Judgment

God's judgment will be:

A. According to Truth Romans 2:2-3

Truth here refers, not to the gospel, but to reality. God will judge each of us as we really are; not as we appear to be; nor as others think we are.

You may have gone to those houses of mirrors where they have those funny mirrors. In one you look fat; in another you look skinny; in one you look tall; in another you look short. Those mirrors are distorted and don't show us as we really are. The truth is that we spend much of our time presenting distorted views of ourselves before others. We work overtime covering up who and what we really are. We hide things from our spouses, our parents, our friends. We don't want to reveal our real self, but God will judge us according to our real self. When the day of judgment comes, God will not be fooled by our pious pretense.

We often try to get our self off the hook when we look bad before others by justifying what we have done by renaming our sins. God calls this hypocrisy. We try to make our self look better than we are.

If you do it, you're a liar; I merely “stretch the truth.”

If you do it, you're cheating; I'm “bending the rules.”

You lose your temper; I have righteous anger.

You're a jerk; I'm having a bad day.

You have a critical spirit; I bluntly tell the truth.

You curse and swear; I let off steam.

You're a hypochondriac; but I'm really sick.

We're quick to condemn others what we excuse in ourselves.

All of us are prone to hypocrisy because we all by nature let ourselves off the hook too easily.

B. According to Opportunity Romans 2:4-5

Paul is saying that the moral man (Jews) misuses the mercy of God by taking the mercy of God for granted. He thinks that because God hasn't punished him yet, he must be a good man. After all (he thinks) if I were a bad man, God wouldn't let me get away with being a bad man. He uses God's patience with him as an excuse to continue his hypocrisy. But he misses the point. God's patience doesn't mean He is pleased. To the contrary, God's patience with mankind means that He is willing to give man extra time to come to his senses.

The mercy and love of God are not meant to make us feel that we can sin and get away with it; they are meant to break our hearts that we will seek never to sin again.

The word “despise” means to treat with contempt. What about our response to the goodness of God toward us? God's goodness is intended to lead us to repentance. What a horrible thought to despise or to treat with contempt the goodness of God toward us.

God's goodness is accompanied by His forbearance and His longsuffering.

“Forbearance” has the idea of holding back some mighty force that is ready to explode. The forbearance of God holds back or delays the punishment of God for our sins. God's forbearance restrains the punishment, but it does not cancel out the punishment of God unless we repent of our sins.

“Longsuffering” means to be long tempered and is always associated with mercy and God's readiness to forgive. The longsuffering of God would rather bear the guilt Himself and let the sinner go free – to pardon rather than punish.

C. According to Deeds Romans 2:6-11

Why are deeds or works so important? Because our works reveal what is in our heart. Whatever is inside must eventually come out.

If you are Angry inside, that anger must eventually reveal itself.

If you are Bitter, that bitterness will bubble to the surface.

If you are Greedy, your greed will show itself in your actions.

Likewise, if you are merciful, mercy will come forth.

If you are kind, the world will soon see your kindness.

If you are trustworthy, it will be seen in the way you live.

That's why God judges by works. Not to establish the way of salvation, but the basis of judgment. We are saved by faith and judged by works. Is there a contradiction? Not at all. Our works ultimately reveal what is in our heart – either faith leading to life or unbelief leading to judgment.

Notice the words “every man.” Each and every person will answer for their own deeds – what he does.

The word “render” means “to pay back.” The lost man will be paid back for every evil thought and every evil deed.

D. According to Light Romans 2:12-16

Paul's final principle is brought on by his comments in 2:11: “For there is no partiality with God,” for “God does not show favoritism.” This was not good news for the Jews because they deeply believed in the favoritism of God. They wanted – and expected – special treatment from the Almighty. Many Jews believed that because God had chosen them as His people, He would give them a special deal when Judgment Day finally rolled around.

In these verses Paul explains that God judges the Jew and Gentile by two different standards. Since the Jews were given the Law, they would be judged by the Law. But the Gentiles, who didn't have the Law, would receive a different judgment.

1. Jews are judged according to the Law Romans 2:12b

When Paul says “Law”, just think of the Ten Commandments. The Jews had known for 1,500 years exactly what God wanted from them. Those divine principles were engraved on tablets of stone. But that knowledge only makes the guilt greater! Why? Because knowledge always demands a response. That's what Paul means when he says, “For it is not those who HEAR the Law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who OBEY the Law who will be declared righteous.” God doesn't want big talkers; He wants big doers! It is not the Possession of the Law, but the Practice of the Law that matters with God.

We may think we're better than others, but God judges us more strictly because we know so much more than the “sinners” of the world.

2. Everyone else is judged according to their conscience Romans 2:14-15

We need to pay careful attention to Paul's argument in these verses. Five times in two verses Paul mentions the word “Law.”

1. The Law was not given to the Gentiles Historically.
2. The Gentiles “by nature” does some things the Law requires them to do because there is something inside of the heart of man which compels him to keep the moral standards God laid down in the Ten Commandments.
3. The Gentiles obey the moral standards of the Law even though they knew nothing about the Law. They have an unwritten Moral Code in their hearts that has been revealed to every person.
4. Every man has a conscience which either condemns him or sometimes even Vindicates him, because God has written His Law on the heart of every man. This universal code consists of things like, “Do Not Steal,” “Do Not Cheat,” “Tell the Truth,” “Honor your parents,” “Keep Your Word,” “Do Not Kill.”

The day is coming when all the things God sees are finally made public, and “God will judge man’s secrets through Jesus Christ.”

1. We must all face Jesus Christ sooner or later.
2. Either we face Him as Savior now, or we must face Him as Judge later.
3. Those who choose to face Him as Judge will live to eternally regret their decision.

A. No Excuses will be Taken Romans 2:1

People habitually attempt to excuse their wrong behavior.

- “I didn’t mean to.”
- “But so-and-so did it first.”
- “You just don’t understand my circumstances.”

But in that day, there will be no excuses taken – not for the heathen, not for the Jew, not for the moral man, not for you, not for me. No one will be treated unfairly. Every man will receive exactly what he deserves. Man will be judged by the light he has received, and no one will be found innocent.

B. No Escapes will be Possible Romans 2:3

God’s judgment is inescapable. Men may escape the judgment of men when they commit a crime, but they will never escape the Judgment of God.

Some wrongs may never be discovered by men, but ALL that we do is open and naked before God – Hebrews 4:13. Some things done on earth may not have been detected, or found out, or brought to trial, but no one can fool the court of Heaven. Some on earth may be able to pay a earthly judge off, but not so the Heavenly Judge.

C. No Exceptions will be Given Romans 2:11

All will be judged on the same basis. No favoritism. There is only one way for a man not to appear before the Judgment Bar of God at the Great White Throne Judgment, and that is to settle his case out of court. If that is to be done, it must be done here, in this life, for it will be too late when one stands face to face with Jesus.

The most important teaching in these verses may be that the wrath of God is PROPORTIONATE to human sin, in the sense that those who sin much will be punished much and those who sin less will be punished less.

Some people are more guilty than others and have done more wrong to be guilty of than others and must be punished accordingly. Some have heard the Gospel repeatedly and have seen its power to change lives and if they refuse that repeated revelation, they are the guiltiest of all.

The stubborn, unrepentant person stores up wrath for the day of God’s judgment. He lays layer upon layer of God’s wrath upon himself, or treasures up God’s wrath.

What will the lost receive at God’s Judgment? Romans 2:8-9

- Indignation – God’s direct judgment
- Wrath – God’s anger against man will bring grief to his mind.
- Tribulations means to be crushed, dogged, have pressure put upon one, with no relief.
- Anguish – Inward distress, hardship, misery, affliction.

Our alternatives are very simple. Either face Jesus now or face Him later. Today He wants to be your Savior; tomorrow He will be your Judge. Today you can be Forgiven; tomorrow you will only be Condemned. Today your record can be wiped clean; tomorrow your record will be used against you.

Run to the cross. Drop everything and run to Jesus. Drop your morality, your pretense, your hypocrisy, your excuses, your fears – drop it all and run to Jesus. He is ready to receive you!

WHAT IS A JEW?
Romans 2:17-29

Someone has said, "Nothing is as easy to counterfeit as Christianity."

Most people believe that being a Christian and being religious are one and the same. But being a Christian and being religious are two different things.

- It is possible to be a Christian without being religious.
- It is possible to be religious without being a Christian.

Many people believe that being religious is a good thing. However, those same people fail to realize that religion will send you straight to Hell. Hell will be just as filled with religious folks as it will be with rank sinners.

It is not what we do externally that saves our souls, but it is what happens internally that determines where we will spend eternity.

The Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, looked around Copenhagen in the 19th century and saw a lot of "Christians," "but they were Christians In Quotation Marks!" They owned unread Bibles; they belonged to unattended churches; even more tragic, they never encountered the Living God. Their's was a powerless religion.

They had the Bible and, even, a knowledge of God, but it did them no good. How sad it is that many are a Religious person, but not a Redeemed Person!

In the first two chapters of Romans, Paul has shown the universal guilt of mankind.

- The Gentiles are guilty before God because of their sin – Romans 1:18-32.
- The moralist are guilty before God because of their sin – Romans 2:1-16.
- Now he says the Jews are guilty before God because of their sin – Romans 2:17-29.

The Jews were probably in agreement with Paul concerning his statements about the judgment of the wicked. We are the same way! When we hear about certain groups coming under judgment, we get all self-righteous and say, "Amen!" But, we should check up on ourselves and be sure we are not living in deception. Nothing would be worse than dying and going to Hell after believing that you were headed to Heaven! "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

I. The Privilege of the Jews Romans 2:18-20

Paul is dealing here with the question, "Who is a real Jew?"

Previously called Hebrews and Israelites, by the first century, "Jew" had become the most common name for the descendants of Abraham through Isaac.

The Jews were the toughest group to deal with because they were so deeply devoted to their own religious heritage. We know the Jews can trace their descendants back to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

We know that God made a covenant with the Jews in the Old Testament – a covenant of land and a covenant of people.

In 70 A.D., Titus of Rome came into Jerusalem and destroyed the city and it fell. From that time the nation of Israel vanished from the face of the earth and it did not exist for hundreds of years.

- There was no nation of Israel in 310 A. D. when Constantine ruled the world.
- There was no nation of Israel on earth in the Middle Ages.
- There was no Nation of Israel during the days of the American Civil War.
- There was no nation of Israel in the days of WWI or WWII or the days of the Great Depression.

But on May 14, 1948, the Nation was reborn and it grew and today has a government and has been granted a charter by the United Nations. It has been almost 1900 years since Israel was alive. It had been dead for almost 1900 years, but God has revisited Israel. She has a renewed covenant and God is at work again in Israel.

The Jews were a chosen people and a privileged people and the Jews were confident and took great pride in their Race, their Revelation from God, and their Responsibility.

A. Pride in Their Name Romans 2:17

"If you call yourself a Jew." That was always first. When Paul calls them "Jews," you can almost feel the pride he felt. They were God's chosen people; privileged among all the people of the world; people of the covenant with God; to them was committed the ancient Law of God. The prophets and kings belonged to them, as did Moses.

The term “Jew” is first found in 2 Kings 16:6, taken from the name of the Tribe of Judah and means, “Praise.” When Jews introduced themselves, they would add the word “Jew” after their name: “Simon Bar-Jonas, Jew.”

B. Pride in Their Book Romans 2:17-18

“You rest (“rely”) on the Law and brag about your relationship to God; you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed in the Law.”

The Law was written with the finger of God on Mount Sinai. How much better could you get? The Greeks might have Plato and Aristotle, but their writings seemed like scribble compared to God's writing! No wonder the Jews bragged about the Law. It gave the Jews a sense of superiority and security.

C. Pride in Their God Romans 2:17

“You make your boast in God.” They felt they had a “copyright” on God. They had a “patent” on God. They had exclusive rights on God.

D. Pride in Their God Romans 2:19-20

The Jews made four boastful claims about themselves:

1. Guides to the Blind

When one has been given special revelation from God, it becomes his responsibility to teach others the revelation God has taught them. The Jews saw themselves as instructors of the ignorant (Gentiles). They esteemed themselves qualified to instruct the heathen world. Yet, Jesus called the Pharisees “blind guides” (Matthew 23:24) and “blind leaders of the blind” (Matthew 15:14).

2. Lights in the Darkness

Again, a “light” refers to the “Jewish teachers” and “darkness” denotes the ignorance of the Gentile world.

But the Scribes and Pharisees were legalistic, ritualistic, and works-oriented and wanted the Gentiles to become like them.

3. Instructors of the Foolish

Again, the Jew thought himself qualified to instruct those (Gentiles) void of understanding and without knowledge.

4. Teachers of Babes

The blind do need guides and the foolish desperately need instructors and the infants need teachers. The claim was perfectly respectable. The performance was something else entirely. All three claims of the Jews were outward. None of those things touch the heart; and since they didn't touch the heart, they can all be faked. They require no inward change.

Without a heart change, the Jewish advantage turns out to be no advantage at all!

II. The Practices of the Jews Romans 2:21-24

The Jews are hypocrites because they are guilty of violating their own teachings and the very standards of the Law. There is inconsistency between the Jews' profession and their practice; their preaching and their practice.

Paul asks five questions and the implied answer for each one is “yes.” They say and do not.

1. “You teach others; are you teaching yourself?” The Jews were good at telling others what to do, but when it comes to living up to their own standards, they failed miserably. It's a matter of integrity to practice what you preach.

2. “You preach against stealing; do you yourselves steal?” Yes, the very people who preach against stealing robbed widow's houses.

3. "You say that people should not commit adultery; do you commit adultery?" Are you unfaithful?

4. "You say not to worship idols, do you practice idolatry?" Yes, they were consorting with temple prostitutes.

5. You brag about possessing the Law; do you dishonor God by breaking the Law? It's always worse, and hurts the cause of Christ more, and brings reproach on the Name of Jesus when believers act like hypocrites because then the Name of God is blasphemed.

What do the people of the world really want and need and deserve? What would make a difference to them. Listen to the words of Edgar Guest:

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one would walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
The best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done.
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do.
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

One good man teaches many, men believe what they behold;
One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.
Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear.
For right living speaks a language which to everyone is dear.
Through an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,
I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day.

People don't believe what you say, only what they see. If the two don't match up, your words will be disregarded.

You and I are the only Bible most folks ever read. The world doesn't read the Bible. The world reads the Christian.

III. The Powerlessness of the Jew Romans 2:25-29

Our primary problem in approaching this passage is that circumcision does not mean to us what it meant to the Jews. To us, circumcision is a purely optional physical act performed on young baby boys. Some are circumcised; some are not. Outside of the Jewish faith, few people are circumcised for religious reasons. Most undergo the procedure for hygienic reasons.

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But to the Jews circumcision was a holy mark on the body, a physical reminder to the Jewish male that he belonged exclusively to God. God gave circumcision to Abraham and to his descendants as a sign and seal of the sacred relationship that existed between God and the Jewish people.

Note this carefully: Circumcision, although it was a physical mark on the body, was never meant to be an end in itself. The physical mark was meant to be accompanied by a deep spiritual commitment to God. Where commitment was absent, circumcision soon degenerated into ritualism. That's roughly what had happened over the centuries.

Circumcision had become the supreme symbol of Jewish superiority! A man need only to be circumcised to insure his place in Heaven. Paul declares that circumcision is useful only if accompanied by a changed life. It is better to be uncircumcised and truly obey God than to be circumcised and break God's Law – Romans 2:25-27.

Just as the Jew thought his circumcision gave him a special status with God, today many count their church membership, their baptism, their denominational affiliation, or any number of things as proof that they are Christians. Like circumcision, these outward signs have meaning only if there is an inward reality.

What does NOT make a Jew? Romans 2:28-29. The key words in Romans 2:28 are "outward" and "in the flesh," as contrasted with "inwardly" and "of the heart."

What DOES make a Jew? Not all Jews racially are true Jews in the spiritual sense and not every Jew physically can lay claim to be spiritually what the name "Jew" was intended to imply. An uncircumcised, non-Israelite can be spiritually what the name "Jew" was

intended to imply.

Suppose I asked, "Are you born again?" What would you say? "I was baptized." But that's not what I asked you.

Suppose I asked "Are you saved?" What would you say? "I was born a Baptist and I'll die a Baptist." But that's not what I asked you.

Suppose I asked, "Are you a Christian?" What would you say? "Of course, I'm a Christian. After all, I was born in America." But that's not what I asked you.

It all boils down to this: In What or in Whom are you trusting for your eternal salvation? The issue is your relationship to Jesus Christ. There is one way to heaven: Only Jesus and Jesus only. Only Jesus can save you, so put your trust in Jesus only.

Would you describe yourself as a Religious Person, or would you describe yourself as a Redeemed Person? There is a difference and that difference will determine where you spend eternity.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR ADVANTAGES

Romans 3:1-8

In the first two chapters of Romans, Paul has made it clear that ALL are under sin – the heathen Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul knows the Jews are going to challenge his teachings because they believed that the Jews were God's chosen people and that they were right with God, simply because they were born as Jews.

Rather than accepting Paul's teaching about the Jews being sinners and needing a Savior just as the Gentiles did, Paul anticipates their objections to what he was teaching.

They were like the young lawyer I heard about who was defending a man of biting another man's ear off during a barroom brawl. A witness to the fight was on the stand and the lawyer was cross-examining him. The young attorney asked, "Did you actually see the defendant bite this man's ear off?" "No, sir," the witness replied.

That was the answer the attorney wanted and needed and he should have stopped right there, but he thought he was on a winning track and wanted to make a good impression before the judge, so he continued to cross-examine the man. The lawyer said, "Well, if you didn't see this man bite the man's ear off, how do you know he bit it off?" The witness said, "Because I saw him spit the ear out."

This is another difficult passage in the Book of Romans, so let me give you a key that will help unlock the meaning of the passage. At the very end of Romans 3:5 Paul says, "I speak as a man." Paul is using a literary device known as a "straw man." A straw man is a make-believe man and by creating this make-believe man, he is going to carry on a question and answer session with himself.

Because of what Paul said about the Jews in Romans 2, Paul is anticipating a great deal of questions and he will deal with three of those questions. Paul said two things in Romans 2 about the Jews:

1. Just because a person is a Jew doesn't mean they will escape the judgment of God. Just being a Jew doesn't make one right with God.
2. Circumcision is absolutely worthless if the man is not right with God in his heart.

With that in mind, Paul anticipates three questions from the Jews which the straw man will ask and answer.

I. There's a Question of Divine Favor Romans 3:1-2

Actually, there are two questions asked in Romans 3:1, but they are the same question just phrased in two different ways.

A. The Question of Advantage is Anticipated Romans 3:1

The first question of advantage has to do with the issue of Race – Romans 3:1.

The second question uses the word profit and makes circumcision the issue.

The question: "What profit is there in circumcision for the Jews?"

If one who is born a Jew cannot go to Heaven without Christ, then what is the advantage of being born a Jew? Romans 3:2 says that

there is great advantage. First of all, the Scriptures were committed to the Jews.

Romans 9:4-5 gives insight to the answer of that question:

1. Jews have an advantage of being born a Jew – not in the sense of providing salvation to every person born a Jew, but by being sovereignly selected as a nation to receive God's special calling, covenant and blessing and to serve as His witness nation. They have a special family relationship with Him.

2. The Jews had the advantage of experiencing God's Divine Glory.

The shekinah glory of God was manifested only to the nation of Israel. No other people experienced the glory of God and His All-consuming being and presence like Israel did.

3. The Jews had the advantage of being a part of the covenants made between God and the Jewish people.

A covenant is a legally binding promise or agreement or contract where God promised to accomplish something based on His own character and not on the response or actions of the Jewish people.

4. The Jews had the advantage of being the exclusive nation to receive the Ten Commandments, written in stone from the finger of God on Mount Sinai.

5. The Jews had the advantage of the service of God, better translated “temple service,” and refers to the entire sacrificial and ceremonial system that God revealed through Moses (Exodus 29:43-46).

God actually manifested Himself in the tabernacle and temple and the emphasis was on worship and the way in which this worship pointed to the pathway to God by atoning sacrifice for sin, which prefigured the only perfect sacrifice through Jesus Christ.

6. The Jews had the advantage of knowing that the promised Messiah would come out of Israel and bring eternal life and an eternal kingdom (Acts 2:39; Acts 13:32-34; Galatians 3:16).

7. The Jews had great advantages by having the examples of the patriarchs in their past; like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

8. The chief or foremost advantage of the Jews was that God came in the flesh as a Jew and was entrusted to them. The Jews have great privilege but also great responsibility – a responsibility to do the right thing and to share their blessing with all mankind.

B. The Question of Advantage Answered.

There is an advantage of being a Jew, BUT the Jews didn't take advantage of their advantage. Thus, if the Jew doesn't take advantage of his advantage, he is not any better off than a non-Jew.

Let me make the application to us: What advantage is there in being born in a Christian home, with godly, Bible-believing, church-going parents, if we ignore or disregard what they try to teach us?

II. There is a Question of Divine Faithfulness Romans 3:3-4

Here is the question: If the Jews are unfaithful to God; if the Jews do not fulfill the responsibility as His chosen people, will God go back on His promises to the Jews or will He still honor the covenants He made with the Jewish people?

God has declared Himself as the Faithful God who always keeps His promises and the God who does not change, but will He remain faithful to us if we are unfaithful to Him?

If we are unfaithful to God, will God be unfaithful to us?

Paul's answer is emphatic: “God forbid!” “Absolutely not!”

1. God is Faithful.

Regardless of the belief or unbelief of men, the faithfulness of God will never be nullified by anything man does or does not do.

2. God is Truthful.

Regardless of how untruthful man may be, every promise of God can be counted on. “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

3. God's pronouncements are right and just and God will always be proven to be right.

Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4. David understood that God was right to punish him for his sin. The worse sin a man can commit is rejecting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of one's life. God was right to punish David for his sins and God will be right to punish the person who rejects Jesus as Savior and He will be right in the WAY He punishes him.

III. There is a Question of Divine Fairness Romans 3:5-8

When Paul says "I speak as a man," he means that he hates to win bring this up. This is something a spiritually-minded person would never even dream up. This is a natural man's argument.

Here's their question: "Since our sin is the backdrop against which God's grace shines forth and our sin makes God's grace look good, sin must be a good thing. If we didn't sin, we would not know anything about God's grace. So, the more we sin, the better God becomes."

Paul's answer? Sin is never justified. God is always just.

Because man is carnal, this question comes up several times in Romans (see Romans 5:20 – 6:2).

Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

THE MAN IN MY MIRROR

Romans 3:9-20

Paul has spent the first two chapters and the first eight verses of chapter three examining the spiritual condition of all humanity.

Now, beginning in Romans 3:9, Paul summarizes the condition of EVERY human being apart from the grace of God and it is not a pretty picture.

According to Paul, Jews are not better than Gentiles and neither are Gentiles better than Jews. ALL are alike under sin. That means ALL are subject to God's wrath and final judgment.

Here is Paul's – and God's – conclusion: Romans 3:9-12, 23.

Most of us have an image of ourselves that is somewhat different from reality. We may feel that we are fatter or thinner than we really are. Others may believe that they are smarter, or perhaps, even dumber than they really are. This same deceptive self-image slips into our view of our spiritual selves as well.

Most, if not all of us, believe we are basically good people. We want to think that we are in good shape spiritually and that all is well within our hearts. Sadly, this is simply not the truth.

This passage reveals the truth that we are nothing more than sinners in the eyes of the Lord. In fact, evil resides in every human heart. No one is exempt. Some may receive a bigger share of evil, some less, but all are sinners.

That's why Paul begins his letter to the Romans with a long discussion of the doctrine of human sin. This is a serious charge because it portrays humanity as unable to do a single thing to please God or to understand God or to seek after God.

These verses describe what theologians call the total depravity of man. "Total depravity" is a misunderstood term. It does not mean that man is as bad as he could be; rather, it means that man is as BAD OFF as he could be.

Most people are willing to admit that they are not perfect, or that they wonder off the true path at times, but God declares that ALL men outside the grace of God are totally depraved.

All have failed to measure up to the standard of the glory of God.

Paul uses a courtroom scene to show that all men are guilty before God.

I. The Indictment Romans 3:9-10

The word “charged” (NKJV) or “proved” (KJV) is a legal term that refers to bring a charge against someone.

The key phrase is “under sin.” All are “under sin.” Again, this is a military term that means to be under the authority of someone or something else. In this case, it means that the whole human race is under the domination and control of sin and is helpless to escape from it.

The words “under sin” means to be completely dominated by sin, ruled by sin, and enslaved by sin. We not only serve sin, we have become slaves to sin. We are totally infected by the disease of sin and nothing we do on our own will cure it.

Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. No matter how much we straighten up the outside, our heart will still be wicked.

Lay a twisted oak on a giant saw and cut off the twisted outer portions of the log and square it up, and it will be straight on the outside. But run the saw down the middle of the heart of the log and you will see the twisted heartwood running through the middle of the log. So, it is with man. Straightening up the outside doesn't straighten up the inside.

II. The Evidence Romans 3:10-18

The Indictment: All guilty of total depravity. But what evidence is presented to justify the indictment? Sin has not only affected every person; it has affected every part of every person.

Have you ever said, “I'm not such a bad person. In fact, I'm a pretty good person.” Read these verses and see how you feel!

A. Sin in our Character Romans 3:10

Here is God's evaluation as He looks down from Heaven. He doesn't see a single righteous person – not even one! Man has failed to have a right standing before God. More than that, man is not capable to have a right standing before God; nor to practice what is right, nor the ability to produce righteousness. The best we can produce in the flesh is filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). The best we can do will never be good enough!

But how can this be? How can God look down at 5 billion people and not see even one righteous man? Is this not an overly-harsh judgment?

The answer is that God judges according to a different standard than the one we use. Most of us grade on the curve. We compare ourselves with some other person we know. But God doesn't judge that way. The standard He uses is His own sinless perfection.

He compares us to His own Perfect Holiness, His own Perfect Love, His own Perfect Wisdom. Compared with God's own perfection, not even one person comes close to being righteous in His eyes.

Man's problem is that he always measures himself against the wrong measuring stick!

B. Sin in our Mind Romans 3:11

Sin has dulled our minds to the truth of God. Sin has left us spiritually brain damaged! We do not understand the truth about God and we do not seek God on our own.

If any man truly seeks God it is only because the Holy Spirit is working in his heart. Without the inner wooing of the Spirit, no one would ever come to Christ.

C. Sin in our Heart Romans 3:12

The whole human race has turned away from God. There is a total absence of goodness in mankind. We are totally corrupt.

We are “worthless” as far as redemption is concerned. The picture is that of milk that has turned sour or meat that is spoiled. When something is sour or spoiled it is worthless or unprofitable, useless... Good for nothing and must be discarded as worthless.

When Paul says, “there is none who does good,” he is talking about absolute, perfect goodness. Sometimes someone says, “I'm doing the best I can.” That is simply not true. No man has ever done his best, and if he had, it wouldn't be good enough.

D. Sin in our Lips Romans 3:13-14

Paul now shows how sin has infected the various parts of the human body, starting with the organs of speech. He uses four different

words for the various organs of speech: Throats. Tongue. Lips. Mouth.

Each of these show how thoroughly sin affects the things we say. Our speech is:

- Corrupt throats an open grave.
- Deceitful tongues practice deceit.
- Unloving poison of vipers on our lips.
- Blasphemous mouths full of cursing and bitterness.

1. Man's speech is likened to the vileness of a sepulcher Romans 3:13

Listen to the language of society and you can tell how rotten and corrupt and vile men are on the inside. The vulgar, unclean, unkind, untrue speech of men betray a defiled, deceitful, destructive, dirty heart.

Jesus said, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Whatever is in the heart will eventually come out.

The Living Bible translates the first part of Romans 3:13 this way, "Their talk is foul and filthy like the stench of an open grave." That's why we talk about "dirty" jokes or "gutter language."

Is it a coincidence that so many of our "dirty" words have to do with human waste and perverted sex? Is this not a reflection of the decay inside the human heart?

2. Man's speech is likened to the Venom of a Serpent.

Think of the deadly poison that has ruined the life and reputation of godly people through gossip and rumor. The tongue is a wicked thing and has devastating power.

E. Sin in our Feet Romans 3:15-17

In America today killing the innocent is perfectly legal. We call it abortion. In fact, we are quick to shed blood if it means covering our sin. Most abortions take place to cover the sin of sex outside of marriage.

F. Sin in our Eyes Romans 3:18

"They care nothing about God or what He thinks about them" (Living Bible). "No fear of God" means they live as though God doesn't exist.

Put the six together: Sin in our character, our mind, our heart, our lips, our feet, our eyes. Sin has afflicted and affected every part of our being.

III. The Verdict Romans 3:19-20

Guilty! Man is convicted and condemned by the Law. No flesh will be justified in His sight.

The Law cannot save us. It was intended to drive us to the cross.

HOW CAN A MAN BE RIGHT WITH GOD?

Romans 3:21-31

Romans 3:21-31 begins the second section of the Book of Romans.

Section one: Romans 1:18 – 3:20 – Sin: Righteousness Required.

Section two: Romans 3:21 – 5:21 – Salvation: Righteousness Received.

Section one ends with Pronouncing Guilt for all men before God – Romans 3:19-20. And shows the Need for Salvation.

Section two begins with Pronouncing Hope for all men before God – Romans 3:21-22 – And shows the Way to salvation.

The most important question that we can ask is, "How can a man be right with God?"

- Somewhere in the world today, a man offered a child upon an altar, hoping to appease his angry god.
- Somewhere in the world today, a man cut himself with a knife, hoping by his pain to win approval of his deity.

- Somewhere in the world today, a man cut himself with a knife, hoping by his pain to win approval of his deity.
- Somewhere in the world today, a man lies on a bed of nails, proving by his mastery of pain to prove his worthiness of eternal life.
- In the Middle East millions of “believers” pray toward Mecca, following the dictates of their religion.
- In Haiti followers of Voodoo kill chickens and place their carcass before a makeshift altar, hoping to cause god to smile upon them with good fortune.

WHY?

The answer is always the same. The men and women who do these things desperately want to be right with God. They do what they do because they hope to appease their god or to please their god, or to pacify their god.

We all want to stand before God someday and have Him declare us righteous in His sight.

What is the real answer to this great question: “How can a man be right with God?” The answer is given in Romans 3:21-31 and it is the heart of the Christian message.

So far in the Book of Romans, Paul has dealt with the doctrine of human sin. Paul shows the universal sinfulness of mankind.

Paul has presented the picture of the Total Depravity of man and the human condition, not to depress us, but to paint a realistic picture of the human condition. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

So far, Paul has presented bad news. Bad news. Bad news. Now, after all that bad news, what we desperately need is some Good News! That's what we find in this passage.

God is presented with a Divine Dilemma. God is a God of love and therefore wants to forgive sinners. But He is also a God of holiness, who must not and cannot overlook sin. How could God love sinners and, yet, not overlook their sins? How could God be true to Himself by forgiving sinners but not overlooking the sin they committed? Divine justice demands the condemnation of sinful mankind; yet, divine love wants to reach out to the guilty human race and have fellowship with him. How can corrupt beings ever be made righteous in the sight of a holy God?

Our heavenly, creative God finds a way and came up with “The Miracle of Righteousness” through our Savior and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ!

No one would ever have dreamed of His answer and plan! God sent His own Son in the likeness of man to die for sinners. In that way, the just punishment for sin was fully met in the death of Christ and sinners who trust in Christ could be freely forgiven. No man would ever have dreamed of such a wonderful solution. Only God could have done something like that. Thus, Paul says, God is both just (in punishing sin) and the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus.

But note the power of Jesus' death. Even the sins of those who lived before Christ are forgiven by His death. When Jesus died, He reached all the way back to Adam and took care of those sins! Not only that, but Jesus also took care of the sins of those who would live long after Him.

Think of it! In the death of this ONE MAN, all the sins of the human race are fully paid for – past, present, and future. As a result, those who believe in Jesus find that their sins are gone forever!

I. The Reality of Divine Righteousness Romans 3:21-26

Paul discusses seven aspects of God's Divine Righteousness:

1. Righteousness is From God Romans 3:21

The difference between Heaven and Hell hangs on the meaning of those first two words: “But now.”

What is God's answer to the depravity of the human race? Does He turn His back and condemn us all to hell? No. The words “but now” guarantee that God has an answer for the worst that man can do. His grace is greater than our sin: His mercy is infinitely more than our iniquity.

Let me point out that the Greek word translated “righteous (ness)” and the Greek word translated “justify” are really the same basic word.

“Justify” actually means “to declare righteous.” So, when we speak of “Justification by faith,” it is the same as saying “righteous standing by faith.” Both words mean “to stand before God innocent of wrongdoing; to be found by the Divine Judge as not guilty.”

This righteousness is unique. God is the source of righteousness and it fulfills both the penalty and precept of God's law. Christ death as a substitute pays the penalty demanded on those who fail to keep God's Law. Because God's righteousness is eternal, the one who receives righteousness from Him enjoys it forever.

2. God's Righteousness is Apart from the Law Romans 3:21

To the Jew this was a shocking and troubling statement. In Paul's day, as in our day, many religious people sincerely believe that their religious devotion would win God's approval. They hoped that by following the Ten Commandments, by observing the rabbinical ordinances, by offering the proper sacrifices, that God would be satisfied and their sins forgiven. Paul says it doesn't work that way.

Righteousness before God is NOT BY the Law; it is APART FROM the Law. We cannot be righteous before God (or saved) by keeping the Law, because that was not the purpose of the Law.

The purpose of the Law is to REVEAL SIN (Romans 3:20), but it does not have the power to cleanse us and forgive us of sin. Galatians 3:11; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:9; Titus 3:15.

Why do we need a righteousness “from God?” Because we have no righteousness of our own. The good works that I do are but filthy rags in His sight. “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”

When Jesus died on the cross, He took our sin upon Himself. Our sin was imputed to Him. All of our sin, He took on Himself. But when we open our heart and receive Jesus Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. He took our sin. We receive His righteousness! The righteousness we need comes down from God Himself.

If keeping the Law was a requirement for being saved, not a one of us could be saved, because none of us can keep the Law.

3. God's Righteousness is Received only by Faith Romans 3:22

The key verse of Romans (Romans 1:17) says that “the just (righteous) shall live by faith;” a quotation of Habakkuk 2:4. The Old Testament foreshadowed the righteousness of God in Christ and was foretold by the prophets.

The word “freely” means “the righteousness which God provided comes by faith in Jesus Christ WITHOUT ANY COST.”

The concept of faith is very prominent in this entire passage – Romans 3:22, 25, 26, 28, 30.

Faith means trust, reliance, confidence; and always involves a personal commitment to that in which one believes. Genuine faith always involves conviction, confidence, and commitment.

4. God's Righteousness is for Sinners Only Romans 3:23

When it comes to needing salvation, there is truly “no difference” between people. Since all are sinners, all need salvation. “There is no difference” in men (all are guilty); there is no difference in the provision (all are invited).

The picture in Romans 3:23 is of repeated failure. ALL have sinned and keep coming up short of the glory of God and are in a violation of God's standard. All of man's best efforts fail to measure up to what God requires.

When Paul says that all of us as sinners fall short of the “glory of God,” he is talking about the perfection of all of God's attributes found in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is the “brightness (radiance) of God's glory.” A reflector is something that bounces light off itself. For example, the moon is a reflector of the glory of the sun. When you see the moon, you're not seeing its own light. You're seeing a reflection of the sun. Not so with Jesus, for He not only reflects the glory of the Father, but He radiates the glory of the Father. The son is not just reflecting God's glory, He is God and radiates His own essential glory.

We all fall short of God's glory in Jesus Christ. How does your life measure up when it is compared to Jesus Christ? Consider Him. He lived on earth 33 years and never committed a sin. He never had an evil thought, never said an evil word, never committed even one evil deed. He never cheated, never lied, never procrastinated, never got bitter, never lost His temper, never lusted, never sought an easy way out of a hard situation, never bent the truth to make Himself look good, never cursed, never turned His back on His friends. On top of that, He lived a life of perfect holiness, perfect purity, perfect kindness, perfect truth, and perfect goodness. He was in every way the One Perfect Person ever to live on the earth. How do you stack up against Him?

5. God's Righteousness is Based on the Grace of God Romans 3:24

Justification is by grace exclusively. What is grace? It is unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. Grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. The riches of God climax in justification. And if that isn't enough, the phrase "being justified" is in aorist tense, which means it is an action that happens continually. Justification didn't only take place the day we were saved, for even this very moment we are being justified and declared righteous.

And we are "justified freely by His grace." The word "freely" means "without a cause." Salvation comes "without a cause in us." That is, God saves us despite the fact that He can't find a reason within us to save us. There is nothing in us that causes God to want to save us. No good works, no inner beauty, no great moral attainment of any kind. When God saves us, He does it despite the fact that we don't deserve it.

A simple definition of justification is "Just as if I had never sinned," but it is more than that. Justification is an ACT and not a WORK. It is an act of God whereby He declares sinners, who have previously been declared guilty, now to be righteous in His sight.

When a sinner is justified, he is forgiven, pardoned and declared to be righteous.

6. God's Righteousness is Provided by the Death of Christ Romans 3:24-25

Now we come to the heart of the gospel. Paul explains exactly how the death of Christ saves sinners. Paul presents three facets of Christ's saving work on the cross.

A. Justify

This word comes from the courtrooms of ancient Greece. To "justify" means to "declare not guilty." More than that, it means to wipe away the record of sin and to declare a sinner righteous in God's eyes. It's what happens when God alters our "permanent record" in heaven. When a sinner trusts Christ, God declares him righteous, and that declaration never changes!

B. Redeem

This word comes from the slave market and the place where slaves were bought and sold.

Three Greek words are used for redemption:

- (1) The first word speaks of a man buying a slave and using him for a season of harvesting or cultivating and then returning him to be sold again. This is not the word used here.
- (2) The second word speaks of buying a slave as a permanent possession. This is not the word used here.
- (3) The third word is the word used here. It speaks of a man going to a slave market to purchase a slave for the purpose of setting him free, never to be sold again. We were purchased by the Lord for the purpose of being set free. "I no longer call you servants, but friends" (John 15:15).

Redemption refers to the price paid to bring liberty to the slave of sin. We owed a debt we could not pay, but He paid a debt He did not owe. Jesus Paid it All.

C. Propitiate

This word comes from the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. The word means "to turn away wrath by the offering of a gift. Through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, the place of judgment has become the place of reconciliation.

In Christ's death the demands of God for justice against a sinful race are fully met, leaving Him free to be merciful to those who at one time merited only judgment. Jesus took God's holy wrath upon Himself by shedding His blood and substituting Himself in the sinner's place. I John 2:1-2.

7. God's Method of Salvation Demonstrates God's Justice Romans 3:26

The miraculous love and creativity of God found a way to forgive us and maintain His moral integrity. He forgave us without condoning our sin by substituting Himself to take God's wrath in our place which satisfied the requirements of divine justice.

II. The Results of Divine Righteousness Romans 3:27-31

What are the implications of justification and righteousness?

A. Boasting is Excluded Romans 3:27

If men are justified by faith alone, who gets the credit for your salvation? Salvation begins and ends with God alone. He paid it all; therefore, we have nothing to boast of. Salvation comes by simple faith in Jesus – plus nothing and minus nothing.

B. Distinctions are Rejected Romans 3:28-29

Who can qualify for God's salvation? Both Jew and Gentile. Since there is only one God, there can be only one way of salvation.

God has no step-children. He doesn't have children who come into His family in different ways. Everyone comes by faith in the Lord Jesus. No one comes by works. That means everyone stands on equal basis with God when it comes to salvation.

C. The Law is Established Romans 3:31

If salvation is by faith and not by keeping the Law, does that make the Law null and void? "God forbid" is Paul's energetic reply.

Justification by faith upholds or establishes the law in at least four ways.

1. The Law Shows Us Our Sin.

Without the Law we would never know what God demands of us or how to live. We need His moral code. His Law not only shows us what God wants, but how far short we fall in meeting God's demands.

2. The Law shows us Our Need for Christ.

Every time we fail to keep the Law, we are reminded that unless a supernatural change takes place within us, we will always fall short of what God wants from us.

3. The Law was Fulfilled by Christ.

In His sinless life and in His sacrificial death Jesus fulfilled the righteous demands on our behalf. His obedience is credited to us.

4. The Law is fulfilled by the power of the Spirit in us. We have His indwelling Power.

SALVATION: RECEIVED THROUGH TRUSTING; NOT TRYING

Romans 4: 1-8

Romans 4 might well be titled "All About Abraham." He is the subject of verses Romans 4:1-25. He is not mentioned at all in Romans before this chapter, so why the sudden interest in Abraham? What does he have to do with the Book of Romans? Why bring him up at this point?

There are three answers to that question:

1. To gain credibility.

The typical Jewish attitude concerning Abraham is found in John 8:39: "They answered and said unto (Jesus), Abraham is our father." Of all the Jewish heroes that Paul could have selected from the Old Testament, Abraham was a source of pride; more so than any of the prophets or even Moses.

One of Paul's main concerns was to answer Jewish objections to the doctrine of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law. One of the best ways to do that was to bring up the example of Abraham, because every Jew would easily relate to Him. He was revered as the father of the Jewish nation and as the pattern of what a godly man should be. He was the man whom God had personally chosen to start the line of Israel. All agreed that Abraham was truly justified; the only question was how. The Jews would agree that whatever was true of him must also be true of them.

2. To prove his doctrine was not something new.

Paul was teaching that justification was by faith, but the Jews believed this was an entirely new teaching. It wasn't what their rabbis taught them and they didn't believe it's what the Old Testament taught. To them it contradicted what the Scriptures taught them; therefore, no Jew would pay attention to what Paul was teaching. So, Paul reaches way back into Jewish history to the founder of the Jewish nation. If Abraham was justified by faith apart from works, then Paul's teaching could not be said to be something new.

3. To illustrate from history.

All great teachers know that to win a hearing, you need illustrations from real flesh and blood examples. By bringing up Abraham Paul shows in detail how justification by faith works out in the life of one particular man.

The first eight verses of Romans 4 break down into three basic questions that begin with Abraham and end with us.

- How was Abraham saved? Romans 4:1-3
- What difference does it make? Romans 4:4-5
- What happens to my sin when I trust Christ as Savior? Romans 4:6-8

I. How Was Abraham Saved

Romans 4:1-3

A. Not by works Romans 4:1-2

Was it when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees that God declared him righteous? No.

Was it when Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah in order to offer him as a sacrifice that God declared him justified? No.

God declared Abraham righteous when Abraham simply believed Him (Genesis 15:6).

To the Jews who knew Scripture well, Paul said, "Think about it. Abraham was not pronounced righteous when he was doing something spiritual or sacrificial. He was pronounced righteous when he simply believed God.

Look at that phrase, "as pertaining to the flesh." Here is the question of Romans 4:1: What did Abraham accomplish "as pertaining to the flesh" or based on the flesh or by fleshly efforts? Nothing!

Abraham achieved nothing, earned no standing with God by anything done in the flesh. Anything that you do yourself that makes you think you are right with God is flesh.

Paul could have referred to several specific matters in the life of Abraham as illustrations of fleshly effort:

- Circumcision is literally an activity performed on the human flesh, but circumcision doesn't purchase right-standing with God.
- Paul might have mentioned the decision Abraham made to produce a son by Hagar, hoping to assist God in His promise of a seed. That decision was "according to the flesh" because that human energy brought Abraham nothing in God's eyes.

No human effort is good enough to save us. We believe human effort is a must because the world lives that way. The world puts us on a performance standard. We are taught from the day we were born to look to the things we do in order to find our self-respect, our self-worth, and our sense of significance.

We live in a world where works are instantly rewarded. The pressure is on for more production, more profit, more performance. Do more!

Too many of us subconsciously think like this:

- "I'm good because I closed the deal."
- "I'm significant because I got straight A's."
- "I must be doing good, I got a raise today."

There's only one problem with that kind of thinking. God isn't impressed by our outward performance. Why? Because God doesn't look on the outside; He looks on the heart. When He looks inside our hearts, He sees why we do what we do. He sees the greed, the anger, the fear, the unkindness, the power plays. He hears our secret thoughts.

Works don't work with God! We can't fool God by our performance. Works don't work because they don't last. We need a righteousness that isn't based on our works.

B. But by Faith Romans 4:3

Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. This is the first verse in the Bible that brings three topics together – faith, justification, and righteousness.

Do you remember the context? God told Abraham at the age of 85 he was about to have children. God took Abraham outside and said, "Look up, Abraham. Count the stars." As Abraham began to count, God said, "Before I'm through, I will give you more

descendants than the stars in the skies.” “And Abraham believed God; and He counted it to him for righteousness.”

Notice the word “counted” or “credited.” It is a bookkeeping term that means “to credit to one's account.” It's what happens when you deposit money in the bank.

Let me illustrate. Let's suppose that God keeps a record of the entire human race – one page for each person. On the left side of the divine ledger, He writes down the sins we commit. On the right side, He notes the good things we do. Most people hope that by the time they die, the good will outweigh the bad and God will allow them in Heaven on that basis.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. The good column will never outweigh the bad column. We are always more sinful than we are good. And just about the time we think we've been good enough to catch up with our sins, we start sinning again and fall even farther behind. The truth is, you never catch up. If God grades the human race on that basis, no one will ever make it to Heaven.

So how is Abraham saved? He believed God and his faith – his trust, his confidence in God's promise – that faith was “credited” to his account in Heaven. In one glorious moment, his “debt” column was wiped out and his “credit” column reached Heaven. In a blink of an eye, Abraham was justified.

And Abraham was justified for one reason and one reason only: Because he believed God. When he was old and childless, when he had no human reason to believe God, when everything argued against him, Abraham believed God. That faith was “credited” to his account. God declared him righteous wholly apart from his works.

So, how was Abraham saved? He was saved by faith wholly apart from works of any kind.

II. What Difference Does It Make? Romans 4:4-5

So, what if Abraham was saved by faith? What does that mean for me? Paul gives us two clear implications – each of which helps to explain the significance of Abraham's faith.

A. If Salvation is by works, then Heaven is a Reward, not a Gift Romans 4:4

Paul's argument is simple: When you go to work, your paycheck isn't a “gift.” It's a reward for hard work. How would you feel next payday if your boss handed your paycheck to you with the words, “Here is a gift for you.” You'd say, “Gift, nothing! I earned that paycheck.” Remember, it's not a gift if you have to work for it.

It's the same way with salvation. If you have to work for it, it's not a gift you've earned it. If salvation is by works, then God owes you heaven.

B. If Salvation is by Faith, then even the ungodly can be saved, because their Faith is credited as Righteousness Romans 4:5

Romans 4:5 gives us one of the clearest statements of the gospel in the New Testament. “To the man who does not work but trust God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Note the word “wicked” (ungodly,” KJV). God justifies the ungodly or the wicked. In fact, ungodly people are the only kind God saves. And God saves the ungodly while they are still ungodly.

Many people think God wants good people in heaven, so they spend their lives trying to be good enough to go there when they die. But God doesn't want good people in heaven. He wants bad people in Heaven so that, by saving bad people, He can demonstrate the greatness of His grace.

Many think God wants us to clean up our act and then He'll save us. Rather, God says, “I'll save you while you are still dirty and then I'll help you clean up your act. While you are still dirty, I'll give you the righteousness of Jesus Christ.” God saves the ungodly while they are still ungodly. That's the miracle of justification.

When we come to Christ – still dirty and unclean – not only does He save us, but He begins an inner process of cleansing that cleans us up from the inside out. He saves us first, then He cleans us up.

Let me illustrate. Hold up your right hand, letting it represent the Lord Jesus Christ. Now cover your right hand with a clean white handkerchief. Let that represent the perfect pure, and spotless righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now hold up your left hand, letting it represent you in all your sinfulness.

As long as your left hand is uncovered when God looks down from Heaven, all He sees is your sinfulness – your evil, your wicked

deeds, your greed, your anger, your bitterness, your lies,

your broken promises, and all the other ways you have failed God over the years. That's what He sees! Your sin is ever before Him because you have no "righteousness" to cover your sin. You stand naked before the Lord – naked and condemned. As long as your sin is "uncovered" before the Lord, He is forced to condemn you.

Now take your left hand and move it under the handkerchief, clasping your right hand at the same time. Where is your left hand now?

It is invisible because it is under the white handkerchief. That's what happens when you trust Jesus Christ. When you by faith are joined with Jesus Christ, His righteousness "covers" your sin. What does God see when He looks at you? He sees the righteousness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He doesn't see your sin.

That's why God is able to save the ungodly while they are still ungodly. When they are joined by faith to Jesus Christ, the righteousness of Christ covers their sin. God no longer sees their sin; He only sees the righteousness of His Son.

III. What Happens to my Sin When I Trust Christ as Savior? Romans 4:6-8

Here Paul brings in a second Old Testament heavy weight. He quotes the words of King David in Psalm 32. The reason? After Abraham, David was the most respected man in Jewish history. What's more, since Abraham lived before the Law and since David lived under the Law, if they both agree on justification by faith, then Paul's argument becomes airtight.

Psalm 32 is part of David's confession to God after his terrible sin with Bathsheba. He writes while his hands are still red with the blood of Uriah the Hittite. At first, he tried to "cover" his own sin. But that brought him only agony, pain and overwhelming guilt.

Finally, he came to his senses and confessed everything to God. The verses Paul quotes deal with the blessedness David discovered as he confessed his sin and God freely forgave him.

Paul says in Romans 4:6: "David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works." In other words, David's experience was the same as Abraham's. And both agree with Paul.

"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him" (Romans 4:7-8).

So, what happens to our sin when we trust Christ as Savior? Three things happen.

1. Our Sin is Forgiven Romans 4:7a

"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven." The word "forgiven" means to "send away" or to "remove from one location to another." When God forgives us, He removes our sins from us and takes them so far away that we will never be able to find them again.

2. Our Sin is Covered Romans 4:7b

"Whose sins are covered." The word "covered" means to "cover so completely that they can never be uncovered again." The blood of Jesus is so powerful that it completely covers all our sins. If you have trusted Christ, your sins are covered – yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forever.

3. Our Sin is not Counted Against us Romans 4:7c

"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." Once you trust Christ, your sin will never be counted against you. God will not credit your sin to your account. Why? Because your sin is now "credited" to Christ's account and His righteousness is now "credited" to your account.

Understand that sin still has its consequences. What could David do to restore to Bathsheba her chastity and to Uriah his life? What could he do to restore his own innocence? Nothing! His case was hopeless. But then God stepped in and in sovereign grace, freely canceled David's sin and counted him righteous! His sins were not only forgiven, but canceled.

Think about it. For those of us who have trusted Christ as our Savior, our sins are: Forgiven. Totally Removed. Covered. Totally covered. Not counted against us. Total Disappearance.

Once God has forgiven us of our sin through Christ, He will never, never bring them up to us anymore. Neither in this life, not in the day of judgment. Why? Because they are remembered no more.

This truth is expressed in a familiar gospel chorus:

"Gone, Gone, yes, my sins are gone.

Now my soul is happy, In my heart's a song.
Buried in the deepest sea, yes, that's good enough for me.
I will live eternally, Praise God, my sins are gone."

Can you say that? Is that your testimony? Can you sing with assurance that your sins are truly gone forever? You can if you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

ABRAHAM AND CIRCUMCISION

Romans 4:9-12

Certain subjects in the Bible makes a preacher as well as the people a little uncomfortable no matter how you deal with them. Circumcision is one of those subjects. No matter what I say after that "word," some of you will have difficulty listening to my words. I want you to know that if it is uncomfortable for you, it is uncomfortable for me as well.

But the subject is in the Bible; therefore, it must be worth talking about. Circumcision was God's idea, so we're talking about it because God talks a lot about it in the Bible. If it's important to Him, then it ought to be important to us as well.

The issue Paul deals with here is, "must a person be circumcised in order to be saved?" Although that question might not occur to us, it was a burning issue among the Jews in the first century.

I. What About Circumcision? Romans 4:9a

"Is this blessedness (of salvation) only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?"

Our problem in understanding these verses is the fact that circumcision doesn't mean to us what it meant to the Jews of the first century. To us, circumcision is simply a medical procedure for hygiene purposes where the foreskin is removed soon after birth. To the Jews, circumcision was a sacred ceremony that marked out a man as a true son of the covenant.

Barclay says, "To a Jew, a man who was not circumcised was, quite literally, not a Jew, no matter what his parentage was." He goes on to quote an ancient Jewish prayer, "Blessed is he who sanctified his beloved from the womb, and put his ordinance upon his flesh, and sealed his offspring by the sign of the holy covenant."

If a Gentile wanted to convert to Judaism, he had to do three things: (1) Be baptized. (2) Offer a sacrifice. (3) Be circumcised. The point to grasp is that to the Jews, circumcision was far more than a ceremony; it was the point of entrance into a living and true relationship with God.

Why did God initiate this particular sign for His chosen people?

A. Circumcision served as a Private Reminder to the man.

Although few other people would ever see the mark on his body, the man would see it every time he undressed. No matter where a Jew went, no matter how far he traveled from Jerusalem, he had a private and personal reminder that he was God's man first and foremost.

B. Circumcision left a Permanent Mark on the body.

A man could not be "uncircumcised" by reattaching the foreskin. Once done, the act marked the man forever. Thus, circumcision served as a permanent reminder of a man's sacred relationship to God.

C. Circumcision Powerfully marked a man.

It reminded a man of his spiritual obligations. Suppose a Jew wanted to commit adultery with a pagan woman. Even in the act, the mark would remind him whose he was and to whom he belonged.

No wonder the Jews valued circumcision so highly. It was God's way of reminding them that they were His people.

Seen in that light, the question makes perfect sense. Must a person be circumcised to be saved? THEY SAID, "Yes, of course!" But Paul is going to say, "ABSOLUTELY NOT!"

II. Circumcision IS NOT Necessary for Salvation Romans 4:9b-11

Remember, the context is all about Abraham and the great question, "How was Abraham saved?"

Paul has already established that Abraham was saved by faith. "But surely" they would argue, "since Abraham was circumcised, does that not prove that circumcision is necessary for salvation?"

Here is Paul's answer: "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteous. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised or before? It was not after, but before.

Maybe a time-line will help. When was Abraham saved? In Genesis 15:6 when Abraham was 85 years old. When was Abraham circumcised? In Genesis 17:24 when Abraham was 99 years old. Abraham was circumcised 14 years AFTER his salvation; therefore, circumcision cannot be necessary for salvation.

If circumcision did not provide salvation, what was the point of circumcision?

A. Circumcision is a Sign.

A sign is something that points the way to something else. If I see a sign that says, "Memphis 100 miles," I know that sign isn't Memphis; it only points the way to Memphis.

That doesn't mean the sign is without value. In fact, if Memphis is where I want to go, then the sign has great value because it points me in the right direction. In the same way, circumcision was a physical sign given to the Jews to point them to God. It was a divine reminder that they belonged to God, were the special recipients of His blessings, and would one day give account to Him.

B. Circumcision is a Seal.

A seal authenticates the truth or reality of something else. A passport is not valid without the Great Seal of the United States. Likewise, the seal of a notary public assures the validity of the signature on the paper.

A seal means, "This is the real thing." It is an outward indication of an inward reality. In exactly the same way, circumcision meant that a Jew was wholly dedicated to God. Although a man was circumcised as a child, the act was meant as a perpetual reminder that he must live his life in submission to God.

Notice this: Circumcision had value so long as the outward sign was accompanied by the inner surrender to the heart to God.

The sign or seal is worthless apart from what it signifies. Many Jews have been circumcised and many church members have been baptized, who never put faith in God and have never been cleansed from sin spiritually.

Perhaps an illustration will help. On the fourth finger of my left hand, I am wearing the ring Sherry gave me the afternoon we were married. I never take it off.

What does this ring mean when people see it? Even to people who don't know me, they recognize that I am a married man. They may not know Sherry, but that doesn't matter. This ring is a public sign that I belong to someone else. I'm not a free man. I'm off the market because I have given myself to someone else.

Now suppose that I take my ring off. Am I still married? Yes. Taking the ring off doesn't make me single (something both men and women should remember). I'm just as married without the ring as I am with the ring. Then why wear it? Because it is a public, visible symbol of my commitment to my wife. I wear this ring because I'm proud of my wife and I want the world to know that I belong to someone else.

Let's turn that around. Suppose a single man puts on my wedding band. Would he then be married to Sherry? No, he would simply be wearing a symbol of a commitment he has never made.

A wedding ring has no value unless there is a heart commitment behind it. When there is no commitment, the ring becomes nothing more than a circle of gold.

The same is true for circumcision. Where there is a commitment to God, it has great value. Where there is no commitment, it has no meaning, and in fact it can become misleading because it makes people think they are God's children when they really are not.

The principle and application are not hard to see. Outward ceremonies have value only when they are accompanied by inner change. I think this is the number one argument against infant baptism. Although well-intentioned, in too many cases it leads people

to think that simply because a priest has sprinkled some water on their forehead, they are already saved. Such people stand in the same position as the Jews who trust in their circumcision and not in the God who stood behind the circumcision. No religious ceremony – no matter how well-intentioned – can make the slightest difference when it comes to salvation. What God looks for is a heart that is yielded to Him.

III. The Application Romans 4:12

Since circumcision is not necessary for salvation, who, then, has the right to call Abraham “father?” Is it the right of only the Jews (which is what the Jews thought) or can Gentiles call him “father” as well?

Paul's answer: The Jew can call Abraham “father,” but only as long as they share Abraham's faith. The most important thing is faith – not circumcision.

Salvation is not a racial issue. It has nothing to do with who your parents are or where you were born or what kind of marks you have on your body. Whether for Jew or Gentile, the important thing is to have Abraham's faith.

Salvation is by faith alone apart from human ceremony of any kind.

For those trusting in water baptism for salvation, they have a false hope of heaven because they are trusting in their baptism to save them.

LOOK WHAT WE HAVE IN JESUS!

Romans 5:1-5

Understanding Romans 5 is like arriving at the top of a difficult mountain after climbing up steep inclines and rough narrow paths. It makes you appreciate the view from the top more because it was so hard to reach the top.

Romans 5 moves us into the Third Part of Romans.

- In Part one (Romans 1:18 – Romans 3:20) Paul explains The Sinner's Predicament.
- In Part two (Romans 3:21 – Romans 4:25) Paul explains The Sinner's Provision.
- In Part Three (Romans 5 - Romans 8) Paul explains The Saint's Possession.

Notice Romans 5:1 – “Therefore, having been justified by faith, WE HAVE.” Because we have been justified by faith, we as believers possess some things.

To be justified means to be acquitted from the penalty of sin. We have gained a right standing before God. Justification frees the guilty man from paying the just penalty of his sin. He is totally exonerated. All charges are dropped.

Justification means that God has done everything necessary for you to go to heaven. His Son has paid the price for your sin. Nothing you can do can add in the least to your salvation. The moment you trust Jesus Christ, all charges are dropped. It is a free offer.

The only option we have is to accept or reject it. Justification is a one-time legal declaration with continuing results. In the Greek “having been justified” is an Aorist participle, meaning that our justification is a fact that has happened in the past. It is a done deal. God declared us righteous, never to change His mind.

There are some benefits of being justified by faith:

I. Peace with God Romans 5:1

“Peace” means to be in a state of well-being and prosperity because warfare has come to an end.

Peace means the restoration of a broken relationship. It's what happens when two people who haven't been speaking to each other once again become friends.

There is only one way the sinner may have peace with God, and that is “by faith through the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Before we were justified, we were at war with God. We were enemies of God before we were saved. This truth is unpleasant, but factual. God and man were enemies.

You say, "Now, wait a minute, Preacher. I was never at war with God." Whether the lost person realizes it or not, he is at odds with God. He is fighting God. He is fighting God's love, mercy, and grace. He is fighting God's holiness, Lordship, Provision (His Son), and even God's convictions.

Beginning with Adam, man has planted his feet in a path of deliberate self-will and rebellion and God's wrath has been upon man for his sin.

When Jesus died on the cross, He was signing a peace treaty with His blood between God and man. Colossians 1:20 says that Jesus made peace for us by His blood on the cross. Those words, "made peace," literally means "to join together." When Jesus was shedding His life's blood on the cross, He took one hand of the Father with one hand and one hand of sinful man with the other hand and joined us together by His blood.

II. Access by Faith In to His Grace Romans 5:2

The word "access" means "to enter the presence of a king; the right to enter the inner chambers and speak with the king face to face." Access is a privilege gained only to the king's family and close friends. Though Jesus we may now enter the very presence of God.

This was revolutionary especially for the Jewish readers. They were accustomed to keeping a respectful distance between God and man. Believers now have a standing in grace, which means we have a right to be there. We have a right to speak to God any time we want. We don't have to worry about being turned away; nor not listen to us. He's our Father! We're His children. He loves to hear from us.

Hebrews 4:16 says we can come "boldly" before His throne of grace. The word "boldly" means "freedom of speech." God invites us to say whatever is on our heart and mind.

We have access into the fulness of God. Whose fault is it if we go away empty? John Newton said it this way:

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring.
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

III. Rejoicing in our Hope of the Glory of God Romans 5:2

The "hope of glory" is a joyful and confident expectation that one day God will fulfill all His promises to us. It is the "hope of glory." It is the Assurance that when we die, we're going to heaven. You either have that hope or you don't.

But can anyone be sure of heaven? That's the point Larry King raised with Billy Graham during an interview with him. When Mr. King asked Dr. Graham how he felt about growing old, Billy replied that he felt great about it. "Why?" "Because I'm not afraid of dying. In fact, I'm looking forward to death because I know where I'm going." This thought obviously baffled Larry King. "Really?" "Absolutely. I know I'm going to Heaven because I've put my trust in Jesus Christ."

Someone else said, "I'm as sure of Heaven as if I'd already been there 10,000 years."

IV. The Joy in Suffering Romans 5:3-4

Up to this point the results of our justification seem to be heavenward – Peace with God, Prayer to God, the Presence of God – but now, Paul says there is something more wonderful. We have something that can get us through the tough times – NOW – and in style!

Lest anyone think that the Christian life is only "pie in the sky by and by," Paul hastens to discuss the suffering of this life.

What difference does it make in my life knowing Christ when my life is falling apart? When life tumbles in, what then?

Listen to Paul's answer: "We rejoice in our suffering, knowing that" the most important words are "we know" (knowing).

The word "glory" (Romans 5: 3) means to shout or rejoice. And we are to shout or rejoice in tribulation!

Shouting and rejoicing is not the first thing I usually do when I'm in the middle of some trial. If I shout anything, it is usually, Help!

It's natural to shout in something which is positive, but it's not natural to do so in sufferings and tribulations.

Paul says we have peace with God, but that doesn't mean we have a life free from difficulty.

The word "tribulations" does not refer to what we think of those trials of our earthly existence, meaning our aches and pains, fears and disappointments.

The word means "to be under pressure." It was used of squeezing olives in a press in order to extract all the oil and squeezing grapes to extract the juice.

The next word is important: knowing. It is very important "to know" something when we face tribulation.

Most of us know what it means to be in the valleys of life. And we also know what it means to be on the mountain top of life. Do you know where we learn our greatest spiritual lessons? In the valleys.

God has never taught me anything on the mountain top. Do you know why? That's not what mountaintops are for. Mountaintops are not for learning. Mountaintops are for praising God for the things you learn in the valley! God does His teaching in the valley; in the darkness; in tribulations and trials.

It is there where God teaches us that when He is all you have, you'll find that He is all you need.

It's where we learn to love Him ...to learn of His care and protection and provision.

Let me remind you that anytime you have a mountain, there has to be at least two valleys to make a mountain. So if you're in a valley right now, stop grumbling. Stop murmuring. Stop complaining. Stop whining. Just shout to God! He's going to teach you something you don't already know. And when God teaches you that, He'll lead you up to the mountain. You can praise Him a while and when He's ready to teach you something else, He'll put you back in the valley.

There are three steps in the process of development:

A. From Tribulation to Perseverance Romans 5:3

What attitude should Christians adopt to those tribulations? Not an attitude of just enduring them, we are to rejoice in them.

The pressure – experience of oppression, trouble, distress and affliction helps produce in a Christian the quality of perseverance or patience, if we respond to it positively and not with anger or bitterness.

B. From Perseverance to Character Romans 5:4

When we learn to stay under pressure, that produces a quality of a mature character, tried character, tried integrity.

Character is the quality of a person who has been tested and has passed the test.

It is the quality of a veteran soldier as opposed to a raw recruit.

C. From Character to Hope Romans 5:4

This mature character then strengthens our hope, our confidence and assurance in God.

Notice: We started with hope (Romans 5:2). We ended with hope (Romans 5:4). But between hope and hope we went through tribulation, patience, and character. Hope and hope are the two mountains and those others are the valleys in between.

Everything that happens to me can only happen because God allows it. If what happens to me is good, it's because He's blessing me. If it's bad, it's because He's teaching me. And whatever happens, He says, "Shout through it."

V. The Assurance of God's Love Romans 5:5

Paul adds that our hope (our expectation, our aspiration to partake of the glory of God) is not going to disappoint us. We are assured that our hope is sound.

How do we know this? Because our Christian hope – our hope of glory – rests on the steadfast love of God. The reason our hope will never let us down is that God will never let us down. His love will never give us up.

How can we be sure of God's love?

“The love of God” means God's love for us. This love of God for us “is shed abroad” (has been poured out) in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us when we were saved.

God's love for us was most convincingly demonstrated when Christ died for us. The fact that Christ died in our behalf, even while we were sinners, displays the love of God for us.

God loved us in spite of our weakness (Romans 5:6), in spite of our ungodliness (Romans 5:6), and in spite of the fact we were sinners (Romans 5:8).

This is the first time in the Book of Romans that the Holy Spirit is referred to. But this is not the first time in the Book of Romans the Holy Spirit has been at work.

Paul has been talking about conviction of sin and our conversion to the Lord Jesus and about the righteousness of God imputed to our lives and about all our sins being blotted out, and the Holy Spirit is at work in all of that.

It is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin and converts us and baptizes us into the body of Christ and fills us at the very moment we are saved and convicts us when we go astray and comforts us when we are discouraged.

ALL THIS, JUST FOR US

Romans 5:6-11

In Romans 5:1-11 Paul shares with the Romans, and with us, the benefits that are ours as children of God. Paul continues to make plain the great provisions that come our way through the death of the Lord Jesus when we place our faith in Him for salvation.

These verses tell us of the wonderful things we have in Christ. Look at the last two words in verse 8: “for us.” Those two words sum up the content of this message. All of this is just for us.

I. Man's Hopeless Condition Romans 5:6-10

In these five verses Paul describes the condition of all men who are lost in sin. Man's condition can be summed up by four descriptive terms: without strength (Romans 5:6), ungodly (Romans 5:6), sinner (Romans 5:8), enemies (Romans 5:10).

This is God's estimation of the human race as each of us comes into this world. Not a very pretty list, is it? But these words describe the spiritual state of every person in the world apart from Jesus Christ. Let's look at each one:

A. Man is Weak Romans 5:6

The words “without strength” can be translated “powerless” or “helpless.” The word does not refer to the physical, but to the spiritual. It means that man is completely powerless or unable to change his basic nature.

It was Poor Richard's Almanac that gave us the phrase, “God helps those who help themselves.” Perhaps no greater heresy has been passed off as something true than that phrase. The Bible nowhere teaches any such thing. The biblical view is the opposite: “God helps those who are willing to admit they cannot help themselves.” You and I can never change our basic nature by self-effort. It simply is not possible. We are powerless to change our basic nature. If it is to be changed, God must do it.

B. Man is Wicked Romans 5:6

The word “ungodly” refers to those who are “without reverence for God or without fear of God.” Because we cannot change our basic nature, we live our lives as if God did not exist. We invent our own morality; we live to please ourselves; we go our own way; we set ourselves up as God and then worship ourselves.

Remember, to be “godless” doesn't mean wallowing in sin like a pig rolling in mud. It applies as much to the moral man as to the

mass murderer. The one is just as godless as the other. It's really not that far from the country club to the state penitentiary.

C. Man is Wayward Romans 5:8

The word "sinners" means "to miss the mark." It's the picture of the archer who takes aim, looks straight at the bull's eye, pulls the bowstring back, shoots the arrow and misses the entire target. He thought he was aiming at the right place, but something happens and the arrow never hits the target. It falls short of the target. No matter how many arrows he shoots, the result is always the same. He always falls short of the target and misses the mark.

That's what it means to be a sinner. You try and you fail. You try and you fail. You try and you fail. You do your best, but your best isn't good enough. You set high standards for your life, but somehow you always fall short.

D. Man is Warlike Romans 5:10

"When we were God's enemies" means we were hostile toward God. Like prisoners of war who face their captors for the first time, they may attempt to be brave, but their hearts are filled with fear. They can be put to death at any moment. They have no means of escape. They have good reason to be afraid.

It's the same with sinners. Beneath their brave look and big talk, they fear standing before a righteous God someday and giving account for their actions.

Sin "uglyfies" everything it touches. But God loves us in spite of our unloveliness.

II. Christ's Boundless Compassion Romans 5:6-8

How many people are you willing to die for? If the moment came and in a split second you had to make a decision, how many people would you be willing to lay down your life for with no hesitation or reservation?

A handful and no more. Your parents, your children, your husband or wife, and perhaps one or two very close friends. But that's about it.

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When we read it, we like to emphasize, "Christ died for us," but the emphasis is clearly on the first phrase – "While we were still sinners."

The wonder is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners, still ungodly, still powerless, and still enemies of God. He didn't die for His friends. He died for His enemies. He died for those who crucified Him and hated Him and rejected Him and for those who cheered as the nails were driven in His hands.

The death of Jesus is the final proof of God's love. Gaze upon the bleeding form of the Son of God and there you will see the love of God.

See from His head, His hands, His feet.
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

And I said, "Lord, how much do you love me?" "This much," He said. Then He stretched out His arms, bowed His head, and died.

III. Our Infinite Gain Romans 5:9-11

If Jesus has died for us, what difference does it make? What have we gained by His bloody sacrifice?

There are two parallel statements in verse 9 and 10 – "Much more." It's a form of argument that is called "from greater to lesser." If the greater thing is true, then the lesser thing must also be true.

These verses give us one of the greatest statements on eternal security in the New Testament. Notice what we have because of Jesus:

A. Our Position Romans 5:9a "Justified by His blood"

The word "justified" means "to be declared not guilty." When the shed blood of Jesus Christ is applied to us by faith, God sees us like He sees His Son: perfect and fully right with Himself. He now sees us "Just-As-If-We-Had-Never-Sinned." We are accepted by God and He sees us as if we had never been stained by sin.

B. Our Protection Romans 5:9b "Saved from wrath"

Why can we be so sure that we will never go to hell? Because God's wrath is His punishment for sinners who have never accepted what Jesus did on the cross for them. But that doesn't apply to us because we have placed our full trust in Jesus. That's why we can say that once you are saved, you are saved forever. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, you will never face God's wrath. It is impossible for a born-again child of God to ever go to hell. That's what it means to be justified. You are declared "not guilty" in the sight of God. God will never send His blood-bought children to hell.

C. Our Peace Romans 5:10a "Reconciled by His death"

To be reconciled means that once you were enemies, but now you are friends. Peace has broken out where once there was war. We who once were far away have been brought near to God. We are now a part of God's family. We are now declared to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus.

D. Our Preservation Romans 5:10b "Saved by His life"

This verse is not talking about His earthly life 2,000 years ago, but His resurrection life in Heaven right now. Nothing can ever come between us and God, because Jesus is there standing up on our behalf; interceding on our behalf.

Hebrews 7:25 – When we sin, Jesus speaks up for us in Heaven. He pleads His blood on our behalf. He speaks in our defense. And because His Father is the Judge, when the Son speaks to the Father, his plea is always heard. I John 2:1

Jesus is our Advocate in Heaven. Sometimes Satan accuses us before the Father. He will say to the Father, "I know what Lowell has been doing. I saw him do it. He calls himself a Christian, but he's nothing but a hypocrite." Jesus stands up and says, "Father, everything he says is true. But Lowell is one of your children. I shed my blood on his behalf. I ask you now to forgive him." And the Father forgives me every time – not because I'm such a good man, but because of the intercession of His Son.

Jesus is interceding for you and me that we will stay strong, that we will grow in grace, that we will follow God's will, that we will resist temptation. He is our prayer partner! Even when I am not on praying ground, Jesus always is!

E. Our Praise Romans 5:11a "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus"

Because we are saved and secure in our salvation, we are filled with praise to our King.

F. Our Privilege Romans 5:11b "We have now received the atonement"

We have been made "one" with God.

Our Past is forgiven by His Death.

Our Present is secure through His Intercession.

Our Future is guaranteed by His Promise.

HOW PARADISE WAS LOST

Romans 5:12-14

"No doctrine of the Bible is as easy to prove as the doctrine of original sin." This doctrine says that left to ourselves, with no outside influence, whenever we have a choice, we'll always choose to do wrong. G. K. Chesterton said it this way: "Whatever else may be said about man, this much is certainly true: He is not all he could be."

If you have any question about the sinfulness of the human race, simply go anywhere in the world, pick up any newspaper you want, in any language you please, read the front page and you will be convinced. Something has gone wrong with the human race. We are not all that we could be. Something evil lurks inside the heart of every person. No one is immune, no one is exempt, and no one is truly innocent.

One writer said it this way: "There is no name on earth who, if his secret thoughts were fully exposed, would not deserve hanging ten

times in his lifetime.” Just ten times???

I must confess that all too often, when I look in the mirror, I see a man who knows what is right, but all too often chooses to do what is wrong. Sometimes, thoughts come into my mind which, were I to follow through with them, I know they would destroy me, my ministry, and those close to me. And, yet, I still think about them and I still sometimes want to do those things.

If you are honest, you would have to say that that is you also. Sometimes you think about doing things that are wrong and if you did them, it would deeply hurt those you love and sometimes you go ahead and do them.

What is it that makes us repeatedly do that which can hurt us? It is the doctrine of original sin. We know what is right and, yet, we deliberately choose to do what is wrong. There is something in us that bends us toward evil.

What is it inside us that makes us want to do wrong? Where did it come from? Why are we all bent toward evil? Romans 5:12-14 gives us the Bible's clearest answer to those questions when we come face to face with the awesome truths of original sin and total depravity.

In order to understand these crucial verses, I want to ask and answer four questions regarding our sin problem:

I. Where Does Sin Come From? Romans 5:12

I'm not asking that question in the ultimate sense regarding the fall of Lucifer from heaven, but I want to give the question a more limited focus: “When did sin first enter this earth?”

Paul gives a simple one-word answer: Adam. Sin entered the earth through Adam. “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man.”

That truth takes us back to the place called Eden; to a Paradise inhabited by just two people – Adam and Eve. God created Adam to be the king and ruler over all creation. Adam named the animals. Adam named Eve. Adam was the head of the first human family.

God said to Adam, “This paradise has been created for you. If you see any fruit you like, eat it. Care for the animals. Play with them. Build a home and live where you like. Enjoy paradise. I made it for you.” Then God said, “But there's one thing you need to know. That tree over there – the one with the ripe red fruit – that's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't eat of its fruit. If you do, you'll die.”

You would think that Adam could be happy in paradise. But he's not. He wants the one thing he can't have. He wants the fruit from that forbidden tree.

You know the rest of the story. Placed in paradise, with everything good and only one tree forbidden, the Serpent tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. She gave some to Adam and he ate too. But note the difference. Eve was deceived; Adam deliberately sinned. Eve was tricked; Adam ate the fruit knowing it was the wrong thing to do. He was not deceived in any way. He made a deliberate choice to do wrong. It was through that deliberate choice that sin entered the world. He made his choice with his head held high, as if to say, “God, I don't need you. I know what's best for my life. I can do what I want when I want.”

If you had been there that day, all you would have seen was a man taking fruit from his wife and eating it. No lightening, no thunder, no bells, no scary music in the background. Yet, from that one act of disobedience, awesome results flowed out across history.

Theologians call it “The Fall.” It means that when Adam ate the fruit, he fell from a state of innocence into a state of guilt. He fell from grace to judgment; from life to death.

There is no other way to explain the world apart from the Fall. It is impossible to understand the world as it is today apart from Adam's deliberate sin.

How do you explain babies having babies or racial hatred or greed and violence or injustice – where did it come from? What makes us hate one another? Why can't we change human nature? The answer is simple: “By one man, sin entered the world.”

II. Why Do I Sin? Romans 5:12

Now we are no longer talking about Adam and what he did long ago. We're talking about you and me personally. Why do we sin?

Why do we repeatedly choose to do wrong?

The answer is simple. You and I sin because we have a sin nature. We were born with an inner bent toward sin.

"Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men, because all sinned." Notice the last three words: "Because all sinned." That's in the past tense –

"All sinned." Not "all sin" (though that is true) or "All are sinners" (equally true). The tense is crucial for understanding Paul's point.

This is not a commentary upon the current activities of men and women as they continue to sin. No. Paul is pointing back to some event in the past when "all sinned."

In order to make sense of this, we need to add two words to the past phrase: "Because all sinned in Adam." This verse pushes us back to the Garden of Eden, back to that fateful moment when Adam ate the forbidden fruit. In some mysterious way, you and I were there. In some strange way, when Adam sinned, we sinned with him.

This is the doctrine of original sin in its plainest form. It means that when Adam sinned, we sinned. When Adam disobeyed, we disobeyed. When Adam failed, we failed. To say it another way, although you and I were not historically there in the Garden, because we are descendants of Adam and since we are in his family tree, we suffer the consequences of what he did.

You may say, "How can that be? I wasn't there in the Garden. How could I sin in Adam or with Adam or through Adam? How could I fall when Adam fell?" Well, theologians have a term for this principle. They call Adam the "Federal Head" of the human race.

Let me explain it this way. When Adam was created, he stood as the divinely appointed representative for the whole human race. What happened to him happened to all of us because in God's eyes, he was appointed to act in the place of everyone who would later come after him.

When Adam represented us in the Garden of Eden, he did better than we would have done. He was our champion. Think of it this way. Suppose we send our country's finest power-lifting team to the World Games. If these guys of immense strength, who have dedicated their lives to lifting weights, go to the Games and get beaten badly by the Russians, which of us would say, "The Russians didn't really win. After all, they didn't beat me"? That would be absurd. If we send our champions and they are defeated, we all lose because they are our best.

So, too, Adam was the best humanity had to offer. But he got beat in the Garden of Eden. He represented us, and we would have done no better. "I don't know about that," you say.

Well, I dare you to go one week without sinning. Go seven days without thinking a bad thought, without having a rotten attitude, without saying an unkind word, without doing anything wrong. And if you can go one week without sinning, come and talk to me. I want to meet you!

But we can even go beyond that. You truly were there in the Garden because you were present in his loins. You were potentially present in Adam because he is the father of all humanity. All of us trace our lineage ultimately back to this one man. He and Eve are the founders of the human race. So, when Adam sinned, he represented us and we were truly present in him because we are directly descended from him.

Back in the Garden of Eden. When Adam fell, he tainted the human stream. The virus of sin entered the human bloodstream. And as a result, every baby born into this world is tainted with the deadly sin virus. That's what Romans 5:12 is telling us. Every person is born with a tendency to do wrong. We're born with a sin nature.

It's easy to see this in little children. If you have young children, there are many things you must teach them – how to talk, how to walk, how to tie their shoelaces, and so on. But there is one thing you never have to teach a child – how to do wrong. They are born knowing how to disobey.

The words of the Minnesota Crime Commission have the clearest statement on the doctrine of original sin I have ever read:

"Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it – his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist."

You and I are not evil because we do evil; we do evil because we are evil. Our basic nature is corrupt and depraved. That's our inheritance from Adam. We are born living on the wild side. We are born with a minus on our record.

To say it another way, there is no sin we would not commit, left to our self, if the circumstances were not right. Murder? Sure, we would. Adultery? You've dreamed about it this week. Theft? If necessary. Lying? Why not? Everything is possible for us. No sin is beyond the realm of possibility.

It started with Adam, but it didn't end there. It continues in your life and mine. Adam was the first sinner, but he wasn't the last. We follow in the footsteps of our forefather because we share his tainted blood.

III. What Happens When I Sin?

What is the ultimate result of my sin? Where does sin lead? The answer is simple: When I sin, I die. Every time I sin, I die a little bit more. We sin because we think it will bring us freedom and life, but we end up with bondage and death. "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men, because all sinned."

Notice the three things he says about sin and death in these verses:

1. Death comes through sin Romans 5:12
2. Death comes to all men Romans 5:12
3. Death reigned from Adam to Moses Romans 5:14

What does Romans 5:14 mean when it says that death reigned from Adam to Moses? It means that even before God gave the Ten Commandments sin resulted in death. Romans 5:14 says they sinned even though they never broke a specific command. Sin was in the world before the law. The presence of death before Sinai proves that fact. Death reigned in the earliest generations of world history.

Death also reigns for you and me. You and I are going to die someday. How certain is the fact of our death? So certain that there is an entire industry built about the expectation of our death. It's called the life insurance industry. The only reason you buy life insurance is because someday you are going to die. If you lived forever, you'd never need life insurance. But you buy life insurance precisely because you know the fact of your death, your just don't know the time of your death. You pay the money, but in order to get the insurance benefit, you have to die. If you live and don't die, you've spent the money and you lose. But when you die, someone else gets the money. You lose either way.

Don't miss the point: Life insurance is based on one great theological truth: Death reigns. When you and I die, the coroner will fill out a death certificate. There's a space on that certificate that says, "cause of death." If we understand the Bible, the answer is always the same: "Sin." Not sickness, not cancer, not an accident, not old age. Those are merely symptoms of the one great cause of death: Sin.

IV. What Is the Remedy for My Sin?

What is the remedy for my sin? The answer is simple. I need the gift of God. Five times in Romans 5: 15-17 Paul mentions "the gift."

1. The gift of God Romans 5:16
2. The gift of grace Romans 5:17
3. The gift of righteousness Romans 5:18
4. The gift of eternal life Romans 6:23

Romans 5:15 says that this gift "came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ." Did you get that? God's gift of eternal life comes to us through the one man, Jesus Christ.

How do you get that gift? Since it's a gift, you can only do one of two things with it. You can accept it or reject it. You don't have any other options. Have you ever accepted God's free gift of salvation?

Have you ever said in faith, "Yes, Lord Jesus, I open my heart to you and ask you to forgive me of all my sins."?

If you go to hell, don't blame Adam. It's not his fault. If you end up in hell, blame yourself. It will be your fault for not accepting God's free gift. He gave it so you would accept it.

That means your destiny is now in your own hands. What will you do with the gift of God?

HOW PARADISE WAS REGAINED

Romans 5:15-21

In our last study from Romans 5:12-14, we talked about how Paradise was lost. We learned that Adam, the father of all humanity, sinned against God, and as a result of his sin, the whole world was plunged into darkness. Adam's sin had dire consequences for the whole of humanity. In this study in Romans 5:15-21, we will see how Paradise is regained. What Adam gave away, Jesus bought back!

This passage is very difficult to understand. When it is read, it seems very confusing and fuzzy. This makes these verses extremely hard to outline. However, it may help to look at this passage as a series of contrast. Paul is trying to show his readers the difference between what they received from Adam and what they have received from Jesus Christ. THE WHOLE POINT OF THIS PASSAGE, IS TO SHOW THAT WHERE ADAM FAILED, CHRIST PREVAILED!

Let me give you an overview of our last study as Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Christ:

Adam	Christ
1. Adam is the head of the physical family.	1. Christ is the Head of the spiritual family.
2. Adam was from earth.	2. Christ came from Heaven.
3. Adam was a sinner.	3. Christ is the righteousness of God.
4. Adam gave me a sin nature – Death.	4. Christ gives me a spiritual nature – Life
5. Adam represents Ruined humanity.	5. Christ represents Redeemed humanity.
6. In Adam, all are sinners.	6. In Christ, we are saints.
7. In Adam, God places the emphasis on his obedience.	7. In Christ, God places the emphasis on His offense.

In Christ, God has dealt with man's sin and provided a way so that man may be delivered out of Adam's family and placed in the family of God.

Let's begin with one crucial observation: When God looks at the history of the human race, He sees only two men. If we know these two men and what they represent, then we will understand world history from God's point of view.

When God looks at the five billion people who live on planet earth – and the other billions who lived here in the past – He sees two people who stand out from all the rest of humanity. They are representative men. The whole history of the human race revolves around these two men – what they did and what flowed from what they did.

One man is Adam; the other is Jesus Christ. Adam did something in the Garden of Eden; Jesus did something on the cross. Because Adam sinned in the Garden, we live today in the continuing consequences of what he did.

On the other side is Jesus Christ. When He died on the cross and rose from the dead, something happened that counteracted what Adam did in the Garden. The course of the world was changed at Calvary because of the death of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago.

Two men, two deeds, two frozen moments in time, with two vast results flowing across the generations, affecting us to this very day. Paul's burden in the passage is to compare and contrast what Adam did with what Jesus Christ did.

I. Three Great Contrasts Romans 5: 15-17

Paul begins by giving us three great contrasts, one in Romans 5:15, one in Romans 5:16 and one in Romans 5:17. In Verse 15 Paul points out that what Jesus did was greater in its nature.

A. Adam's Trespass Verses Christ's Free Gift Romans 5:15

The word "trespass" means to go beyond the border. You "trespass" when you enter someone's property illegally. It's what happens when you deliberately break a rule.

That's what happened in Eden. God drew a line in the sand and said, "Don't cross it." Adam said, "Watch me." And he deliberately "crossed the line" when he ate the forbidden fruit.

By contrast, when Jesus died on the cross, He died for others. What Adam did was an act of total selfishness. He didn't care that others would be hurt by his foolish decision. When Jesus died on the cross, it was totally for others. He had no sin of His own, so He couldn't be dying for Himself. His death was self-sacrificing.

Adam was thinking only of himself; Christ was thinking of others. Thus, in the very nature of what two men did, Christ's deed was greater than Adam's deeds, even as love is greater than selfishness.

B. Adam's Sin Brought Condemnation; Christ Death Brought Justification Romans 5:16

Think of it this way. How many sins did Adam have to commit in order to bring condemnation to the world? Only one. That's all it took. One sin and the world was plunged into darkness. One man, one sin, condemnation comes to the whole world.

On the other side of the ledger, how many sins were forgiven in the death of Christ? What Adam did saw his own fault, yet it affected the whole world. What Jesus did paid the price not just for Adam's sin, but for the sins of the entire human race – from the time of Adam till the end of the world.

C. Because of Adam's Sin, Death Reigns. Those Who Receive Christ Reign in Life Romans 5:17

Don't let that complicated verse trip you up. Just focus on two words: Death and Life. Death reigns. That's our heritage from Adam. Death reigns on the earth because of Adam's sin.

What keeps the funeral homes in business? What keeps the undertakers going? Why do cemeteries stay in business? Why is it they never run out of customers? The answer is simple: Death reigns. That's our heritage from father Adam. He sinned and as a result, death now reigns on the earth.

Ah, but that's only one part of the story. There is a way out. There is a way to reverse what Adam did. There is a way to overcome the reign of death.

It comes to those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the "gift of righteousness." That's justification. Justification means that when we receive Christ by faith, we also receive the "gift of righteous." It's not earned in any way. It's a free gift.

But notice the result of receiving the gift of righteousness. Those who receive this free gift now "reign in life." On one hand, death reigns; on the other hand, those who know Jesus Christ as Savior reign as Kings right now, in this life and in the life to come.

II. Two Great Results

If you are in Adam, you have one set of results; if you are in Christ, you have something else entirely. Notice Romans 5:18.

In Adam: one man, one act of selfish disobedience, with the results being condemnation for all men. Because of Adam, we are all born "condemned;" we are all guilty before God, and it comes to "all men" without exception.

In Christ: His death and His act of righteousness results in justification that brings life for all men. When Christ died, He died for "all men" without exception and without distinction.

In some mysterious sense, His death paid the price for the sins of the entire world, even for those who do not receive Him.

In Adam, all are made sinners; in Christ, all are made righteous – Romans 5:19.

Think about it. One man commits one sin and through him enormous suffering comes to the entire world. You say, "Why didn't God give Adam another chance? Maybe Adam didn't understand what God said the first time. Isn't this a harsh punishment for one simply mistake?"

The Answer: I don't think it would have mattered how many chances God would have given Adam. He would have sinned every single time. If God had given him a hundred chances, he would have sinned a hundred times.

So, we are either "made sinners" or we are "made righteous" through Jesus Christ. We are either "in Adam" or in "Christ." The only question is, How does one move from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ?"

III. One Great Principle Romans 5:20-21

Our passage ends with one great principle which sums up everything Paul has been saying.

When God gave the Ten Commandments, He wasn't trying to tell us how to go to heaven. No one goes to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments, because no one ever truly keeps the commandments perfectly, and God won't accept anything less than perfection.

No, God gave the Ten Commandments so that we might realize the depth of our own personal sinfulness. Without the Law we might think we were good folks, but with the Law, if we truly and honestly examine our life, the only result will be to cry out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

"Where sin abounded (increased), grace abounded (increased) much more." This translation is a bit misleading because it uses the word "abound" or "increased" in both sides of the statement. But in the Greek the words are different. When he says, "Where sin abounded," he uses a word that speaks of addition. But when he says, "Grace abounded," he uses a word that means multiplication. On the one hand, sin increased one by one. On the other hand, God's grace in Christ Jesus was multiplied over and over and over again.

Where sins were added one by one, God's grace was multiplied a thousand times. What does it mean? Here is the Good News: You can't out-sin the grace of God (some of you have been trying and some of you have been doing a good job, but no, God's grace is greater than your sin).

Here is the principle: In Jesus Christ we have gained much more than we ever lost in Adam.

Let me show it to you this way:

In Adam	In Christ
1. Adam's sin brought condemnation	1. Christ death brought Justification Romans 5:16
2. Because of Adam's sin, death reigns	2. Those who receive Christ reign in life Rom. 5:17
3. In Adam, we're made sinners	3. In Christ, we're made righteous Rom. 5:19

Julia Johnston wrote a hymn that perfectly captures the sense of this passage:

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary's mount out poured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was split (shed).
Grace, grace, God's grace.
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace
Grace that is greater than all our sin.

Are you in Adam or in Christ?

You can't help being in Adam by virtue of your physical birth. But you don't have to stay there. God has made a way for you to pass from Adam to Christ. Your first birth put you in Adam; your second birth puts you in Christ. That's why Jesus said, "You must be born again."

FREE AT LAST

Romans 6:1-7

We begin the third major division of the Book of Romans.

1. Romans 1-3:20 deals with the Doctrine of Sin. In those three and a half chapters Paul says that sin is an offense to God, and sin separates people from God and makes them an object of God's wrath. Our sin condemns us before God and makes us guilty before God.

2. Romans 3:21-5:21 deals with the Doctrine of Salvation. Sinful man can be saved from the wrath of God and be justified by faith in Christ.

- Romans 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified (saved) by faith without the deeds of the Law."
- Romans 4:16: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace."
- Romans 5:1: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God."
- Romans 5:20: "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more."

3. Now we come to the third major division of Romans (6-8) which deals with the Doctrine of Sanctification.

There are many reasons people give for not becoming a Christian. One of the most often reasons or excuses is that they don't believe they can live the Christian life. They don't believe that Jesus can really change their life.

Is real change possible? The invitation of the gospel is always the same: "Come and see." Come and see for yourself. Make up your own mind. Decide for yourself whether Jesus Christ can make a difference.

Is real change possible? Can a person whose life has been going in one direction suddenly go into another direction? Can a person who has lived in the grip of debilitating sin for decades find liberation?

There is a sharp right turn between Romans 5 and Romans 6. There is a change in chapters, in subject matter, and in theme.

Romans 5 speaks of Justification; Romans 6 talks about Sanctification.

Romans 5 explains how God DECLARES people righteous; Romans 6 explains how God MAKES people righteous.

Justification happens at the moment you trust Christ and is never repeated. Sanctification happens moment-by-moment as you surrender your life to the Lord.

Justification delivers from the Penalty of sin.

Sanctification delivers from the Power of sin.

Justification is an Event. Sanctification is a Process.

Justification happens once and only once.

Sanctification is gradual and continuous.

Justification cannot be repeated.

Sanctification must be repeated.

Justification is the work of a moment.

Sanctification is the work of a lifetime.

Justification gives you the merit of Christ.

Sanctification gives you the character of Christ.

These two doctrines are distinct; yet, inseparably related. Justification leads to sanctification. Those who are truly born again are led of the Spirit into a life of growing holiness.

Simply put, sanctification is the grace of God at work in my life every day, changing my life to become more and more like Jesus.

Paul does in this chapter what he often does: Paul anticipates arguments from his readers and answers their objections up front. The argument is based on Romans 5:20. In that passage, we are told that in the presence of much sin, there is much more grace. Paul gives the analogy of the sinner being crushed under a great pile of sin, but in Jesus, that same sinner is made to stand on a high mountain of grace.

The argument in verse one says, "Well, if grace comes as a result of sin, then shouldn't we just sin more so we can enjoy more grace? After all, grace is greater than all our sin!"

Paul's answer: God forbid. Never let it be so. Absolutely not. Unthinkable.

Some people say, "If you preach grace, people will live loosely unless you lay down the law, and tell them what to do and how to think."

Shouldn't we sin more so we can see more of God's grace? That seems like an odd question, doesn't it? In order to understand it properly, we need to learn a new word – Antinomianism. (Anti- "meaning against, and "nomos" meaning the law.) An antinomian is a person who is against the law.

Antinomianism describes a point of view that we might call “spiritual lawlessness.” It describes a person who wants to live life freed of any rules whatsoever.

He follows the credo, “only believe and do as you please.” This is a person who says, “I know I’m saved and going to heaven when I die, therefore it doesn’t matter how I live in the meantime.” He claims to love God while at the same time living in sin. He claims to follow Jesus but doesn’t want to live by His teaching.

An antinomian says, “If I sin, it’s covered by the grace of God. Therefore, my sin doesn’t really matter very much, because I know God will forgive me no matter what I do.” Where does such thinking lead? To such statements as:

“I might as well commit adultery because God will forgive me.”

“I can blow my top because God will forgive me anyway.”

“It doesn’t matter whether I tell the truth or not. I can always ask forgiveness.”

We all think like that some of the time, but whenever we think like that, we are not thinking like biblical Christians. We are abusing the grace of God.

That way of thinking is probably the one great objection to the doctrine of eternal security. “If you believe that, why not go out and live in sin? After all, you know you’re going to heaven.” Unfortunately, some believers have done exactly that. They have engaged in grossly sinful behavior and dismissed it because they believe their salvation is still secure. That kind of thinking doesn’t disprove the doctrine of eternal security, but it does teach us something about the deceitfulness of the human heart.

II. The Answer Romans 6:2-3

“God forbid that we should ever begin to think like that.”

Paul introduces us to a new term: “Dead to sin.” That’s the key to this whole chapter. Paul’s entire doctrine of the Christian life hangs on the truth that we died to sin.

Note the tense: we died to sin – past tense. It is something that has already happened; not something that needs to happen. This is not a present tense – “we are dying to sin” – or future tense – “we will die to sin” – or an imperative – “die to sin.” What is a Christian? Someone who has died to sin.

When death touches these physical bodies, certain changes take place immediately. As soon as a person dies, they lose all desires for the things they use to enjoy. If a man was an alcoholic, as soon as he dies, he is no longer plagued by the urge to drink. If someone is a drug addict, at the moment of death, they are free from their desire for drugs.

What does it mean to be dead to sin? It means that you have been set free from the ruling power of sin in your life. Sin is a vicious slave master. Before you came to Christ, you were a slave to sin. Romans 6:2 is telling us that when you came to Christ, you were set free from sin’s power (you “died” to sin’s ruling power over you) and were placed under the rule of Jesus Christ.

Picture an ancient slave market. If you are a slave, you must obey your master’s every word. He speaks, you obey. You are “alive” to his voice because he is your master. But suppose you are sold at an auction to a new master. From the moment of the sale, your old master no longer has any legal right to command you. He can speak, but you no longer have to obey. He can command, but you don’t have to respond. You have “died” to his authority and “come alive” to a new master.

Can you still obey your old master? Yes, but you don’t have to because he has no more power over you unless you choose to give him power. It doesn’t make sense to obey your old master when you have a new master.

That’s the whole argument of Romans 6 in a nutshell. You “died” to your old slave master (sin), and have “come alive” to a new Master (Jesus Christ). So why serve sin voluntarily when you don’t have to. Why not serve Jesus Christ?

When we place our faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation, we died to sin. Now, I know that the old nature still yearns for sinful expression. It still wants everything it ever did. The old nature will not change until it dies at the end of these physical lives. But, when we were saved, we are made a new creature in Christ Jesus! There is a new man living in these physical bodies and he is dead to sin! Some have a hard time grasping that because it seems to you that you still want to sin. The secret to accepting the reality of our passing away to sin is found in Romans 6:11. Paul tells us we must “Reckon” ourselves dead to sin. This is an

accounting term that means “to calculate.” Paul is telling us to add up the evidence and then declare ourselves dead to sin!

Why does Paul go into this in such detail? Because our tendency is to try to live in two worlds at once. We like to straddle the fence between the old life and the new life. Paul says you can't do that. It won't work. No man can live forever straddling the fence. Eventually you have to go one way or the other. To try to do so is an abuse of the grace of God.

You can sin, but you won't be happy.

III. The Analogy 6:3-7

By some extraordinary miracle of God, when we were saved, we were placed into His death. When Jesus died on the cross, all of those who have their faith in Him died also. We were taken back some 2,000 years and placed in Christ on the cross.

Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ.” When He died, we died.

An army chaplain reported his amazement at the large number of Desert Storm soldiers who gave their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, then asked if they could be baptized. To accommodate their request, a wise pastor used the only “baptismal” available in the middle of the Saudi Arabian Desert: a coffin – a potent and perfect symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of which baptism is a picture. We identify with Jesus.

Does one have to be baptized to be saved? Ask the thief on the cross, to whom Jesus said, “Today you will be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The role of baptism simply serves as an outward symbol of an inward commitment. On the day Sherry and I were married, I gave her a ring. That ring didn't make us married. But if she had refused it, saying, “No thanks. I'm not into outward symbols of inward commitments,” although we would still be married, I would wonder why she didn't want to publicly identify with me.

Paul is saying, “By faith you are spiritually joined to Christ in such a way that although 2,000 years separate you from Calvary, what happened to Him really happened to you.”

And because He was raised to new life, you were raised to new life (verse 4). Has it begun to be clear to you that we are participators in everything Jesus did? When He died on the cross, He was dying for sin. However, when He died on the cross, we died in Him. When He rose from the dead, we were in Him then and we rose also. Just as we were in Adam when he sinned in the Garden of Eden, so too, we were in Jesus when He died and rose from the dead. What Paul is trying to tell us is that our life is intimately tied to the life of the Lord Jesus! Just as we participated in His death, so too, we participated in His life.

Since this is true, the believer should therefore walk in a manner that is consistent with his new life. Since we have died to sin and since we have been raised up to new life in Jesus, there are some truths that you and I need to know. We have received a command from the Lord, in this verse, to walk in newness of life.

If this is true, and it is, then why is it so many still struggle with lives that are tainted with sin? The reason is that when you got saved, your body became the house for two natures. Your old nature is still in there trying to be the king. Now, there is a new nature there and it is trying to be the king. As long as you are alive in this world, there will be a warfare going on in your person (Galatians 5:16). While there will be many battles, we can win them if we will remember the secret that is revealed to us in verse 11.

IV. The Application Romans 6:5-7

A. United with Christ Romans 6:5

The word “united” means “joined at birth.” We are inseparably joined with Jesus or “fused into one.”

B. The Old Man is Crucified Romans 6:6

The phrase “body of sin” refers to your literal body as a helpless tool of sin. Sin worked through your tongue to say ugly words. Sin worked through your hands to commit foul deeds. Sin worked through your eyes to behold impure acts. Sin worked through your ears to listen to slander and gossip. Sin worked through your feet to carry you places you shouldn't go. Without Christ, your body was truly a helpless tool of sin.

But now the power of sin has been broken. The word “destroyed” means “rendered powerless, rendered inactive, or paralyzed.” It doesn't mean “annihilated.”

C. Able Not to Sin Romans 6:6

Can we not sin? Yes. Is it necessary? No. What makes a Christian sin? He chooses to yield to sin. We are able not to sin, but the choice is ours. We still have responsible choices to make.

D. Freed From Sin Romans 6:7

This is the final and ultimate blessing of our union with Christ. We have been set free from sin. Why, then, would we ever go back to sin? Because sin is fun for a while, but only for a short while.

“He breaks the power of canceled sin, He set the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me.”

HOW TO WALK IN VICTORY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE Romans 6:8-14

Certain subjects are of growing interest to the thoughtful Christians and whenever a pastor deals with one of these subjects, he knows that most of the people will be right with him from the very beginning. It may be Bible prophecy or the Holy Spirit or something about the family or marriage, OR it may be something about spiritual victory, which is the subject in this message.

If you doubt whether this is a popular subject, visit any Christian bookstore and see how many books and tapes there are for sale on the subject of spiritual victory. There is a great hunger and a great desire among the people of God to find a way to live in victory. So many Christians go through life struggling from day to day and live spiritually-defeated lives.

The problem with so many of the books on the subject of living victorious spiritual lives is that so many go to extremes.

- For instance, there is the teaching that says if you want victory, all you have to do is to understand that God has done it all. Their slogan: “Let go and let God.” Although that teaching has a Biblical core to it, if taken to an extreme, it will turn you into a passive Christian.

- Others teach, “You have to do it all.” Spiritual victory depends 100% on you. Although that teaching also contains a core of truth, it may turn you into a legalist and rule keeper and ultimately into an arrogant, proud person with perfectionist tendencies.

- Others say that if you want spiritual victory, you need a crisis experience that brings you to a moment of decisive surrender to God.

Let me repeat: All three views have some biblical basis, but we need to find a solid biblical balance. Romans 6:1-14 is the key passage telling us how to live in victory. There are basically three steps to spiritual victory.

Key verses from Romans 6:1-14:

- Romans 6: 2 “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”
- Romans 6:14 “For sin shall not have dominion over you.”

Romans 6:3: “Know ye not,” Rom. 6:6: “knowing this,” Rom. 6:9: “knowing that.” Spiritual victory begins with someone knowing something. Three steps: we have to Know something, we have to Reckon something, we have to Yield something. Taken together, these are God's prescriptions for the believer to walk in victory.

I. Knowing: Information Concerning Christ Romans 6:2-6

It is important for us to know that if we are IN Christ, then everything that happened to Christ also happened to us, because He choose to be one with us. How can this be? It beats me. Yet, although I don't understand it mentally, I accept it by faith because that's what God's Word says.

A. We were crucified with Christ Romans 6:2-3, 7

How many people were crucified at Calvary on the day Jesus died? If you said three, from a historical point of view, you'd be correct. From a theological point of view, you'd be wrong. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you were there that day. You were crucified with Christ, you were buried with Him, you were raised from the dead with Him. The cross of Jesus Christ is an event that transcends

time.

When Jesus died on the cross, He died for me as my substitute. His death had my name on it.

When R. G. Lee went to the Holy Land for the first time and visited the place called Calvary, the guide asked, "How many of you have been here before?" Dr. Lee raised his hand and the guide asked him when he was there. Dr. Lee was an old man, and he answered, "I was here two thousand years ago." The guide said, "Sir, you couldn't possibly be that old." Dr. Lee said, "Yes, two thousand years ago when Jesus died for me, I died with Him."

Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ ..."

Here's the key to understanding your death with Christ: "For he that is dead is free from sin" (Romans 6:7). What happens when a man dies while in jail awaiting his trial? All charges against him are dropped! You can't try, convict, and sentence a dead man. Since we have died with Christ, charges are no longer valid against the old man that we were.

Baptism is symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament the word baptism, though it literally means to immerse, has a symbolic meaning: Identification. When we are baptized, we are publicly identified with Jesus Christ. Baptism symbolizes what happens to us the moment we say "Yes" to Jesus.

Paul says, "We died to sin." That's a fact, but it's not something we physically experience. You may say, "I don't feel like I was crucified with Christ." Feelings have nothing to do with it. "I don't feel like I was raised with Christ." Your feelings have nothing to do with the truth. From God's point of view, He sees you as dead, buried, and raised with the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore, united with Him so tightly that you could never be separated. That's the basic truth of this passage.

1. Christ died to the Penalty of sin.

By taking on the sin of the world, Christ satisfied sin's legal demands for those who would believe in Him. "Christ died to sin once for all" (Rom. 6:10). That means the penalty He paid for sin was done fully and finally.

Christ achieved a victory that will never have to be won again. Hebrews 7:26-27.

2. Christ died to the Power of sin Hebrews 2:14

If we have died to sin as Christ died to sin, then what does that mean? It doesn't mean that we have died to the Reality of sin, nor to the Reach of sin, but it does mean that we died to the Reign and damnation of sin.

Dead to sin does not mean that we do not sin or that we are freed from temptation to sin. Although we are dead to sin, sin is not dead to us. But it does mean that sin no longer has the power to dominate our life. We are separated forever from the dominating, ruling power of sin.

It's like watching a lion roar at the zoo. You may get a thrill from listening to the lion roar in his cage, but as long as the lion is behind bars, you are safe. The lion can roar all it wants to, but it can do nothing to you unless you do something stupid like crawl into the cage. Then you have a problem. Sin is like a roaring lion. As long as you understand that the power of sin is broken, sin cannot dominate your life unless you choose to let it dominate your life.

B. We were Buried with Christ Romans 6:3-4; I Corinthians 15:3-4

C. We were Raised with Christ Romans 6:4-5, 8-10

Jesus carried my sins to the grave and left them there. Then He rose! And because I'm identified with Christ, I rose to new life as well! Jesus lives in me!

Christians aren't just nice people, they're new creatures – 2 Corinthians 5:17. Salvation is not reformation or renovation. It is not just an improvement over what we used to have. It's the impartation of the divine life of God – which means we have something now that we never had before.

What is it? We have the resurrection life in Christ. "If we have been planted (united) together in the likeness of His death, we will also be united with Him in His resurrection" (Romans 6:5). We now have the resurrection life of Jesus within us.

This is something God wants us to KNOW!

“Reckon or consider or count” is a bookkeeping term that literally means that you can count on it. By an act of faith, act on what you know to be true.

It means to add up all the facts and come to a proper conclusion. What are the facts? We who are saved are dead to sin and alive to God. The old man is dead! The new man is alive! Alive to the things of God: His Word, His work, His worship, His will, His ways.

We are to Reckon and we are to Relinquish. We are to be actively involved in determining what these bodies will and will not do. Instead of allowing the flesh to have its way, we are to yield control of our lives to the Lord Jesus. Allow Him to reign in these bodies so that we might be instruments of glory in His hands. It's the idea of Romans 12:1-2.

We are to present these bodies to the Lord as His instruments for His use.

We are to Reckon; then we are to Relinquish; then we are to Release – Romans 6:14.

We have been released from the dominion of sin. We are not sin's slaves any longer. We are free by the power of God's powerful grace! Free to live for God! Free to say NO to sin!

In 1982 an unusual thing happened on the island of Guam. A Japanese soldier came out of the jungle. He had been living in the jungle for 37 years, since the end of World War II. Why? Because when the news came at the end of the war, he couldn't believe that Japan had surrendered and the war was over. So for 37 years, he lived in the jungle.

Let me ask you a question. During those 37 years, was he free? At any time from 1945 until 1982, he was completely free to come out of the jungle. It's not like General MacArthur was coming in to get him. He was free. He was completely free on a theoretical basis, but because he didn't believe it – because he didn't reckon the fact of his freedom to be true – he lived in self-imposed bondage in the jungle for 37 years. Was he free? Yes. Was he free? No, because he chose to stay in bondage, in hiding, in fear in the jungle.

Many Christians are still living in the jungle of sin. The war is over, Christ has won, but they refuse to believe it. They live in self-imposed bondage to sin. They are still in the jungle spiritually because they refuse to believe that Christ has set them free.

III. Yielding: Our Emancipation Through Christ Romans 6:12-14

The word “Yield” means “to stand as a servant, near one's master, presenting one's self, awaiting orders.”

Yield! Paul says it negatively and positively: “Don't yield” and “Yield.” Don't yield what? The parts of your body. What are the parts of your body? Your hands, fingers, eyes, ears, lips, legs, feet, toes, and all the rest.

He's very specific about it. “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness (wickedness). The word “instruments” really means “weapons.” Don't offer your body parts as weapons of wickedness, but rather yield yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life.

And when you yield, be decisive and be definite. Spiritual victory will never be real for you until you make it particular and definite regarding the parts of your body.

How about your lips? Your eyes? Your ears? If you want victory, you can have it, but you must yield all the parts of your body to Him!

NOW THAT I'M SAVED, DOES IT MATTER HOW I LIVE?

Romans 6:15-23

The word “servant” or “servants” is found eight times in these eight verses. Really the word should be “slave” rather than “servant.”

Slavery is a concept that is very much out of place in our modern world. The idea that one human can have the power to force another human to serve him is offensive to our modern minds. The majority of us would recoil at the very thought of owning a slave, or especially, at the thought of being a slave.

But did you know that slavery is alive and well today? In fact, there are slaves here in Tupelo, MS! I'll go a step further, there are slaves in this very room! Surprised? Well, it may surprise you to learn that we are all slaves! The only difference lies in reference to which master we serve.

In these verses, Paul is continuing to discuss the difference between being dead to sin and being alive in Christ. Paul says that we will continue to be slaves for all of our lives, but that we have a choice of which master we serve.

I want you to be able to see clearly which master you are serving, and I want you to have the opportunity to change masters if you are serving the wrong one.

You and I are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness.

John 8:34: "Jesus answered them, most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."

You say, "Well, Jesus is not Lord in my life, but sin certainly is not my master."

What's the difference between the life of sin and the life of salvation?

The life of sin pays off in three ways:

1. It is a Wicked Life Romans 6:20

The lost sinner has no association with righteousness. Everything a lost person does is tainted by sin. The flesh has no power to produce anything other than evil and the sinner cannot even see it.

2. It is a Wasted Life Romans 6:21a

It can produce nothing that will endure but a legacy of sin and of evil.

3. It is a Wretched Life Romans 6:21b

The life of sin pays off in death. The wicked person receives "wages" and the wages are the fair compensation for a life lived in evil.

The Life of Salvation

1. It is a Life with Purpose Romans 6:20

This is a life lived by the power of God and produces fruit and holiness in this life and everlasting life in the life to come.

2. It is a Life with Promise Romans 6:22b, 23b

While the sinful life pays wages of death, God's gift to those who trust Him is everlasting life. Wages are something we work for; a gift is something we simply receive and then it belongs to us.

But does it make any difference how a Christian lives?

Here is a man who has been a Christian for three or four or five years. Although he comes to church, he's not very faithful and he doesn't seem very interested in growing in his walk with the Lord. In fact, he's involved in some activities that really drag him down as a Christian. When you mention that fact to him, he says, "Hey, I know I'm going to heaven. Why not live it up until I get there?" What do you say to him?

Here's a lady whose been married about fifteen years and has been a Christian just about that long. She's your best friend. You just discovered that she's getting involved in a romantic relationship with another man. When you confront her, she responds, "I know it's wrong. You don't have to tell me that. I know it's a sin. But I know God understands and I know He'll forgive me." What do you say to her?

Here's another man whose been a Christian a long time in the church a long time and by his own admission, he's never grown as a Christian at all. He says to you, "Look I'm going to heaven and that's the only thing that matters to me. I don't mind taking a back seat up there and let the rest of you sit toward the front of the class, just so long as I make it in. That's all I care about. The rest of it doesn't matter." What do you say to him?

Those are common voices, common words, common thoughts. We hear them a lot. If we're honest, some of us have said the same things to ourselves if not out loud.

What does God have to say about such thinking? Now that I'm saved, does it make any difference how I live? Yes or No? What does God have to say about this?

The answer, of course, is yes. God has a great deal to say about how I live as a Christian.

Romans 6 has 23 verses and divides easily into two parts. This chapter contains two questions and two answers.

In Romans 6:1-14, there is a question: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace shall abound?" "Is it our right as

a Christian to live a life-style of sin? Can we go ahead and sin because we know God will forgive us anyway?" That's the first question. The answer: "God forbid." "Certainty not!" (Romans 6:2).

Question two is slightly different: "Does living under grace give me liberty to sin?" (Romans 6:15).

Question one involves a life-style choice; question two has to do with my moment-by-moment decision. At any given moment is it alright to slip into sin because I know I can instantly be forgiven?

Is it okay to treat somebody unkindly because you know you can get back in fellowship with God? Is it okay to pick up a magazine you know you ought not to be looking at and look at it anyway because you know can be forgiven in your quiet time tomorrow morning? Is it okay to "borrow" something without permission because you know you can be forgiven by God later?"

The same answer is given to both questions. "God forbid." "Certainly not!"

Romans 6:16: "Don't you know?" "You should know. I can't believe you don't know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey."

There are two kingdoms in this world: the kingdom of sin and the kingdom of God. Before you came to Christ, you lived in the kingdom of sin, whether you knew it or not. You were a slave to sin. You did what sin demanded. You lived according to the dictates of the lust of your eyes and the lust of your flesh and the pride of life. You followed sin. Sin was your master and you were a slave to sin.

But now – through the power of Jesus Christ – you have been transferred out of the kingdom of sin into the kingdom of God. You don't live in the realm of sin any longer. Now you live in God's kingdom. Now you have a choice as to how you will live.

Notice there is a difference between a slave and a servant. A servant is somebody we hire who works for us and does what we ask for 30 or 40 hours a week, but then we let them off to let them have time of their own.

A slave is indebted to his master 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Now that we have come to Christ Jesus, we are to be in the service of God, enslaved if you will, to God, freely serving Him seven days a week, 24 hours a day."

Every day you and I have two ways we can go. We can go toward sin or we can go toward God. If we go toward sin, we are slaves to sin. If we go toward God, we are slaves to God and righteousness.

But some people say, "Well, I want to go in the middle." There is no middle. You go toward sin or you go toward God. You can't have one foot in sin and one foot in righteousness. It doesn't work that way. You can't live in both kingdom at the same time. You've got to make up your mind which way you are going to go.

So, whose slave are you? Suppose I ask each person in each pew the question, "Whose slave are you?" You answer that question by the choices you make each moment.

What difference does it make which way we decide to live? It makes all the difference in the world. Sin pays off and God pays off. You make a choice and you get what you choose.

There is an unusual phrase that you may have passed over in Romans 6:19. Paul is talking about our pre-conversion days. "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity." Before you came to Christ, you used your body parts for impurity. You use to take the very parts of your body and you dedicated them to an impure life: your lips, your hands, your feet, your mind, your eyes, even your private parts.

Now that you've come to Christ, you understand what being a slave to impurity means. Then he says, "You gave yourself to ever-increasing wickedness (of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness)."

You know what that means? It means you can tell a lie, but you can't tell just one. You tell a lie and then you tell another one to cover up the first one, then you tell another one to cover the second one and the first one. One sin leads to another sin.

That's ever-increasing wickedness. It's like David who lusted after Bathsheba. First, he lusted. Then he committed adultery. Then he lied to cover that up, then he committed murder to cover up everything else. Lust. Adultery. Lie. Murder. Ever-increasing wickedness.

Then Paul compares what sin pays and what God pays: Sin pays Slavery (Romans 6:19-20), Shame (Romans 6:21), Death (Romans 6:21, 23). God pays Righteous (Romans 6:19), Holiness (Romans 6:19), and Eternal Life (Romans 6:23).

I don't want to leave Romans 6 without summarizing what this chapter teaches because it teaches what God has done to make

overcoming sin a possibility for every believer and how we can live the victorious life.

1. What God has done for us is both positional and practical. Positional means that God has done His part for us. Practical means there is something that we should do.

2. There are two key positional truths you need to know: You are dead to sin if you have trusted Christ and you are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

3. God's intention for us is that sin should no longer master us and that we should live a brand new life and bring forth fruit for God.

4. Our first response must be to reckon it true that God has done everything necessary for us to walk in victory and to count it as so. Our second response is to stop yielding our bodies to sin and to start yielding them to God.

5. Our greatest motive in serving Christ is that God pays off in righteousness, holiness, and eternal life.

Do you want to go to heaven? You can. The free gift of God is wrapped up in the Person of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

FREE FROM THE LAW

Romans 7:1-6

We are in that section of Romans that deals with sanctification. The word "sanctification" means that the grace of God is working in our lives to make us holy by setting us apart TO God and FOR God.

Romans 6 uses the analogy of slavery to teach us that we are dead to our old master, which was sin; and alive to our new Master, who is Christ.

Romans 7 uses the analogy of marriage to show us that before we were saved, we were married to the Law; but now that we are saved, we are no longer married to the Law, but to the Lord. Romans 7 deals with sanctification, but it shows us how we are NOT to live.

In these first six verses, Paul uses the analogy of marriage. Many have used this passage to relate to marriage and remarriage, but Paul never intended to deal with literal marriage here. This entire passage was written to show Christians how NOT to live. The Christian is NOT to live under legalism; if he does, he will end up a defeated Christian.

The Bible is not a Book of Rules and Regulations, but a Book of Principles and Percepts.

What is Legalism? Legalism is the belief that I can become holy and please God by obeying Laws. It's measuring spirituality by a list of Do's and Don'ts. The weakness of legalism is that it sees SINS, but not SIN. It sees the Fruit of sin, but it doesn't deal with the Root, which is sin. It judges by the OUTWARD and not the INWARD.

The consequences of trying to live life as a legalist is two-fold:

1. Either the person becomes a pretender or he abandons any desire to live a holy life.
2. Or, he becomes a person who is hard on others: Critical, condemning, unloving or unforgiving ("You don't do or act or dress or believe just like I do, so you're wrong.").

Often the biblical writers turn to marriage as a useful illustration of the relationship between God and His people. In order to simplify this text, let's arrange it in a series of statements:

Before we are saved, Paul likens the relationship between the Law and man to the relationship between a husband and wife. Unfortunately, after a person is saved, many try to live their Christian life by keeping the Law rather than living by grace. Paul says that the Christian is dead to the Law and alive unto Christ and grace. Through our union with Christ, believers are set free to serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what Paul is saying:

- A wife is bound by Law to stay married as long as her husband is alive.
- If her husband dies, she is no longer married to him.
- If she remarries while her husband is alive, she is an adulteress.
- If she remarries after his death, she is not an adulteress.

Thus:

- Remarriage is not permitted while the husband is alive.
- Remarriage is permitted after her husband is dead.

Two statements go to the heart of Paul's application:

- We died to the Law.
- We are now married to Christ.

Let me present two husbands to you and you decide which one you want to be married to:

We'll call the first one – Mr. Perfect or Mr. Letter of the Law.

He's a good man. In fact, Romans 7:12 says that he is holy, just and good. Not many men possess those qualities.

He's a perfect man. And that's where the rub comes. You're grateful that Mr. Law is holy and just and good, but because he is perfect, he demands perfection.

Mr. Law is very demanding. In Romans 7:1 the word "dominion" means to be in control, or in charge. He stands over his wife and says, "Do this and do that. Don't do this and don't do that. Perform. Perform. Perform. Jump. Jump. Jump. Do what I say."

She tries. I mean, God knows she tries. She tries. She does and does and she doesn't do and she never does and she jumps and she performs – BUT it's never, never, never good enough. She's frustrated. She's defeated. Her life's a wreck. Her husband is good and perfect, but he's also demanding and she can't measure up.

She feels trapped, but she is bound by the Law to stay with her demanding, controlling husband "till death do us part."

The point of Paul's message is not that we trade husbands – the Law for Christ. His real point is that we have traded a bad marriage for a good one. When we were under the Law, we were in a relationship that could never satisfy us. It's like being married to the most demanding person in the world. Nothing you do pleases him.

Nothing is ever good enough. Nothing is ever clean enough. You work all day to fix a nice meal, and because it's not perfect, he doesn't like it. You iron his shirts, but because he finds a wrinkle in the collar, he gets mad at you. He wakes up every morning with a list of things you need to do today. And no matter how hard you work, you can never finish the list to his satisfaction. He's picky, he's demanding, he's a perfectionist, he's critical, and to top it all off, he's right all the time. And he knows it and doesn't mind telling you so.

That's what it's like living under the Law. You know the Law is good. It's right all the time. You do your best to live up to the Ten Commandments, but "nobody's perfect." But perfection is what the Law demands. God doesn't grade on the curve. It's not good enough to keep most of the commandments most of the time. That will only condemn you. It can never save you.

The point is, living under the Law is like living with a perfect husband. You end up beaten down, discouraged, frustrated, feeling like a failure all the time. You can never be good enough no matter how much you try.

But now we died to the Law. That ended our "marriage" to the Law because death ends all contracts. Having died to the Law, we are now "married" to Jesus Christ. That's like trading in a demanding husband for one who is always loving, always forgiving, always encouraging, always accepting, always full of compassion. He is the exact opposite of the first husband. He's everything the first man wasn't.

The amazing thing is, He's also perfect. In fact, He's the Son of God. But He never makes you feel bad about your lack of perfection. He takes you just the way you are and joins Himself to you so that as you spend time with Him, He actually turns you into a better and nicer person.

By the way, did you notice that you are the one who died (Romans 7:4)? Paul turns the illustration on its head by supposing that you – not your husband – dies. You died, then you received life, then you marry a second husband. It's not that the Law died to us, but we died to the Law. The Law no longer has any controlling power over us. Therefore, we are now free to "marry" Jesus Christ.

See Colossians 2:13-14; Galatians 2:19-20

By the way, a second marriage – re-marriage – is never the same as the first. You aren't the same person and you aren't married to the same person. Life isn't the same. Your new husband doesn't react the way the old one did. He doesn't think or talk or act like your first husband. And you are not the same either. You change because you've changed partners.

Our new marriage to Christ is so different. No more rules and regulations. No more obligations and stipulations. Jesus loves you unconditionally and will lead you day by day in joy and liberty.

The Law says, "Responsibility!" Love says, "Just respond to me."

Listen: Do you know why my wife fixes my meals, cleans the house, washes my clothes? Because at the beginning of each day I give her a list of things to be done and I have a whip next to my chair and she knows if she doesn't get the things done that I tell her to do, I'll pop that whip! No. She does what she does because she loves me. Not because I make demands on her.

Do you know why some Christians are defeated? They are legalistic. They live under the fear of the demands of Mr. Law with all his rules and regulations and think that will make them spiritual.

"I do not work my soul to save;
That work my Lord hath done.
But I will work like any slave
For love of God's dear Son."

I see another problem with so many Christians in this regard to service. They try to serve two husbands
– Mr. Law and Mr. Love.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee gives this illustration: Back in the antebellum days, before the Civil War, there was a plantation owner, a very fine, handsome man, married to a beautiful woman, and they lived in a lovely home. The husband took ill and died suddenly. It was a great heartbreak to his wife, for she loved him dearly, and she did a strange and morbid thing. She had his body embalmed, placed in a sitting position in a chair in an airtight glass case, and situated in the great hallway of her home. The minute someone opened the door, they were looking at him. Her friends knew this would never do, so they encouraged her to travel abroad for almost two years.

During that time, she met a man, fell in love, married him, and on their honeymoon, they came back to her plantation. When her new husband carried her across the threshold, there was that man, staring them both in the face. She had forgotten about him being there. It didn't take her long to decide to put him in the ground.

Too many Christians, now married to Christ, try to drag up Mr. Law rather than letting Mr. Love live through them.

Those who have died to sin and are alive in Christ have discovered a more exciting and a more effective way to live.

We have a choice as to how we will live our Christian life: we can live in the drudgery of the Law, which will tire us out, or in the delight of Love, which refreshes us throughout.

WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?

Romans 7:7-13

It was in the 1980's that Dr. Carl Menninger wrote a book entitled, *Whatever became of sin?* In that book, Dr. Menninger wrote these words:

"The very word 'sin,' which seems to have disappeared, was a proud word. It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word. It described a central point in every civilized human being's life plan and lifestyle. But the word went away. It has almost disappeared – the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin? (p.14)."

The whole burden of his book is to document the disappearance of sin from American society. He basically argues that, in place of the historic concept of sin, we now speak of crime and symptoms. But when you look at sin as either a crime or a symptom, you take God out of the picture because sin is committed between a person and God.

As Dr. Menninger points out, when you discard the concept of "sin" and replace it with the concept of "crime" or "symptoms," you've defined it as something that's completely exterior, or outside of us. There are proofs of this everywhere but his first proof is the change that's been made by American presidents in the proclamation associated with the annual Day of Prayer.

The first president to call Americans to a National Day of Prayer was Abraham Lincoln in 1863. If you go back and read that proclamation, it is so couched in Biblical language that it is virtually a Christian document issued from the White House. In that first

document by Abraham Lincoln, he uses the word “sin” and calls the nation to “repent of its sin and turn back to God.”

One hundred years passed. In the early 1950's, Congress passed a law that the president should henceforth and every year after that designate a certain day in May as a National Day of Prayer.

President Eisenhower, in the first year, went back to Abraham Lincoln's declaration, borrowed much of the language and used the word “sin” in that first declaration in the early 1950's. Dr. Menninger points out that in all the succeeding years, President Eisenhower left the word “sin” out. He pointed out that since then, no American president, in issuing his call to prayer, has used the word “sin” again.

Think about that. No American president actually has had the courage to call Americans to repent of their sins. We are living today in a society that has lost the concept of sin, but not the practice of sin.

What happens in a society, culture, or nation when sin is practiced, but is not admitted? What happens when you sin but do not admit that that is what you are doing? I'll tell you what happens. That nation, that society, that culture begins to deteriorate. Why? Because there is dishonesty to the core. That's what's happening in America today.

William Bennett, former Secretary of Education, recently came out with something called “The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators.” You may have heard of the “Index of Leading Economics.” That's a set of scales that predicts the direction of the American economy.

Bennett has been very concerned about the cultural decline of America. So he took 19 different categories and measured them over the last 30 years. The list includes such things as the number of crimes committed, median prison sentence for serious crimes, child abuse, teen suicide, marriage and divorce, children affected by divorce, high school drop out rates, drug use, and daily television viewing.

The result? While the American standard of living has risen dramatically in the last 30 years, on every measurable social, moral, and ethical scale, American cultural values are going down.

During the last 30 years, there has been a 560 percent increase of violent crimes, more than a 400 percent increase in illegitimate births, four times as many divorce rates, three times as many children living in single parent homes, more than 200 percent increase in teenage suicide, and a drop of some 80 points in the SAT scores.

Whatever happened to sin? We just stopped talking about it. We haven't stopped doing it.

We have turned from the concept of sin because we have turned away from the concept of God's moral Law. That brings us face to face with Romans 7:7-13. These verses are written to people who think they can get along fine without God and God's Law.

When we turn to God's Law, we discover four realities about sin:

I. The Law of God Reveals the Fact of Sin Romans 7:7

The purpose of the Law is to tell us what is right and what is wrong. That is the purpose of the Ten Commandments. Paul goes back to his experience as a youth. In the beginning of his life, Paul thought he was very good. He came to the First Commandment of no other gods and Paul said, “No problems. I've got that one.” No idols. “I don't have any idols.” Don't take God's Name in vain. “I would never do that.” Don't murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness. “Check.”

Then he comes to Number Ten – “Do not covet.” Boom! Direct hit to the heart. The first nine referred to outward behavior; but this last one is talking about what goes on in the heart. Coveting means uncontrolled desires. Remember that Jesus said that out of the heart come murder, theft, adultery. Paul desired to do things all the time.

This Tenth Commandment – the Law that catches us all – revealed to Paul that he was a sinner. If you understand the Law, it will reveal that you are a sinner as well.

If you understand the Law you understand that you can't sing, “How Great I Am,” because you are not so great. There is sin in your heart.

All of us must admit, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love.”

The Law reveals to us the fact and the reality of our sinful condition. The Law is not Sin; the Law Identifies Sin in Us!

II. The Law Reveals the Power of Sin Romans 7:8-10

Notice two key phrases. Romans 7:8 says, "Sin taking (seizing) the opportunity" and, at the end of Romans 7:9, "sin revived (sprang to life.)."

Those are military terms. They are terms for waiting in ambush; waiting and finding the moment to spring into life and without warning capture the enemy.

Paul says, "When I realized what that Tenth Commandment meant, suddenly sin, which was already within me, sprang to life and ambushed me."

The Law said, "Don't" and that's all I wanted to do. The Law said "Don't" and I did.

Human beings are so perverse that the easiest way to get us to do something is to tell us not to do it. It's what we call Reverse or Negative Psychology. Parents use it all the time. It works 80-90 percent of the time. If we want a child to do something, just tell them not to do it.

The Law works this way. God says, "Don't." "It's for your good." God says, "Don't, don't, don't" and something in us begins to say "Do it, do it, do it." There's something within us that makes us fight against anybody who tells us to do something or not to do something. That's that bent of sin that is inside of us.

Here's another illustration. We see the sign on the fence that says, "Wet Pain. Do Not Touch." You look around, touch the fence, say, "Yes, it's wet," and wipe your hands off. But you don't know until you touch it. The sign says, "Keep off the grass." So, you have a picnic right by the sign. The sign says, "55 MPH." But you can't find anybody going 55. To be safe on the road you've got to keep up with the flow of the traffic. The slowest person is going 58 MPH.

We all know you shouldn't throw rocks through windows at stores. Why is it that they don't have signs that say, "Do Not Throw Rocks Through Windows?" Because there wouldn't be a single window left in 24 hours if they put up that sign. There's something in us that makes us want to "do" when the sign says, "don't."

III. The Law Reveals the Deceitfulness of Sin Romans 7:11

Sin deceives. You can see the deception of sin in the Garden of Eden. There are three ways in which sin deceives.

1. Sin deceives us by promising what it can never deliver.

Sin says, "Go ahead, it will be fun;" "Go ahead, you'll enjoy it;" "You'll feel better, you'll be more fulfilled." What was it the Serpent said to Eve? "Eat this fruit and you'll be like God." Sin deceives us by promising what it can never deliver.

2. Sin deceives us by convincing us that what happens to others will never happen to us.

Let's say that we know that ten times out of ten, people get caught when they sin. Ten times out of ten, and yet sin convinces us that we are going to be the exception. Sin says, "You're going to be different. You're going to get away with this!" And the Serpent said to Eve, "You shall not die."

3. Sin deceives us by creating in us a desire for that which we know can only hurt us.

A little voice says, "Go ahead." And we stupidly go ahead even though we know we're going to suffer for it. When Eve looked at the fruit, she saw that it was good to look at, good to touch, and good to taste. So, she took it and ate it and we've been taking and eating ever since.

IV. The Law Reveals the Sinfulness of Sin Romans 7:12-13

The Law reveals the complete sinfulness of sin. No, the Law is not bad. The Ten Commandments are good. They still remain a reliable guide for living. But the Law is like a mirror. When you stand before the mirror, you see yourself. "The mirror doesn't lie." It's like the person who doesn't like what he sees in the mirror, so he throws something at the mirror. The problem isn't in the mirror. The problem is in you.

Back to Dr. Menninger who asked, “Whatever became of sin?” The question is asked, “What is wrong with America?” The answer is simple. What’s wrong with America is us. We’ve gone wrong. That’s why our nation is going wrong. There’s something wrong with us. We won’t face the truth about our own spiritual condition.

THE STRUGGLE

Romans 7:14-25

Thus far in Romans 7, Paul tells us something about his relationship with the Law of God.

1. The Law made him aware of his sin Romans 7:7

2. The Law actually provoked him to sin more Romans 7:8

The word “concupiscence” (KJV) means “all kinds of evil desires” (NKJV), or “all manner of covetousness.” When the Law said, “Don’t” it made him (and us) want to do it all the more. Like a sign that says: “Don’t touch. Wet paint.” What’s the first thing you want to do?

3. The Law pointed out the fact that he was spiritually dead Romans 7:10
The Law can’t save, but it sure can condemn.

4. The Law revealed to him just how bad sin really is Romans 7:12

Now in Romans 7:14-25, Paul tells us what he has learned about himself since he has been saved. This is one of the easiest passages in the Bible for me to identify with. It tells the absolute truth about the life of the believer. Romans 7 tells us about the Christian life as we actually experience it much of the time.

Paul is not discussing the life of an unbeliever. Nor is he describing an immature or a carnal Christian. In my opinion, Romans 7 is describing a maturing saint. These verses are a kind of x-ray of Paul’s heart. It can be called “an autobiography of an unhappy Christian,” because Paul tells us the story of his own life after he is saved.

If we are honest, all of us as believers can identify with everything Paul says in these verses. While Paul is writing his own autobiography, he is at the same time writing about our lives as well.

Notice two things in these verses:

1. Paul was unhappy with himself as a Christian.

If we are serious about our Christian life, all of us as Christians have felt as Paul felt. Even the great Apostle Paul felt that he was less than what he ought to be.

2. Paul was trying to live the Christian life in his own strength.

The pronoun “I” is used 38 times in this passage. The pronouns “I, me and myself” are used 47 times.

Paul’s problem was what many of us have problems with: Trying to live the Christian life in our strength rather than in the strength of the Lord.

One other thing I want you to see before we begin our study of these verses:

Every Christian has two natures within him: The carnal nature (sometimes called “the old man,” “the sinful nature,” or “the flesh.”) and the new nature (sometimes called “the spiritual nature,” “the new man,” and “the inward man.”).

The two natures are in constant conflict, both wanting to rule our life as a Christian – Galatians 5:17.

Two natures beat within my breast,
The one is foul; the other is blessed.
The one I love; the one I hate
The one I feed will dominate.

Paul has just stated in the previous verses that there is a problem between himself and the Law of God. The problem is not the Law, the problem is Paul himself. The Law is spiritual in nature. The Law is good and it lays down the rule for proper living. The very fact that the Law originated with God is proof positive that it is not bad. The problem is not with the Law, but with man.

The word “carnal” means “fleshly.” While the Law would teach man how to live godly, man's flesh is only interested in that which is sinful.

There is a part of the redeemed person that is still under bondage to sin. The old nature, that is to be reckoned dead unto sin, is in fact alive and well. The flesh is as wicked as it ever was. It is as mean as it ever was, and still possesses all the same old ungodly, worldly appetites that it has always had. We are “sold under sin.”

Sin is so wretched and powerful in the life of even the redeemed person that it contaminates everything he touches and always wants to dominate all of life. We are locked in a battle between our old nature and our new nature.

II. Paul States His Failures Romans 7:15-20

If I could put in one word what Paul is talking about in these verses, it would be the word Struggle or Conflict or War. That is what the follower of Christ is going to experience. Sin for the believer is not just temptation Out There, but we must also wrestle with sin on the Inside every single day.

Every believer struggles with indwelling sin. Paul says it twice. In Romans 7:17 he says, “it is no longer I myself doing it, but it is sin living in me.” Sin living in me. Paul uses the same phrase in Romans 7:20 – “Sin living in me.”

Sin dwells inside the life of every believer. Sin is actually present in the members of our body. Whenever we want to do good, “evil is right there with me.” As long as we are a follower of Jesus Christ, we will never be completely free from the pull of the sin that is inside us. As long as we are in our mortal bodies, we will wrestle with sin.

Paul makes an amazing confession in Romans 7:15: “I do not understand what I do.”

You hear children say that all the time. They will throw a rock through a window, they will break a plate, they will hit their brother hard. When you ask, “Why did you do that?”, they will answer, “I don't know.”

Paul is saying, that's true of all of us. Have you ever done something really stupid and said, “Why did I do that?” or “Why did I say that?” or “Why did I react that way?” “I don't really know why I did that. Something just moved within me and I did it and I don't understand why.” Well, you're in good company, because that's what Paul said. He said, “Many times I do things and afterward, I don't understand why I did them.”

Look at Romans 7:15-16 Paul is saying, “There's a struggle within my soul. It's like there are two Pauls. One wants to do right and the other wants to do wrong. These two Pauls share one body and they fight over everything.”

How many of us can identify with Paul? There's a part of us that wants to please God in everything we do, but there's another part of us that fights us at every turn.

This shows us that the old nature is not dead. Rather, it is in conflict with the nature of God that is within each of His saints.

Paul says, “I'm miserable. Those things I want to do, I don't do. The things I don't want to do, I do.”

III. Paul States His Findings Romans 7:21-23

Paul wants us to realize that this struggle and conflict and war within us is normal for the Christian. There is nothing wrong with Paul's salvation and there is nothing wrong with our salvation when we experience these struggles.

Just because we're saved doesn't mean we are immune to the pull of sin in our life. No amount of Bible reading or going to church is going to stop that pull in our lives.

Listen to some verses:

- Romans 3:10 “There is no one who does good, no, not one.”
- Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

- Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?”
- Proverbs 28:13 “He who covers his sin will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes it will find mercy.”
- I John 1:7 “The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin.”

IV. Paul States His Faith Romans 7:24-25

What Paul is telling us is this: We're going to win some and we're going to lose some. We're going to be knocked down and we're going to get back up. We're going to keep on struggling and, through the help of God, we are going to one day win the battle. We'll never ultimately win the victory until we are with Jesus face to face. But until then we can walk in significant victory. But there is going to be a war.

As a Christian matures in the Lord, he becomes more keenly aware of just how wicked he really is. I know that's been my experience.

In Romans 7:25, Paul looked forward to and longs for the day when he will be delivered from his wretched body. But even at times when we fail in our struggles, we grow in the Lord. We must not give up the fight. We must not roll over and make it easy for the flesh to win the victory. We must take our stand for God.

What will help us in our struggle with sin? Paul suggest three things in Romans 7:24 and 25:

1. Honesty Romans 7:24a

Listen as Paul describes himself: “What a wretched man I am.” Paul got honest with himself and with God. He did not pretend that he was okay with the struggle between the flesh and the spirit in his life. And when the times the flesh won the victory in his life, he felt like a “wretched man.” The first step of growing and victory is to admit that there are some areas in your life that needs some work on them.

2. Humility Romans 7:24b

“Who will rescue me from this body of death?” The difference between honesty and humility is that honesty says, “I am a wretched man” and humility says, “I cannot get the victory over sin in my own strength. I must allow God to live His life through me.”

3. Complete Dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ Romans 7:25

The answer to everything he has said about his struggle with sin is found in the Lord Jesus. There is a provision to help us win the struggle with sin. It is moment-by-moment dependence on Jesus Christ. His power is enough to rescue us. We don't have to be defeated, although sometime we will be.

God wants us to go through Romans 7. The struggle that we are undergoing in our life now doesn't mean we're a failure. It doesn't mean we're a bad person. God intends for us to struggle with sin so that in our struggle, we will be stripped of our self-reliance and begin to trust in God and God alone. Does the fact that we struggle make us a failure? No. Does it make us a bad person? No. Does it make us a loser? No. It does make us an excellent candidate for the grace of God.

If you are struggling with sin and you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, turn your life over to Him now. If you are a believer, hold on to Jesus and never let go. Run to the cross and there find forgiveness and strength and healing.

Cheer up, child of God. Your struggles are part of God's plan to make you holy. Your struggles are His strategy to make you like Jesus. When you do struggle and fail, remember that you've got good company. Paul also struggled and failed.

Look up, child of God. Run to Christ and embrace the cross. Turn to Him with your whole heart and you will discover that through Christ, you can become more than a conqueror through Him that loves us.

THE DELIVERANCE OF THE SPIRIT LIFE

Romans 8:1-4

In Romans 7 we learned about Indwelling Sin; now, in Romans 8, we learn about the Indwelling Spirit of God.

The theme of Romans 8 is the Holy Spirit.

- In Romans 1-7 the Holy Spirit is mentioned only two times; once in a passing reference to “the spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4) and once in describing how the Holy Spirit pours out God's love in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

- But in Romans 8 the Holy Spirit is referred to no less than 19 times. No other chapter in the New Testament contains as many direct references to the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8 is preeminently the chapter of Christian assurance. It begins with “No condemnation” and ends with “no separation,” and in between, no “defeat.”

Romans 8 tells us that the Holy Spirit of God indwelling the child of God is THE distinguishing mark of the Christian (Romans 8:9, 14, 16).

Let me give you a summary of the references of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:

Romans 8:1 “walk ... after (by) the Spirit”

Romans 8:2 “the law of the Spirit”

Romans 8:4 “walk ... after (according to) the Spirit

Romans 8:5 “mind the things of the Spirit

Romans 8:6 “spiritually minded”

Romans 8:9 “in the Spirit”

Romans 8:9 “the Spirit of God dwells in you”

Romans 8:9 “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

Romans 8:10 “the Spirit of life because of righteousness”

Romans 8:11 “The Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you.”

Romans 8:11 “will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”

Romans 8:13 “If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Romans 8:14 “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

Romans 8:15 “You have received the Spirit of adoption.”

Romans 8:16 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.”

Romans 8:23 “We also have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”

Romans 8:26 “likewise the Spirit also helps our weaknesses”

Romans 8:26 “The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us.”

Romans 8:27 “He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is.”

There is a sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit presented in Romans 8:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. The Spirit of Emancipation | Romans 8:1-4 |
| 2. The Spirit of Identification | Romans 8:5-9 |
| 3. The Spirit of Mortification | Romans 8:10-13 |
| 4. The Spirit of Adoption | Romans 8:14-15 |
| 5. The Spirit of Expectation | Romans 8:16-25 |
| 6. The Spirit of Intercession | Romans 8:26-30 |
| 7. The Spirit of Exoneration | Romans 8:31-34 |

Paul declares three things in these verses about our Freedom in Christ:

I. We Have Been Delivered from the Sentence of Sin Romans 8:1

This is the topic verse for all of Romans 8. Everything he says – all the way through Romans 8:39 – is simply a restatement of “No Condemnation” all the way down to the end of the chapter.

When you read this verse in Greek, Paul used a different word order. When the New Testament writers wanted to emphasize a particular word, they would put it at the first part of the sentence. That was their way of saying, “This is important. Notice this. Pay attention to it.”

In the Greek, the first word is not “therefore” or “there” or “is” or “now.” The first word in this verse in the Greek is the word “NO.” Paul wants to emphasize in the strongest possible way that there is no condemnation. You might translate it this way: “There is no

condemnation – none whatsoever – for the believer in Christ Jesus.”

There are no conditions attached to our freedom from condemnation; grace writes an unconditional guarantee. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? He is not saying there is therefore now no CAUSE for condemnation. That wouldn't be true. You and I fail. You and I stumble. You and I get off the path.

Is Paul saying, “There is, therefore, no failure, no struggle, no stumbling for those who are in Christ Jesus?” No. He's saying, There is, therefore now, no condemnation, no punishment, no coming into judgment for the follower of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what that means? We may stumble, we may fall, we may make a thousand mistakes, we may sin and we do, but for the believer in Christ Jesus, there is, therefore now, no condemnation because God said it is so.

What does it mean, then? It means there is no rejection for the believer. God is not going to reject you just because you struggle. It also means that God is not angry with you when you struggle. It also means there is no punishment. There is discipline and there is correction, but there's not harsh, abusive punishment.

By the way, since there is no condemnation, you don't need to get saved over and over and over again. You only need to come to Christ once for salvation. Once you are saved, you are saved forever.

For those who know Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation. Why? Because Jesus has paid it all. Why? Because your sins are gone. Why? Because Jesus condemned sin by His death on the cross. If He condemned sin by His death on the cross, God will never condemn you.

The word “now” speaks of time. At the moment of conversion, God's promise of “no condemnation” is in effect. Another translation reads: “No condemnation now hangs over the head of those in Christ Jesus.”

Notice that Paul makes it clear that “no condemnation” is ONLY for those who are IN CHRIST JESUS. This is one of Paul's favorite terms. He uses it over 130 times.

II. We Have Been Delivered from the Slavery of Sin Romans 8:2

Two “laws” are mentioned in this verse. If you put the word “power” where the word “law” is, you would get a truer sense of the meaning.

The lost sinner is under the control of three masters: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Ephesians 2:1-3 says that the lost man is dead in trespasses and sins and walks after the standards of the world and the devil. Our very nature was filled with lust for that which was ungodly.

Now that we are saved, the Spirit sets us free from the power of sin and death. The reason is that we are no longer slaves of sin. Our old man was crucified with Christ and we now have a new divinely-given life that is the life of Christ Himself. We are free from the domination and control of sin. We are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we should not let sin reign in our mortal body or obey its lust. Instead, we are to yield our bodies as instruments of righteousness to God – Romans 6:6-7, 11-14, 17-18.

That means that we do not HAVE to sin any more or be defeated any more. We don't have to keep on committing the same dumb sins over and over because the power of Christ in us has set us free.

III. We Have Been Delivered from the Sickness of Sin Romans 8:3-4

Man, outside of Christ, is terminally ill spiritually and there is only one cure for his spiritual illness: The Blood of Christ.

The Law was powerless to condemn sin. The Law can only REVEAL sin, but it can never REDEEM from sin. It could condemn, but it could never save.

What the Law could not do for us, God did. How? By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be an offering or a sacrifice for sin. So, He condemned sin in sinful man.

Believers are no longer condemned because, when Jesus hung on the cross, God condemned the very thing that Satan would like to use to condemn us.

The purpose of Jesus Christ dying on the cross is so that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us. By virtue of the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, God looked at the obedience of His Son and declared that everyone who believes in Him gets credit for what He did. Jesus obeyed perfectly. Therefore, when I trust Him and His finished work, Jesus' merit is credited to my account.

That's why the moment we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit goes to work in our life. He begins to change us from the inside out. The things that used to knock us down won't knock us down any more. Where we used to fail, we now succeed. As we walk with the Lord and as we rely upon the Holy Spirit the demands of the Law (that is, the kind of life that God wants) is fulfilled in us.

This is a "win-win" situation for us. On the one hand, the perfection of Christ is credited to us. And day by day as we rely on the Holy Spirit, a new kind of life begins to emerge. What God demands, we couldn't do. Therefore, what God demands, He supplies. Got it? God demands it, we can't do it, so He gives it to us. There can't be any condemnation because what God has demanded, He has supplied. Amazing!

If you are outside of Christ, you are condemned already. If you are in Christ, you are not condemned. If you are outside of Christ, judgment is still in front of you in the future. But if you are in Christ, your judgment is behind you, in the past.

Either you are condemned and you are waiting to be judged or you're not condemned because your sins were judged on the cross of Christ. Where are you right now? Are you outside of Christ and lost, or are you in Christ and safe?

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Romans 8:5-13

Sometimes folks want to know, "What is a real Christian?"

Go up and down the street, go from door to door, knocking on every door and ask the question, "Would you tell me what you think a Christian is?" I think you would be surprised at the number of different responses you would get.

Some would say, "I believe a Christian is someone who has been baptized" or "I believe a Christian is someone who goes to church and maybe even gives to the church, and someone who tries to live right."

All those things may be fine and good, but all of those things, as good as they may be, are not really a definition of what a Christian is. Paul says, "And if Christ be in you." That's it! A Christian is someone who has Jesus Christ living inside of them. And if Christ is living inside of you, He makes Himself known.

There is the Definition of a Christian, but what is the Description of a Christian?

Notice Romans 8:10b: "the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit (our spirit, not the Holy Spirit) is life because of righteousness."

When Paul says in Rom. 8:10 that the body is dead, he is not saying that our body is no longer alive. Our body IS alive; otherwise you'd be buried down at Lee Memorial Park or somewhere else. Our body is alive. Blood is flowing through our bodies. Our eyes see, our ears hear, our tongues speak, we have a living body.

When Paul uses the word "dead," he means by that that they are "dead spiritually." Our bodies have not yet been redeemed. I have a redeemed spirit, but my body is now un-redeemed, for it has not yet been glorified.

How a believer lives in and by the Spirit is the single most important lesson he can ever learn. How does the Holy Spirit work in my life?

Let me use an example of a car and a subway train. A car runs on the principle of storage. You put gas in the tank and you drive it. You burn the gas and when you're out of gas, you stop, you get more gas, you run it again, you burn it again until you run out. You're constantly running and stopping, running and stopping, filling and refilling.

On the other hand, a subway train runs on the contact principle. You have the two rails on the outside and the electrified third rail in the middle. What is it that keeps the subway train going? As long as the train stays in contact with that third rail in the middle, it will go and go and go and never stop. Too many people get filled with the Holy Spirit and you get run down and you get filled up again and get run down. So, they're constantly up and down, up and down, being filled and emptied, being filled and emptied. That's not the Christian life of the New Testament.

The New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit is always IN the believer. Our job is to stay in contact with the Spirit. When we stay in

contact with the Holy Spirit, He continuously provides the power we need for effective Christian living.

How do I know my spirit has been redeemed?

I know my spirit has been redeemed because I now love the things of God. I love to hear the Word of God preached. I love to hear folks sing about Jesus. I love to hear testimonies of when and how others got saved. I love to gather together with God's people. If we have been made alive in Christ Jesus, then the things that are precious to Christ are going to be precious to us.

When we are saved, Christ comes to live in us and the Holy Spirit makes some changes in our lives. We are transformed by the Spirit of God.

What are some of the changes that are made in a saved person when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in his life?

I. There is a Change in the Believer's Mind Romans 8:5-7

A. The Desires of the Mind are Changed Romans 8:5

God gives us a new way of thinking. How many of you are familiar with the phrase, "World View?" Frances Schaeffer, more than anyone else, brought that term into the Christian vocabulary. A world view is a comprehensive philosophy of life. It's the way one looks at life. It's how one makes ethical judgments about what is right and wrong. It's the lens through which one looks at everything that happens around you. And everybody has a world view whether they know it or not.

There are basically only two world views. There is the secular or humanistic world view and there is the truly Christian world view. There is a Christian way of thinking, there is a Christian way of speaking, there is a Christian way of acting, there is a Christian way of approaching the problems of life.

Romans 12:2 says that we are not to be conformed to this world, but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

The word "mind" means "mind set" and refers to the bent of our minds or the thought patterns of our mind which determines our behavior and life-style.

B. The Devotions of the Mind are Changed Romans 8:6-7

Because our body is not redeemed as long as we are on this earth, the Christian still battles with the flesh and the flesh tries to lure the Christian back into the old sinful ways. The flesh still likes to be pampered, tantalized, amused, and entertained.

Galatians 5:17: "For the flesh lusteth (wars) against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other."

Two things cause the unredeemed flesh to be at war with the Spirit that is redeemed within us: The appetites of the flesh and the old sinful nature within us.

What are the deeds (works) of the flesh that war against our spirit? Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:25-31; Colossians 3:5-9.

The deeds of the flesh may be grouped together in the following way:

1. Deeds related to Sex

Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, depraved passions.

2. Deeds related to Society

Murder, stealing, drug abuse (sorcery) drunkenness (social drinking)

3. Deeds related to Speech

Lying, abusive or corrupt communication (cursing, cutting someone down, talking down to others, gossip), harshness in speech, unkind or unloving speech, slander.

4. Deeds related to the Supernatural

Idolatry, demon worship

5. Deeds related to the Spirit

Hatred, jealousy, envy, malice (unforgiving spirit, self-seeking)

Those who live according to the Flesh

1. Death
2. At war with God
3. Pleasing self

Those who live in the Spirit

1. Life
2. At peace with God
3. Pleasing God

II. There's a Change in the Believer's Motives Romans 8:8-9

If your motive in life is to please self, you cannot please God. Only those who live controlled by the Holy Spirit please God.

Romans 8:9 encourages believers to acknowledge the Holy Spirit in their lives.

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| 1. The Holy Spirit INHABITS every believer | Romans 8:9 | |
| 2. The Holy Spirit INVIGORATES every believer | Romans 8:10 | (I John 4:4) |
| 3. The Holy Spirit INSURES every believer | Romans 8:11 | |

III. There's a Change in the Believer's Members Romans 8:10-13

If we have been made alive in Christ Jesus, then the things that are precious to Jesus are going to be precious to us. And God's Holy Spirit gives us the power to live after the Spirit and not after the flesh.

The same Holy Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead lives inside us. We are no longer obligated to the flesh. We are no longer enslaved by the power and bondage of sin, for Christ has set us free.

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me,
Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.

THE DELIGHT OF THE SPIRIT LIFE

Romans 8:14-17

Romans 8 teaches us:

- Who we are in Christ
- What we have in Christ
- What we can expect to have in Christ

The theme of Romans 8 is the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit:

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|----------------------------|--|-------------|
| • Emancipates the Believer | Sets him free | Romans 8:1 |
| • Empowers the Believer | Indwells him | Romans 8:9 |
| • Enables the Believer | Helps to put away the deeds of the flesh | Romans 8:13 |
| • Enriches the Believer | Gives him the rights as an adult son | Romans 8:15 |

Paul reminds us that it is not enough for us to have the Holy Spirit indwelling us, but the Holy Spirit must have us!

I. The Delight of our Adoption Romans 8:14-15

A. We have a New Family Romans 8:14

Every saved person has been brought into a new family: The Family of God. When we trust Jesus as our Savior, we become "Sons (and daughters) of God." That is, we were removed from the family of Adam and were transplanted into the family of God.

We are literally His children – now, and one day, we will be just like our new Father.

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called

the Sons of God: therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: But we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure."

"As many as are led by the Spirit, they are the Sons of God." That is, those who are in God's Family begin to act like the family and think like the Family and sound like the Family.

Paul has already said that we are to "live after the Spirit" and to "walk after the Spirit," now he says we are to be "led by the Spirit."

The word "led" means "to be willingly led" and is in continuing action. The Holy Spirit who lives inside us as believers has the authority to give us guidance and direction and to reveal God's will to us.

While He was on earth, Jesus told His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to be WITH us and IN us and that He would "TEACH" us and "GUIDE" us. John 14:16-18; 16:7-15.

In the Old Testament God gave His people a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to lead them. But we have something better today. We have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to lead us.

The word "led" also has a personal meaning. It means to lead while remaining near to us.

B. We have a New Father Romans 8:15

I have a question: Are we BORN into the Family of God or are we ADOPTED into the Family of God when we are saved? The answer is "Yes!" Both are true! At the very moment we trust Christ to save us, we are, at one and the same time, Born and Adopted into the Family of God.

Being Born into God's Family has to do with our Redemption; we become Children of God.

Being Adopted into God's Family has to do with our Rights, we become Sons of God.

The word "adoption" doesn't mean the same today as it did to the Romans to whom Paul was writing. Based on Roman law, the law gave the father absolute authority over his children as long as the father lived. Regardless of the child's adult age, the father held all power over personal and property rights.

In Paul's day when a child was adopted, three legal steps were taken:

1. The adopted son was adopted permanently.

He could not be adopted today and disinherited tomorrow. He became a son of the father – forever. He was eternally secure as a son.

2. The adopted son immediately had all the rights of a legitimate son in the new family.

A son born into a family did not have full rights until he was 21 and at a public ceremony was declared an adult son with full rights of citizenship and full inheritance rights by the father.

An adopted son was given adult son rights and privileges at that time, no matter what his age.

That doesn't mean the believer is a mature Christian at the moment he is saved, but it does mean that the youngest Christian has the same rights and privileges before God as someone who has been saved 20, 40, or 80 years. He has the right of access before the throne of grace, the same right to claim the promises of God, the same right of inheritance, etc.

Galatians 4:1-7

3. The adopted son completely lost all rights to his old family. The adopted son is looked upon as a new person – so new that old debts and obligations connected with the former family were canceled out and abolished.

C. We have a New Freedom 8:15

The word "Abba" is the modern English equivalent to the words "Daddy" or Papa." It conveyed intimacy, tenderness, dependence, and complete lack of fear or anxiety.

The word "Father" was used by one who had full confidence of the Father's deep love for him.

Put the two words together and you see one who has full assurance that he is a son and that his Father has the deepest possible love for him.

"Abba Father" are the words Jesus used when He was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed to His Father. "And He

said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'"

Because God is our Father, He wants the best for His children. God never rejoices in our failures, but in our progress. When a baby is learning to walk, you don't say, "Our baby fell down 100 times today!" You say with pride, "Our baby took his first step today!" Just so, God delights to watch the progress of His children.

II. The Delight of our Assurance Romans 8:16

Spiritual assurance that Jesus lives in our hearts day by day is a priceless fact.

The Lord Jesus predicted that there would be a wonderful relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believer and that the Holy Spirit would be with us and IN us, giving us confidence that we belong to the Lord. He gives us perfect peace and assurance as He communes with us.

The Holy Spirit has fellowship with those who are saved by grace. He communes with us. He will speak to our heart. He will tell us things. He will guide us. He will warn us. He will lead us. He will feed us. He will comfort us. He will teach us truth. He expresses His undying love to us. He is the Divine Lover of our soul!

III. The Delight of our Affluence Romans 8:17

We are wealthy beyond measure. Our Father owns everything and we are told that we are heirs of God. Not only that, but we have been made joint-heirs with Jesus.

God has appointed His Son to be heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2). Every adopted child will receive by divine grace the full inheritance Christ receives by divine right.

My Father is rich in houses and lands,
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands,
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full, He has riches untold.

My Father's own Son, the Savior of men,
Once wandered on earth as the poorest of them;
But now He is reigning forever on high,
And will give me a home in heaven by and by.

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,
A sinner by choice and an alien by birth;
But I've been adopted, by name's written down,
An heir of a mansion, a robe, and a crown.

I'm a child of the King,
A child of the King:
With Jesus my Savior,
I'm a child of the King.

SUFFERING AND GLORY **Romans 8:18-27**

The theme of this passage is given to us in Romans 8:18, "For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Underline the word "sufferings" and the word "glory." Paul invites us to make a comparison of those two things. Most of us see only our sufferings. All of us know about the hard times that come to all of us. But there is another side – the glory side. There are sufferings and then there is glory.

If we could put all the difficulties of our life on one side of the scale, and the glory that will someday be revealed to us on the other side of the scale, the glory would be so much heavier than our present sufferings. The sufferings of this life, although they are terrible, are not even worth comparing with the greatness of the glory that will be revealed to us. If we ever let that thought grip us, it would

revolutionize the way we look at our problems.

Romans 8:18 reminds us of a great fundamental truth: we are living in a fallen world. While we are waiting to be delivered from this world, we need to remember that we are living in a world that is under a curse and because of that, there is a lot of growing and turmoil on this old earth. There are struggles going on in us and around us, but the Holy Spirit has promised – even guaranteed – us that better things are coming.

When Paul uses the phrase “the earnest expectation” in Romans 8:19, he means almost the same thing he meant when he used that phrase in Ephesians 1:13-14. He means “a down payment, a guarantee of ultimate fulfillment.” The indwelling Holy Spirit in the believer is the Promise, the Proof, the Assurance that there is more to come.

When a man gives a woman an engagement ring, it comes with a promise: There is more to come. When you put earnest money down on a house, that's a promise that more money is coming.

Before we get into the text, let me point out a word that is used three times in this passage. It is the word “groan” and it meant “to sigh.” It has the idea of one sighing under a burden.

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| 1. The Creation groans | Romans 8:22 |
| 2. The Christian groans | Romans 8:23 |
| 3. The Comforter groans | Romans 8:16 |

When God finished His creation, He declared that it was a Good creation – in fact, He said that it was Very Good. But today it is a Groaning Creation. Today there is suffering, pain, decay, and death – all because of Adam's sin; not because there was a fault in God's Creation.

While we wait to be delivered from this world, we need to remember that we are living in a world that is under a curse. As a result of that curse, there is a lot of groaning taking place.

Tonight, we will look at only the first two groans:

I. The Creation Groans Romans 8:16-22

We live in a frustrating world, don't we? Nothing works the way it's supposed to. You buy something, it breaks, you fix it, it works for a while, then it breaks again. Eventually it wears out and you have to replace it.

But it's not just creation, it's also you and me. We don't work right either. We get cancer or Alzheimer's, a stroke or a heart attack and, if we live long enough, we'll end up in a nursing home. Romans 8:21 speaks of the “bondage of decay or corruption.”

Something has gone wrong with the world. It's not what God meant it to be. The fault was not in God, nor in His creation, but in Adam, because he chose to sin and rebel against God. Because Adam chose to walk in rebellion to the clear command of God, ALL of creation was thrown under the curse.

Five words are used to depict creation's groaning:

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| 1. Suffering | Romans 8:18 |
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This can mean physical suffering, emotional suffering, or any other way the creation or creatures may suffer.

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| 2. Vanity or futility | Romans 8:20 |
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This word means something which does not measure up to that for which it was intended. It causes frustration.

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| 3. Bondage | Romans 8:21 |
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It speaks of being enslaved or tied up, in this case, by corruption.

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| 4. Corruption | Romans 8:21 |
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The word means to decay and refers to the process of death and what comes after death.

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| 5. Pain | Romans 8:22 |
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Notice that it is the WHOLE EARTH that groans.

- The Earth, through tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, fire.
- The Plant kingdom, thorns, poisonous plants, famine, floods, decay.
- The Animal kingdom, poisonous snakes, rabbits, fierce animals, what about mosquitoes.

- Human beings, through disease and death.

But even in our fallen world, our world, our earth and all that is in it still lifts its voice in praise for God's majesty and glory. Psalm 148; Psalms 19:1-6.

Did you know that creation itself EXPECTS to be delivered from the curse that came as a result of man's sin?

Notice Romans 8:19, 21. The word "expectation" in Romans 8:19 means "to stand on tip-toes in order to see something." Creation expects to be delivered from the curse it is now under. Creation will be restored when the curse is removed. Then Groaning will be turned to Glory!

When will that take place? The curse of sin and the marks of sin on this earth will be removed when man receives his glorified body. Romans 8:19, 23.

What changes will be made on earth when the curse is removed and God creates a new Earth? Isaiah 11:6-9; 55:12-13; 65:17-25.

Before man sinned, he had dominion over all the fowl, fish, and beast, but when he sinned, he lost the title deed to the earth. The Lord Jesus will reclaim that title deed to the earth – Revelation 5:1-10.

II. The Christian Groans Romans 8:23-25

Paul is speaking of the Christian's desire to be free from these mortal sinful bodies with its sin nature.

The "firstfruits of the Spirit" refers to the indwelling ministry of the Spirit of God in the believer's life. When we were saved, the Spirit of God moved into our spirit. When He came into us, He began a process in us that helps us to see sin like God sees sin. He sensitizes us to sin in such a way that we become sensitive to sin around us and in us. As a result, we are affected by the sins we commit and that we see others commit.

We groan because of physical suffering related to disease and sickness, but we also groan because of the power and practice of sin in our lives. Christians don't want to sin, but they still possess a sin nature which means they have a wondering spirit.

Notice the words "hope" and "patience (perseverance)" Romans 8:25.

Hope is that settled confidence that looks to the future, knowing that God will one day keep all His promises. Patience is the ability to endure present hardship because we have hope in the future.

Our suffering is educational in that it teaches us hope and patience. We only hope for that which we do not have. If we have it, we don't have to hope for it. But if you don't have it, then hope teaches us to wait patiently for it.

What is it we are waiting for? Paul calls it "our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. When our bodies are redeemed, we will enter into our full legal standing as children of God.

The day is coming when our body won't need changing. We won't grow old or get cancer. The Lord Jesus will give us a brand new body. Until then we live in hope, waiting patiently for that day to come.

THE SPIRIT OF INTERCESSION

Romans 8:26-27

Three times in Romans 8 the word "groan" is used. We have already looked at the fact that the Creation groans (Romans 8:22) and the Christian groans (Romans 8:23); we will now see that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit groans within us (Romans 8:26).

"Groan" is a grief word. We are assured that one day we will be just like Jesus. We are not there yet. Paul says that we "groan" or "grief" because of the remaining sinfulness in us. When we receive "the redemption of our body" or our glorified bodies, we will fully realize our inheritance in Christ. But we are not there yet.

Now the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, groans within us, especially in relation to our prayer life. Two things the Spirit does for us:

I. The Comforter Sustains Us Romans 8:26a

The word “helps” means “to come to the aid of someone in desperate need.” You are in the stands watching a race and you see a runner faltering in the final turn. He stumbles and is about to fall. Seeing that he is not going to make it, you rush from the stands, come to his side, put your arm around him, and say, “Brother, I see you aren't going to make it. Let me help you to the finish line.” That's what the Holy Spirit does for us. He sees when we are in trouble and He comes to our aid.

The Greek word for Spirit here means “one who comes alongside of us to help us.” The Holy Spirit comes alongside of us as we travel through this harsh world and “takes hold of our burdens.”

How does the Spirit help us? Paul says the Spirit “intercedes for us with groaning that words cannot express.” The Holy Spirit prays FOR us TO the Father IN THE NAME of the Son for us in our moment of weakness. It is God praying to God on behalf of God's children!

Paul says that in our weakness, when we feel desperate about the things that truly matter to us, and we don't know how to express what's in our heart, and all we can do is cry out “Oh, God!”, don't worry. The Holy Spirit is praying for us and alongside of us. We may not know how to express to the Father what is on our heart, but the Spirit does!

What kind of burdens does the Holy Spirit come alongside of us and help us bear?

1. The burden of living in our weak, sinful, and morally deficient bodies. The Holy Spirit knows our tendency toward evil and He helps us. He knows that we are prone to wonder and He helps us. He knows that we often grow weary in well doing and He helps us!

We are weak and we are sinners, but He strengthens us so that we are able, by His help, to carry on for the glory of God.

When God used a word to describe His children as we go through this earthly life, He chose the word “infirmities,” which means “weakness.” This word “infirmities” is used several ways in the Bible.

a. John 5:5: At the Pool of Bethesda lay “a man which had an infirmity of thirty-eight years. Sometimes an infirmity means a physical handicap. Here was a man who was cripple for thirty-eight years.

b. Romans 6:19: “I speak after the manner of men because of the “infirmity” of your flesh.” Here the word “infirmity” or weakness refers to our inability to understand spiritual truth.

c. I Corinthians 2:3: “And I was with you in the weakness (infirmity), and in fear, and in much trembling.” Here the word means “a fear of not accomplishing a God-given task or responsibility.”

d. I Corinthians 15:43: Referring to the body after death: “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

Here the word refers to the body After it has gone through the process of death. I've never seen a strong corpse. Dying men are not strong; they are weak.

There are times in life when weakness kicks in and one of those times is when we pray.

2. Martin Luther, writing some 450 years ago, said, “It's a good thing if we occasionally receive the opposite of what we pray for, because that's a sign the Holy Spirit is at work in our life.”

We may be praying, “Lord, do this and this and this.” Meanwhile the Holy Spirit inside is saying, “Lord, what he means is this. Don't pay any attention to what he said. If he saw the bigger picture, he'd really ask for such and such.”

We have limited perspectives and the Holy Spirit “corrects” our prayers, so to speak, so that God's will is done, even when we pray for the wrong thing.

I've had folks say when a loved-one is dying, “Why doesn't the Lord just take him home, but what if, in those final days of difficulty and suffering, God is putting the final touches of the inner person, molding what he will be for the next billion years in heaven.

Let's remember that while prayer is to be Directed TO God, prayer is not to be Directing God.

II. The Comforter Speaks for Us Romans 8:26b-27

There are different types of prayer. There are prayers of Adoration or Praise, prayers of Petition, prayers of Thanksgiving, prayers of Confession.

Then there is the prayer of Intercession – when we pray on behalf of or for others.

- We are to make intercession for others – I Timothy 2:1-3; I Samuel 12:23
- The Lord Jesus intercedes for us – Hebrews 7:25
- The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us – Romans 8:26-27
- The Holy Spirit gives us the Desire to Pray.

There are times we don't feel like praying or we don't want to pray, or we are not inwardly fit to pray. The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, our weaknesses.

He prompts us to pray. He knows that it is our weakness – our “infirmity” when we don't feel like praying or when we don't want to pray, but we know we need to pray.

1. The Holy Spirit teaches us How to Pray. He helps us to know the mind of Christ.
 - James 4:3: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lust.”
 - I John 5:14: “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.”
2. The Holy Spirit teaches us What to Pray. He brings to our attention those things we ought to pray for.

The Holy Spirit takes our prayers that are often flawed and misguided and He straightens them out and tells the Father what is really in our hearts.

For the believer, the Holy Spirit is always on the job; always ready to act on our behalf.

At times we don't know what to pray or which way to pray about something. Or maybe we've prayed all we know to pray but we feel like we need to pray more, but nothing come to our minds and hearts and the words just won't come. The Holy Spirit helps us express to God what we can't express within ourselves. Our groanings may be wordless, but they are not meaningless! From our part we may be speechless, but the Holy Spirit is not and He speaks on our behalf.

Notice 8:27c: The words “the will of” are not in the original. It should read, “The Spirit maketh intercessions according to God” – according to the nature of God.

The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God (He is God). He knows the thinking of God; the desires of God.

Though we may not pray as we ought, He is able to translate to the Father, in the right way, our needs and desires.

He is the “Divine Sorter.” He will not allow anything to go before the Father that is contrary to His will.

Never use the excuse: I don't know how to pray or what to pray for. As the Holy Spirit searches your heart, He can convey to God what you and I cannot!

GOD'S GREAT PROMISE TO THE SAINT

Romans 8:28-30

These verses reveal that God has a perfect plan for the believer's life. Ultimately, God the Father will make every believer to be just like His Son, the Lord Jesus.

God's plan to make us like Jesus Christ will be carried out by following His perfect plan. Our Salvation:

- Commenced in Eternity Past: He Foreknew us.
- Continues in the Present: He Justified, called, and Predestined us.
- Consummates in Eternal Future: He Glorified us.

You may not have noticed that the first word in Romans 8:28 is the word “And.” The word “and” is a connecting word. Paul links the Spirit of Intercession in Romans 8:27 with the Assurance that the believer will be just like Jesus, when Romans 8:27 is joined together with Romans 8:28.

I must tell you that these verses have posed problems for the Church for 2,000 years. In fact, these verses have divided the Church for the biggest part of 2,000 years.

Two schools of thought exist as a result of these verses. I will not be able to settle 2,000 years of doctrinal disputes in this message, but I do want to give you the two major views and then share what I consider to be the truth of what Paul is saying.

1. The first school of thought is known as Arminianism, which teaches that man cooperates with God in salvation. That salvation is through faith in Christ, BUT we can choose to believe when we get ready. Most folks who hold this view also believe one can stop believing at any time, and then become lost again: that basically salvation is based upon the will of man.

2. The other school of thought is Calvinism. Strict Calvinism says that God selected some people for salvation and others for Hell and that those selected have no say in the matter whatsoever. Thus, the will of man is forfeited to the sovereignty of God.

I gave these two schools of thought because that is the subject matter dealt with in these verses.

Next to John 3:16, Romans 8:28 may be the best-known and oft-quoted verse in the Bible. Romans 8:28 may be the most claimed promise of God for the believer. There is good reason for that! Life is filled with trials and troubles and it is good to know that everything is being worked out according to the plan of our Great God.

I. There is a Confidence: "And We Know"

The word "know" refers to that which is common knowledge AMONG believers.

But Jacob declared just the opposite. Famine was in the land. His wife, Rachel, was dead. He thought his beloved son, Joseph, was dead as well. His oldest son, Simeon, was being held hostage in Egypt. And the man in charge was saying, "I will give you no more supplies until you bring the youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt." It was more than Jacob could bear.

Jacob said, "All things are working against me." (Genesis 42:36) But then what happened?

In the succeeding chapter, Jacob did send Benjamin to Egypt. Why? I suggest it was because, even though he was murmuring, complaining, and doubting, Jacob knew Benjamin would come back, and everything would work out. Otherwise, he never would have allowed Benjamin to go.

We have God's promise that He intervenes and works in the affairs of His people. God doesn't just save us and say, "Well, you're saved now, just get along the best way you can." Whether we realize it or not, God is constantly working in our lives to bring us to the place He wants us to be.

The thing that calms and quiets the turbulence in my life and brings confidence to the whole of life, is to know that nothing can touch me unless it passes through the will of God first.

We are confident that ALL things – good and bad – are working together for our good. This is the promise of God.!

II. There is a Completeness: "That All Things Work Together"

He said "All" things; not "most" or "some," but "ALL."

He doesn't say that everything that happens to us is good, but because God is God, He works in the affairs of our life and can use even those bad things to fulfill His purpose in our life.

God uses even the things we don't understand or like:

1. The Sweet Things Work for our Good.

It's easy to see how the sweet things in life can work for us. Things like our home, family, health, wealth, salvation. We ought to praise the Lord for every good thing He provides.

2. The Sorrowful Things Work for our Good.

Even the sick bed, the pain, the injustices. Just ask Joseph.

Most of the time we don't have the wisdom to understand why God allows certain things to come into our lives when they are happening to us, but we can have confidence that He knows what's going on.

3. The Satanic Things Work for our Good.

Satan's attack and affliction in giving Paul a thorn in the flesh was meant to stop him, but it just made him stronger.

4. The Sinful Things Work for our Good.

Christians ought not to sin and when they do, they suffer, but God can even take the suffering for our sin and use it for good.

III. There is a Cause: "For Good"

God is ultimately in control in this life and in every situation in life, whether we realize it or not.

Martin Luther was prone to periods of deep depression. One day, during one of those times, he came to the breakfast table to find his wife dressed in black garments. She looked as if she were going to a funeral. Luther asked his wife who had died and she replied, "God."

Luther raised his voice and said, "Woman, that is blaspheme!" She replied, "It is no more blaspheme to say that God is dead than it is to live as though He were dead." Luther got the point and repented of his foolishness!

When life closes in on you, remember this: If you belong to Jesus, God is behind every circumstance you face. It had to pass across His desk and receive His approval before it came to you!

IV. There is a Condition: "To Those Who Love God"

This promise is not for everyone, but to only those who love God and "to those who are the called according to His purpose."

V. There is a Consequence Romans 8:29-30

The purpose for what God does in Romans 8:28 is to make us more like Jesus.

Jesus didn't finish with us at our salvation. He will continue to shape us until we reflect His image perfectly. That is God's eternal plan and nothing will ever be able to change that plan.

THE GOLDEN CHAIN OF OUR SALVATION

Romans 8:29-30

This passage explains why Romans 8:28 is true. Without this passage, Romans 8:28 is just wishful thinking.

When you look at Romans 8:28, one question comes to mind. "Paul, how can you be sure? How do you know that all things that happen to believers are somehow in God's plan working together for good?"

God did not finish with us at our conversion. He will continue to shape us until we reflect His image perfectly. That is God's eternal plan and nothing will ever be able to change that plan.

These two verses have been called "The Golden Chain of our Salvation." The chain begins in heaven, moves down to earth, then moves back to heaven again. He begins in eternity past and finishes in eternity future.

Five words comprehend the entire work of God on our behalf to accomplish our salvation. Our salvation begins with the first link – FOREKNOWLEDGE. This is the link that starts in heaven. Then we come to PREDESTINATION. That's the link that brings us down to earth. The we come to CALLING. That's the link where we are hooked into the chain. JUSTIFICATION is the link that takes us back to heaven. GLORIFICATION is the link that secures our eternal place in heaven.

Let's look at these five links:

I. Foreknowledge Romans 8:29

This is the most important of the five words; it is also the one that is most often misunderstood. In both English and in Greek the word foreknowledge is actually made up of two words that are joined together – words knowledge and before – which means "to know something before it happens."

There are two kinds of foreknowledge: human foreknowledge and God's foreknowledge.

- Human foreknowledge is the ability to know what's going to happen before it happens because it's always happened that way before, therefore we're pretty sure it's going to happen that way again. For instance, I know the sun is most likely going to rise tomorrow based on past experience.

- God's foreknowledge is His ability to know what is going to happen before it happens because He intends to make it happen. And, God's foreknowledge doesn't simply mean that He knows by looking down the corridors of history at what's going to happen because He can see what's going to happen. That's true, but it doesn't go far enough. God knows what's going to happen because He's sovereign over all the earth.

- He knows what is going to happen because He either directly causes it or gives His permission for it to happen.

But we have to add something to this. The word "knowledge" in the Bible mean more than mere mental condition. It's more than just knowing some facts. The word "know," especially in the Old Testament, has the idea of "knowing intimately," "to know with affection," "to know in a loving way." For instance, we are told in Genesis 4:1 that "Adam knew Eve." Now that doesn't mean he simply knew who she was. It means that Adam knew Eve in the deepest, most loving, most personal and intimate way.

In Amos 3:2 God says to Israel, "You alone have I known of all the families of the earth." Does He mean He didn't know who the other nations were? No, this is God speaking! It means that He knows Israel in an affectionate, loving, purposeful sense that He didn't know other nations. It means that He choose Israel to be His out of all the other nations of the earth.

When you apply that to salvation, to say God foreknew us means that God fore-loved or fore-chose us. Not only did He know you before you were born, He loved you before you were born.

It's like an expectant mother who loves her child before it is born. While the baby is growing inside her, she prays for the baby, she sings to the baby, she talks to the baby. She has a relationship with her child before her child even knows who she is. And in the same way, God loved you first, sought you first, chose you first. Salvation begins with God.

II. Predestination Romans 8:29

This is a hard word that scares many people, but it is another long word made up of two shorter words: "pre" and "destination." What is a destination? It is the final stop. It's where your trip is going to end. The prefix "pre" means before. So, predestination means to decide beforehand where you are going to end up; to decide beforehand where the journey is going to end.

God has set a destination for us: That we are going to heaven and that we are someday going to be like Jesus. The word "conformed" means to be shaped or molded to be like Jesus.

"If that's what is predestined for me, I'm falling far short!" But remember, "He's still working on me" (Philippians 1:6) and that God has taken personal responsibility to see that we will one day look like Jesus. If it depended on me or you, it would never happen.

III. Calling Romans 8:30

There are two kinds of calling in the Bible: The general call and the specific call.

The general call is the call to salvation that goes out to all people everywhere. It is universal and non-discriminatory. It is the invitation that God gives to the whole race. "Whosoever will may come." "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is not God's will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

But that's not the call that Paul is talking about here. This verse speaks of the specific, personal, inward call of the Holy Spirit whereby the Holy Spirit woos and draws and wins you to Jesus. It is the saving call of God. Theologians call it the effectual call. It's the invitation which gives you the ability to respond to the Lord.

Let me try to explain the difference between the two calls. Think of the story of Jesus raising Lazarus. Lazarus has been dead for four days but Jesus has not arrived yet. In desperation you go to the mouth of the tomb where Lazarus is buried and cry out to him, "Lazarus, come forth! We want you back! We need you! We miss you! Please, come back to us!"

Inside the tomb lies a dead man. His ears can't hear. His eyes can't see. His limbs can't move. No matter how loud you shout, he doesn't respond. What's the matter? Doesn't he love us? Doesn't he want to come back to us? Why doesn't he answer our call?

But then Jesus comes and stands in front of the tomb. Jesus opens His mouth and shouts, "Lazarus, come forth!" Inside the tomb, a stirring. Inside the body that has been dead for four days receives a spark of life. His ears begin to hear again. His eyes begin to see again. Lazarus comes forth from the dead. Why? The same words were used, but there's a different result when Jesus give the call. Lazarus hears his Master's voice and comes forth from the dead.

When Jesus calls, because He is the mighty Son of God, He not only calls, He gives the ability to respond. You see, we don't save our self. He called us first and then we came to the Lord. Salvation doesn't begin with us. It belongs with God.

IV. Justification Romans 8:30

This is the link that takes us back to heaven.

To justify means "to declare righteous." Justification is that act whereby God declared us righteous the moment we trust Christ, while we are still a sinner, on the basis of the death of Christ.

Because of our faith in Christ, the righteousness of Christ is credited to our account in heaven while we are still a sinner. As a result, we are set free. We're not guilty. The record is wiped clean. We are not condemned any more.

And our faith in Christ? Even the faith to believe the gospel comes as a gift from God in heaven!

V. Glorification Romans 8:30

"Glorified" means "to be clothed with the glory that God Himself has."

All that heaven has is given to us when we are glorified. But when are we glorified? When we die: when we go to heaven; when we are in the presence of the Lord? Is it still future?

Notice the tense of all these verbs: Foreknew, Predestined, Called, Justified, Glorified.

They are all in past tense. How can glorified be in past tense when glorification is in the future?

The answer: It is so certain that God speaks of it as past tense even though it is still future to us. In God's mind past, present, future are all the same.

If God Foreknows 100, then He Predestined 100 and Called 100 and Justified 100 and Glorified 100. That is complete. Assurance of our salvation.

ABSOLUTE SECURITY

Romans 8:31-39

Romans 8 is an amazing chapter as it relates to the eternal security of the believer. Romans 8:1 begins by saying that there is No Condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus and it ends by saying there is No Separation from the love of Christ in verse 35. No Condemnation and No Separation for those in Christ Jesus – and in between these verses, he assures us of our justification, our sanctification, and our glorification.

The theme of this whole chapter is that God is for us.

- In the Old Testament He was God Above us. God's Holy Spirit would come upon His people for a specific task as He did Samson.

- In the Gospels He was God With us. "You shall call His name Immanuel, 'God with us.'"

- In the Epistles He is God In us, as He Indwells each believer. But He has always been God For Us!

In the last few verses of Romans 8, Paul asked four questions:

1. If God be for us, who can be against us – Romans 8:31. There is no Effective Opposition.
2. Who can bring a charge against God's elect – Romans 8:33. There is no Effective Accusation.
3. Who is he that condemns us – Romans 8:34. There is no Effective Condemnation.
4. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ – Romans 8:35. There is no separation.

No opposition, no accusation, no condemnation, no separation. Why? God Is For Us!

These major truths in Romans 8 are put together in four unanswerable questions. These four questions summarize the love of God and the grace of God and all that God has done for us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

QUESTION 1: If God be for us, Who Can be Against Us? Romans 8:31

Folks all over the world want the answer to this question: "Is there a true and living God, and if there is a God, is He for us or against us?"

The "these things" in Romans 8:31 refers to everything he has already talked about in Romans 8: our justification and predestination and glorification. God has fully protected us.

The "if" in Romans 8:31 is not the "if" of doubt, but of assurance. The word "if" could be translated "since" or "because." "Since" God is for us or "Because" God is, who can be against us. If the all-powerful, omnipotent God stands on our side, what does it matter who stands on the other side?

- Psalm 27:1: "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"
- Psalm 56:9: "This I know; the Lord is for me.."
- Psalm 118:6: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do to me?"

God is not neutral toward us. The strength of any possible adversary is utter weakness against our All-Powerful God.

Name the enemies of the people of God.

- Can the devil stand against us? No, because he has been defeated.
- Can the World stand against us? No, because Jesus has overcome the world.
- Can the flesh destroy us? No, because in Jesus Christ we overcome the pull of the flesh.

Who dares to stand against us if God be for us?

How do I know God is for me? Romans 8:32 answers that question. If God gave His Greatest Gift for us (His Son, the Lord Jesus), will He not give us the lesser gifts also?

Paul answers this by giving us an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has already given us His Son, if He has done that for us, will He hold back anything else that He has?

Those words, "spared not His own Son" means that God didn't cut His Son any slack. He didn't treat Him softly. He didn't lessen the weight of sins penalty just because Jesus was His Son, but He placed on Jesus the full load of His wrath and judgment against sin. He showed His Son no mercy. He allowed Him to be beaten, scourged, mocked, disgraced, spat on in the face, and subjected Him to the worse kind of death known to man.

Don't tell me God doesn't love you! The cross confirms it! God is for you!

QUESTION 2: Who can successfully Accuse us Before God? Romans 8:33

The first question was one of Provision. This second question is one of Protection.

If someone wants to accuse us before God, can anyone bring a charge against us and make it stick?

The words "bring a charge" means "to bring a formal charge, to indict." Revelation 12:10 says that Satan accuses us before the Father, but he is not qualified to indict us, for he too has sinned. There is only One who is qualified to bring a formal charge against us and He refuses to indict us because He died for us.

Let me teach you an important lesson between the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin and Satan accusing you of sin. The Holy Spirit will convict you of sin you have not confessed, while Satan will accuse you of a sin that you have already confessed to God and that God has already forgiven. Satan won't bother you about a sin that you have not confessed.

He doesn't want you to confess sin to God, because unconfessed sin will rob your joy, break your fellowship, drain your power, and steal your spiritual boldness to witness.

QUESTION 3: Who Can Condemn Us Romans 8:34

The word "condemn" is a legal term that means "to bring a guilty verdict." Romans 8:33 says we can't be indicted; Romans 8:34 says no one can bring back a verdict of guilt against us. God is for us!

Not only is the Judge of Heaven on our side, His Son is our advocate or our Lawyer, pleading our case. Twice in Romans 8 we are told that intercession is made for us in Heaven. In Romans 8:25 we are told that the Holy Spirit is making intercession for us and now in Romans 8:34 we are told that the Lord Jesus is also interceding for us.

QUESTION 4: Who Can Separate us from the Love of Christ? Romans 8:35-39

The word "separate" means "to create a space or a distance between." Is there anything that will cause Christ to love us less or even to vary the smallest distance? The answer is "No."

Jeremiah 31:3: "Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love."

Notice that he didn't say, "What can separate OUR love for the Lord," but "can anything separate HIS love for us." Our love for Him will vary, but not His love for us!

Paul gives a list of things that some might think would separate us from the love of God.

1. Tribulation – Romans 8:35 Those things that cause great pressures in life. Here the word probably refers to the kind of adversity common to all men.

2. Distress – Romans 8:35 Those times when we feel helplessly hemmed in by one's difficult circumstances.

3. Persecution – 8:35 Persecution like famine, nakedness, peril (danger) or sword. All these could happen to the people of God some day in America. They are already happening to people in other countries. He is referring to suffering inflicted on the people of God by men because of their relationship with Christ.

Paul just gave his autobiography (2 Corinthians 11:22-27). Paul had experienced everything except the sword and he would experience that also.

The words "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37) means "to over conquer, super conquer. A conqueror defeats his enemy. "More than conquerors" means that we do more than just defeat our enemies, we turn our enemies into our friends. How?

- God uses trials to build our faith.
 - He uses weakness to make us strong.
 - In sickness we are able to minister more effectively to other hurting people.
 - Our losses become our gains.
 - Our trials don't separate us from God, they drive us to Him for help and strength.
4. Death – Romans 8:35 Death is just God's messenger that brings us to our heavenly home. Death cuts our physical life off from this world, but it doesn't cut us off from Christ's love for us.
5. Life – Romans 8:38 Life may disappoint us, but it can't separate us from the God who loves us.
6. Angels and Demons – Romans 8:38 The angels wouldn't and all the demons of hell itself can't keep God's love from us.
7. Things present nor things to come – Romans 8:37 Nothing in this life or the next, including the judgment can separate us from Christ's love.
8. Powers – Romans 8:38 We wage a spiritual war against Satan, but they can't separate us from Christ's love.
9. Neither height nor depth – Romans 8:39 The height of success nor the pit of depression and

loneliness can separate us from Christ's love.

10. Nor anything else – Romans 8:39 Even you and I can't separate ourselves from the love of Christ. We had no part of earning His love and we can have no part in losing it.

A pastor asked a man over ninety years of age, "My dear aged friend, do you love Jesus?" His deeply-furrowed face was lit up with a smile that sixty-seven years of discipleship had imparted, and, grasping the hand of his pastor with both of his, said: "Oh! I can tell you something better than that." The pastor asked, "What is that?" "Oh, Sir!" he said, "He loves me."

He loves you! He loves me! There is no one that He does not love. Even greater and thrilling to the heart is the wonderful truth that He always will love us and nothing shall ever be able to separate us from the love of Christ.

PAUL'S BURDEN FOR THE LOST JEWS

Romans 9:1-5

Romans 9-11 gives us the fourth section of the Book of Romans.

- Romans 1:18 – 3:20 deals with Sin
- Romans 3:21 – 4:25 deals with Salvation
- Romans 5: 1 – 8:39 deals with Sanctification
- Romans 9 – 11 deals with the Sovereignty of God

These three chapters deal with God's relationship with Israel and the Jewish rejection of the righteousness of God.

The Key Verse of Romans 9-11 could well be Romans 9:14: "Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!"

The basic purpose of these chapters is to show that God is righteous (just) in His relationship to the rejected Jews. These chapters defend God in His actions toward Israel.

Each of these three chapters teach us something about Israel:

- Israel's Privileged Past – Romans 9:4-5
- Israel's Pathetic Present – Romans 10:21
- Israel's Projected Future – Romans 11:23

Although Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, he was still very much interested in the Jews. He has not forgotten the importance of the Jews.

Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Romans 2:28-29: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

Romans 3: 1-22: "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God."

Now Paul speaks again to the Jews – Romans 9:4-5.

Each of these three chapters (Romans 9-11) begins with a personal statement by Paul, in which he identifies himself with the people of Israel and expresses his profound concern for them – Romans 9:1-3; Romans 10:1; Romans 11:1.

In these opening verses of Romans 9, Paul reveals his heart for his people, the Jews. In doing so, he teaches us a lesson about the kind of heart we should have for the lost around us.

I. A Manifest Obligation Romans 9:1-3

Paul shares his burden for his lost kindred in the flesh – the Jews. What kind of heart does the soul-winner need?

A. An Honest Heart

Soul-winning is a matter of the heart, not a matter of discipline or training. If we don't have the heart to win souls, we won't win them, no matter our training or discipline.

Paul says, "I say the truth in Christ ... I lie not ... my conscience also bears me witness in the Holy Ghost." You get the idea Paul is sincere.

B. A Heavy Heart (Romans 9:2)

This verse reveals the secret of Paul's great effectiveness as an evangelist for Christ. The first thing a soul-winner needs is great love – Great Love for Christ and Great Love for the Lost.

A missionary was working with great care with some lepers. He would bath their sores, disinfect their running, smelly sores, treat them with salve, and even remove parts of flesh that was rotting. A man who was watching the missionary later told him, "I would not do what you do for a million dollars." The missionary said, "Nor would I, but I do it for the love of Christ and a soul."

Paul says that he feels heaviness, great grief, continual sorrow, and uninterrupted pain for the lost. Paul is never free from the heavy weight and burden he feels in his heart for the lost Jews.

The soul-winner reaches out with a burdened heart for the lost.

Ray Stedman tells the story of a man who said to his friend, "I hear you dismissed your pastor. Why?" "Because he told us we were going to hell." "What does your new pastor say?" "He says we're going to hell, too." "So, what's the difference?" "When the first pastor said it, he sounded like he was glad about it. When the new man says it, it sounds like it's breaking his heart."

It is said that D. L. Moody could never speak about Hell without weeping. Love for the lost makes all the difference.

Paul was not a passive observer, standing by idly while his friends rejected Christ. He saw their unbelief, and it tore at his heart.

C. A Hungry Heart (Romans 9:3)

This is one of the most amazing statements Paul ever wrote. He actually says he would be willing to go to hell, if he could, if it would help his Jewish brethren come to Christ.

The word "accursed" is the Greek word "anathema" and it means to be condemned to total and utter destruction.

It sounds much like what Moses said in Exodus 32:31-32: "Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Oh, these people have committed a great sin (in making the golden calf), and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will, forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of your Book which you have written.'"

I don't know that I could say what Paul and Moses said, but here's the question: How far are you and I willing to go to see our friends come to Christ? What sacrifices are we willing to make? Does it bother us that people we know are going to hell? Paul said that he thinks about that all the time and it breaks his heart.

II. The Missed Opportunity Romans 9:4-5

The Jews were a privileged people. No other people ever had such privileges, such grace, and so many gifts. Yet, they refused to have Jesus rule over them – John 1:11; Luke 19:41; John 19:15.

God gave the Jews eight great advantages.

A. The Adoption Romans 9:4

God looked upon all nations of the world, and as His sovereign right, selected the nation of Israel to be His son; to receive the full rights of sonship.

Israel is the ONLY nation that God ever called His son. He never said that to any other nation. The adoption belongs to Israel – Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Amos 3:2a.

B. The Glory Romans 9:2

The glory is the visible presence of God. The Israelites are the only people who ever had the visible presence of God – Exodus

13:21-23; Leviticus 16:2; Ezekiel 10:11.

C. The Covenants Romans 9:4

These are the marvelous pacts and promises God made with the key figures in the Israelite heritage; men like Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), Jacob (Genesis 28:1-4), David (2 Samuel 7:8-16).

We have no right to question why God choose Israel and not another people – Romans 9:19-28.

D. The Giving of the Law Romans 9:4

This is the greatest covenant of all in that it was made with the whole nation at Mount Sinai. No other nation had God's statutes delivered to them from God as did Israel.

E. The Service of God Romans 9:4

The temple service that refers to the entire sacrificial and ceremonial system that God revealed through Moses – Exodus 29:43-46.

F. The Promises Romans 9:4

This refers to the Promised Messiah, who would come out of Israel, bringing eternal life and an eternal kingdom.

G. The Fathers Romans 9:5

The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through whom the promises of the Messiah were fulfilled.

H. The Christ Romans 9:5

He saved the best for last. Of all the blessing, none was greater than this: Jesus was a Jew, born of Jewish parents, raised in a Jewish home, taught the Jewish law, steeped in the Jewish traditions. Jews gave to the world the Son of God, the Messiah, the Man from Heaven.

“How about your heart?

Is it right with God?

That's the thing that counts today.”

GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND FAIR!

Romans 9:6-18

Romans 9, 10, and 11 are some of the most challenging chapters in all of Scripture. I can tell you that we are about to go into some of the deepest spiritual water we can wade into.

Romans 9-11 deals primarily with the fact that God has set aside Israel as a nation. Understand that that truth was a bitter pill for the Jews in the day of the New Testament to accept. It's a bitter pill for Jews today to accept.

God had chosen Israel as His own. He loved Israel, made a covenant with Israel, blessed Israel, guided Israel, defended Israel; and yet, God set them aside. Why would God do that? John 1:11 says that Jesus “came unto His own people, and His own received Him not”. Because the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God turned to the Gentiles. God set the nation of Israel aside, “and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

That raises a question: If God choose Israel for His own and made a covenant with them, was God wrong about Israel? Did God fail in His intentions? Paul answers in Romans 9:6 with a resounding, “No!” “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect” is a negative way of saying, “God's Word has not failed.”

If God has set Israel aside, then how can it be true that God's Word has not failed?

The key to understanding Paul's point is in the second half of verse 6. The Jews were confused about to whom these promises were made. They WERE NOT made to the Physical descendants of Abraham, but to his Spiritual descendants. That includes some who were the physical descendants of Abraham and some who were not, that is, Gentiles.

Not all-natural descendants of Abraham are among the chosen people of God. If Abraham's FAITH be not in your hearts, it will be no advantage that Abraham's BLOOD is in your veins.

Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, but only one son, Isaac, inherited the promise. Notice Romans 9:8: “Children of the flesh” and “children of promise.” “The word of promise” was given to Sarah; not to Hagar.

Notice Romans 9:9-13. That last phrase has given many people problems. Paul reminds us that God's sovereign choice of Jacob (the younger) over Esau (the older) was made before they were born. The word “hate” doesn't imply animosity or bitterness. It simply means “not chosen.” The choice was made purely on the basis of God's grace that His purpose in election might stand.

The point of both of these stories is that God is sovereign in His purpose carried out through His choices. He chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau. Some feel that God is not fair or just. Why would He choose one and not the other?

The fact is, all human beings are conceived and born in sin, deserving of condemnation. When God chooses one undeserving person, but not another, the choice represents no favoritism – it only represents grace.

All human beings are headed for condemnation without God's grace. His choice to save some doesn't send the rest to hell. They were destined for condemnation anyway. But His choice does reveal His grace and mercy, granting salvation to some who did not deserve it. The realization of this truth should cause us to worship our God more deeply than ever before.

Another point over which some stumble is in Romans 9:13: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated.” Would a God of love “hate” anyone, as we understand that term?

“Hate,” as used here, was a Hebrew idiom that was often used for “preference” or “choice.”

Genesis 29:30 says that Jacob “loved” Rachel more than Leah, and Gen. 29:31 says that Leah was “unloved.” The Hebrew text says she was “hated.” But Jacob didn't hate Leah; he simply preferred (loved) and chose Rachel over Leah.

The same dynamic is found in Luke 14:26 when Jesus said that unless one “hates” his family, he cannot be a disciple of Jesus.

Interestingly, Paul's reference to “Esau have I hated” (Romans 9:13) is not taken from Genesis. All we get in Genesis is a statement of His choice (Genesis 25:23). It is not until we get to Malachi 1:2-3 do we find the phrase. Though we cannot understand God's sovereign choices, His choices always prove to be accurate.

Esau was born into a godly family. He was born in answer to prayer. He was born to be the father of a mighty nation. He was the first born. His dad loved him above his brother. Yet, a thousand years after God choose Jacob, by the time of Malachi, it had become clear that Esau's descendants had only a heart of evil toward God's chosen people, Israel.

Why did God hate Esau?

He counted as worthless what was precious to God – His birthright.

The Old Testament birthright meant three things:

1. He would be the head of the family when the father died, which meant he would make the decisions for the family.
2. He would be the family priest or the spiritual leader of the family.
3. He would get a double portion of the inheritance.

But such things were worthless to him. They meant nothing to him.

I asked you to look at the phrases, “children of the flesh,” which speaks of physical birth, and “children of promise,” which has nothing to do with one's physical birth or earthly rank, but is a matter of faith in God.

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT ELECTION

Romans 9:19-29

In the history of the Christian Church, few doctrines have been so hotly debated as the doctrine of election. It has been called the damnable doctrine of election. Others have called it the sweetest truth in all of God's Word. Whole books have been written to prove that it is not true. Other books say that if God is God, election must be true.

We are faced with some difficult question:

- If election is true, what happens to free will?
- Are we just puppets on a string, doing what God ordained in eternity past?

- Does God elect some people to go to heaven and other people to go to hell?
- Why bother with evangelism since whoever is going to be saved will be saved eventually?
- If God elected some people to hell, how can they be guilty of sin since they are only doing what God elected them to do?

These are difficult questions and I don't expect to answer all of them in one message. But the Bible does teach election. Since election is a biblical concept, we must face this doctrine squarely whether we like it or not. We need to seek to understand the doctrine.

Like most Christians, I have wrestled greatly with election, God's sovereignty, and human responsibility. I ran across this explanation: "God is in charge of what happens, when it happens, how it happens, why it happens, and even what happens after it happens. This is true of all events, in every place, from the beginning of time. He does this for our good and His glory. He does not violate our free will, yet free will serves His purposes. We're not supposed to understand all this. We're simply supposed to believe it."

As we examine these verses, it helps to remember that Paul is grappling with the difficult problem of Jewish unbelief. Why have so many Jew rejected Christ if He is indeed the Jewish Messiah. Paul's heart was broken by the reality that so many of his friends and loved ones were going to hell. I'm convinced that Paul wept when he wrote Romans 9.

Let's look at God's answers concerning the difficult question of election.

I. God has the Right to do as He Wills Romans 9:19-21

The illustration is from the world of pottery-making. The potter sits at his wheel watching the lump of clay as it spins in front of him. With one tiny touch, he creates an indentation; with another slight touch he produces another indentation. By the changing of pressure, the potter radically alters the shape of the clay. What emerges may be an object of dazzling beauty, such as a Ming vase. Or it may be a rather ordinary coffee cup. Both come from the same clay.

One is worth thousands of dollars; the other is worth about a dollar. What made the difference? The potter's hands.

Don't overlook the main point. The coffee cup can't say to the potter, "I wanted to be a Ming vase." It doesn't work that way. From one lump the potter has the right to shape the clay anyway he likes. The same is true for us. We are not all the same. In fact, God makes each one of us unique from everyone else in the world. Some have more intelligence, others less. Some are born into one race, others into another. Some are tall, others short. Some have musical skill, others repair cars. Some will become leaders, others will live in the shadows. That's the way life is. And that's not just the result of sin in the world. You're different because God made you that way. No one can talk to God and say, "You blew it." Number one, He didn't blow it. And number two, even if you think He did, He's not taking any complaints from you or me.

The objection in Romans 9:19 is: How can God blame anyone for sin and unbelief when He has sovereignly determined that person's destiny?

God's second answer to the doctrine of election:

II. God Delays His Punishment to Some in Order to Show His Mercy to Others Romans 9:22-23

These verses teach us that although God is always just, He doesn't always treat everyone in precisely the same way. That almost sounds un-American because we are used to hearing that all men are created equal. That's true in the sense that we are all created in God's image which gives us dignity and worth. We're "equal" in that we are all significant to God.

But these verses specify two different groups within the human race. One group is called the "objects of wrath." They are said to be "prepared for destruction." The other is called the "objects of his mercy." They are "prepared in advance for glory."

W. H. Griffith-Thomas has a helpful word at this point: "The contrast here between 'Vessels of Wrath' and 'Vessels of Mercy' should be closely examined. The 'Vessels of Wrath' are described generally as 'fitted to destruction,' – that is, fitted by themselves, through their own sin. On the other hand, the 'Vessels of Mercy' are described very significantly as those which 'He had afore prepared,' that is, God through His grace and mercy prepared them. Men fit themselves for hell; but it is God that fits men for Heaven."

These verses make it clear that not everyone is going to Heaven. Some people are simply "prepared" for destruction. They live in such a way that their only possible destination is Hell.

But Paul's thought isn't limited to those we consider gross sinners. It really includes all of us. Left to myself, I deserve to go to hell. Left to yourself, you deserve Hell. No one deserves Heaven. If you go there, you go as a gift because Someone else paid the price

of admission for you. You aren't good enough to get in on your own. Mercy means receiving something you don't deserve. Paul's point is that if God were just and merciful, we'd all go to Hell together. But since God is just and merciful, He delays His judgment on sinners in order to show mercy on those He is calling to salvation.

He gives everyone more time to be saved.

Charles Spurgeon applied this great truth to himself:

"I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So, I am forced to accept that doctrine."

III. God Determined to Show Mercy to Both Jews and Gentiles Romans 9:24-29

Many people think that election means that only a few people will be saved. Nothing could be further from the truth. God has determined to open the doors of Heaven to the whole wide world. Anyone who believes in Jesus can be saved. In Paul's day that meant that salvation was not just for the Jews, it was also for Gentiles. Today there are approximately 13 million Jews in the world out of a total population of 6.5 billion people. Who are the Gentiles? That's everyone who isn't Jewish, which is roughly over 99 percent of the world.

If God had said, "I'm only going to save Jews," He would still be fair because no one deserves to be saved. We couldn't complain if salvation were limited to a small group if that's what God had decided to do. But He didn't do that.

These verses teach us that God opened the door of salvation to everyone! Anyone who wants to can be saved. Will there be any Jewish people in Heaven? Absolutely. But not every Jewish person goes to Heaven. These verses use the term "remnant," which describes a smaller group out of a larger population. Paul's point is that we shouldn't be surprised by Jewish unbelief because the Old Testament predicted it in several passages.

But don't miss the greater point. God is so determined to populate Heaven that He has invited the whole world to join Him there. Anyone who wants to can go to Heaven.

This doctrine humbles us because it exalts God as the Author of our salvation. It also preserves human freedom because each person must still personally respond to Jesus Christ. Every decision is a free choice.

Someone has illustrated the truth this way. Think of the gate of Heaven, and above it is a large sign, "Whosoever will may come." As you pass through the gate, you look back and from the inside the sign reads, "Chosen before the foundation of the world."

Listen to a verse of the gospel hymn, "Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy:"

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Not of fitness fondly dream
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him."

This is the gospel invitation:

"Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruin by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all.

"I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
O, there are ten thousand charms."

Throughout Romans 9, Paul has been talking about the Doctrine of Election, the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. All of these are true to the Word of God. That raises a question in relation to salvation: "How can we know who is chosen and who is not chosen?"

Since God has declared the Jews to be His chosen people, does that give the Jews an advantage when it comes to salvation? The Jews have the promises of the Old Testament, the covenants, the Law, the prophets, the patriarchs, and Jesus Himself was Jewish.

But none of that matters when it comes to salvation. Not all Jews will be saved. Paul goes on to say that since God is the Author of salvation, He can choose as He pleases. That's the whole point of election.

That brings us back to the fundamental question. How do we know the ones who are chosen and the ones who are not chosen? The answer is, we don't, at least by outward appearance. No one can look at a crowd of people and say, "You're chosen" and "You're not chosen." How do we know who's in and who's out? Paul gives us the answer in Romans 9:30-33, and it's surprisingly simple. We know who is chosen and who is not chosen by how they respond to Jesus.

As we look at these verses, remember that Paul is dealing with the Gentiles as a group, and with the Jews as a group. He wants us to understand why so many Gentiles believe and why so many Jews don't believe in Jesus.

Paul talks about two groups and two destinies.

I. The Gentiles Romans 9:30

The Gentiles as a group didn't care about finding God's righteousness, they weren't looking for it, or seeking after it, but they found it anyway.

Paul's picture of the Gentiles as a whole is not a pretty picture. They "did not pursue righteousness." They were religious, but they didn't seek the living God on His terms. And now we come to the wonder of the gospel.

They weren't seeking salvation, but they found it anyway. They were messed up, fouled up, confused, broken by their own sinful choices, deceived by the idols they worshiped, deeply stained by sin, and morally tainted. As a group the Gentiles were a sorry lot. Since I'm a Gentile, I can say it this way. But it pleased God to reveal His Son to us and to offer salvation to us if only we would receive it by faith.

God offered Gentiles free grace, and sin left us so broken that we jumped at the offer of free grace. We were not looking for it, and we definitely didn't deserve it, but God in His mercy took us in and we obtained what we never dreamed possible. It's a miracle of grace, pure and simple.

II. The Jew Romans 9:31-32

By contrast, the Jews scrupulously obeyed the Law, offered a river of animal blood on the altar of sacrifice, kept the dietary laws, established the priesthood, and in general tried to "play by the rules." So, what went wrong? If they did what God said, why weren't they saved?

The answer comes down to this. They thought that simply by keeping rules, they would be saved. It comes down to the motivation of the heart. They thought that by keeping the rituals year after year, that was all that God required. But the whole point of the Law was to point to Jesus Christ who would one day fulfill the Law in His life, death and resurrection. To just go through the motions ultimately meant turning the Law (which was good) into a kind of "do-it-yourself" religion of works.

We see the same thing today when people say, "I was raised a Catholic so I must be a Christian." No, it doesn't work that way. Or, "I'm a member of a Baptist church so I must be going to Heaven." That's not right. Or, "My children were baptized as infants so I know they are saved." That's not right either.

Religion cannot save you. Church membership cannot save you. Religious ritual cannot save you. Trying hard to be good cannot save you. Playing by the rules cannot save you. Baptism cannot save you. Giving money cannot save you. Reading the Bible cannot save you.

None of those things are bad or wrong or evil. In fact, we ought to do those things and live that way if we can. But they don't make an ounce of difference when it comes to going to Heaven.

If you want to go to Heaven, you've got to deal with Jesus. You can't avoid Him. You can't use religion as a substitute for the Son of God.

We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. We are not saved by faith in religion. The Jews stumbled over that point and that's why so many of them missed salvation both then and now. It's all about Jesus and how you respond to Him.

The Gentiles realized they were unable to earn their way into the Kingdom of God and that salvation is totally by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Jews, on the other hand, attempted to be righteous by keeping the Law and failed because the Law can save no one. The Law was given to show us we are sinners.

III. Why People Stumble Over Jesus Romans 9:33

To prove his point, Paul combines two verses from Isaiah 8 and 28 into one verse. The beginning and end come from Isaiah 28:16; the phrase "a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that causes them to fall" comes from Isaiah 8:14. He takes these two verses that were familiar to the Jews and combined them to show that Jesus is both a stumbling stone and a cornerstone.

To some He is a "stone that causes men to stumble;" to others He is a cornerstone. Those who stumble over Jesus fall to their own destruction. Those who build their lives on Him "will never be put to shame."

Picture a huge, flat stone in the grass. Some people never see the stone because they are looking ahead and not down. Because they don't see the stone, they stumble and fall. Others walk through the grass slowly, carefully, uncertain of what lies ahead. Their head is down, their eyes fixed on the ground. They see the stone and instead of tripping over it, they stand on it.

The same stone trips one person and supports another.

Jesus is like that. Many people stumbled over Him when He came the first time. The religious leaders stumbled over Him because they were offended by His teaching on hypocrisy. The Pharisees stumbled because they were offended because He chose to associate with tax collectors and prostitutes. The Romans were offended because He upset the public peace.

Two thousand years have passed and men still stumble over Jesus. Why? I can think of several reasons:

1. They are offended by the exclusiveness of His claims.

Some are offended because Jesus declared that He is the ONLY way of salvation (John 14:6). Some say that He is a great teacher or a great moral person, but there must be more than one way to Heaven, they say.

2. They are offended by the implications of the cross.

They don't understand how Jesus dying on a cross 2,000 years ago has anything to do with the way man lives today. That means that the cross implies that we are sinners ourselves. They say, Jesus died. Everybody dies, but how could He die for me and my sins. That implies that we deserve death for our sins.

3. They are offended by the simplicity of salvation.

Most people believe THEY have to DO SOMETHING to receive salvation. They want to contribute to their salvation.

Pride makes people feel that Jesus could not do all the work for their salvation or pay the price for their sins. They don't want a "Jesus only salvation;" they want a Jesus and me salvation.

The Jews still stumble over Jesus to this day. Israel is still trying to be saved by her good works.

Jews today, for the most part, do not accept the blood of Jesus as an atonement for their sin. They understand that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins" (Hebrews 9:22). That's why the Jewish people desperately want to rebuild the temple in order that they may offer Old Testament sacrifices again. For until that time, his only option presently is to hope his good works will cover his sins. So, he continues to stumble over the very Cornerstone of the temple he is so desperate to build (Ephesians 2:20).

Man's way is by works; God's way is by trusting in Jesus Christ. The old hymn says it well:

My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ the Solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.
All other ground is sinking sand.

WHY GOOD PEOPLE WON'T GO TO HEAVEN

Romans 10:1-4

Let me remind you that Romans 9, 10, and 11 focus on Israel.

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 1. Israel's Privileged Past | Chapter 9 | God Chose Israel |
| 2. Israel's Pathetic Present | Chapter 10 | God Chastens Israel |
| 3. Israel's Final Future | Chapter 11 | God Converts Israel |

As we look at the first four verses of Romans 10, I want us to think for a moment about who goes to Heaven. We all know that the Bible teaches the reality of Heaven and the reality of Hell. Jesus spoke of both places Himself many times. I'm sure all of us would like to go to Heaven. Even if you are not a Christian, I'm sure if given a choice, you would choose Heaven.

But let me start with a very simple observation. Not everyone is going to Heaven. Jesus said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter in through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

A line from a Negro Spiritual says it well, "Everybody talkin' bout Heaven ain't going there." Lots of people talk about Heaven, and most people think they are going there, but that's not what Jesus said. There are two roads in life – one leads to Heaven, the other leads to Hell. There are many on the road to Hell, only they don't know it. Millions of good, decent, religious people who think they are going to Heaven will one day find out how wrong they were.

My second observation is that most people believe that good people go to Heaven. According to one poll, 53 per cent of Americans agree that "Good works can earn a place in Heaven." So, I ask very pointedly: Will good people go to Heaven? I believe the answer is "No." Good people don't go to Heaven, SAVED people go to Heaven!

Let me give you four reasons from this passage why good people won't go to Heaven.

I. Because You can Never be Good Enough Romans 10:1

Paul had a real burden for his kinsmen in the flesh – the Jews. Compare Romans 10:1 with Romans 9:1-3.

Would to God that His people would get under such a burden for the lost. I believe one reason we don't have a burden for the lost is that we don't really understand the spiritual condition lost people are in. While they may appear well and healthy, in reality, they are walking dead men.

Ephesians 2:1: "You He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins."

Lost people also live under the constant threat of divine wrath. John 3:18, 36: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God." "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

These are people who, at any moment of time, could be cut off and cast into Hell. They are not promised another moment.

There is a lot of confusion in our world today about what it takes for a person to go to Heaven.

1. Many are like the Jews of Paul's day. They had a real desire to please God by their works or deeds. Sadly, the Jews totally missed the truth that God is pleased through faith alone.

Hebrews 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." True righteousness can never be produced by the works of the flesh. Why? Because the flesh is totally corrupt and incapable of producing righteousness that will be accepted by God (Isaiah 64:6).

Sadly, many are trying to please God by trying to be good and earn a place in Heaven. They hope God will weigh their good against their bad, and their hope is that they will have more good than bad and that God will let them in to Heaven on the basis of their good works. Every person who hopes their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds will always lose out, because no man ever has more good deeds than bad deeds. All men are sinners through and through (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

2. Israel thought they could please God by keeping His Law. They failed to see that they could never keep the Law. On the day the Law came down from Mount Sinai, 3,000 died (Exodus 32:38). On the day the Spirit descended, 3,000 were saved (Acts 2:41).

3. Some folks believe that one religion is as good as another, just so long as you are sincere in what you believe – but they are sincerely wrong. Paul, with great zeal, persecuted the Church and went about to establish his own righteousness (Philippians 3:6). Paul was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong.

What about all the people in the world who aren't Christians, but have their own religion and they are happy with it? What about the millions of people with no religion who seem perfectly happy just as they are? "If it works for you, it must be okay."

Most Americans believe that Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and others all pray to the same God, even though they use different names. Many folks believe all religions teach the same lessons and we're all going to the same place anyway. Does God mind if you call Him by another name?

Listen to the majestic words of Jesus: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved (other than Jesus)." (Acts 4:12).

II. Because Good People are Deceived About Their Condition Romans 10:2

When Paul says they were zealous for God, he knew what he was talking about. When we think of the Law, we usually limit it to the Ten Commandments. But observant Jews went much further. By their own count, there were 613 commandments in the Old Testament – "Do this, don't do that, don't touch this, eat that, bring a sacrifice." To those commandments, the rabbis had added thousands of additional commands. They had rules on top of rules, all designed to keep people from sinning.

The problem was that there were so many rules that the average person could never be sure of keeping them all. And then, there were so many rules that many people ended up trying to keep the rules but not worshiping God from the heart. So, folks just went through the motion of worshiping God.

People who try to keep rules and regulations either feel guilty because no one is perfect, or you feel proud of how good you are – and that pride is sin. Good people won't go to Heaven because they are fundamentally deceived about their true condition. Isaiah 64:6 says that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

Paul says that he could bear record or give a testimony of the Jew's misguided zeal, because he had been a prime example of misguided zeal. The word "zeal" means "fervor, hot, even competitive pursuit." With just such hot zeal, Paul himself had sought to rid Judaism of the Christians who would pollute their pure religion.

It was misguided zeal because it was zeal without knowledge. Zeal without knowledge is fanaticism. They were ignorant of how to get right with God. They thought they had to achieve righteousness before God by doing good deeds.

III. Because Good People Think They Don't Need Jesus Romans 10:3-4

Here is the real crux of the problem. Good people don't go to Heaven because they think they don't need Jesus. That's what happened to the Jews. Because they didn't seek the righteousness that comes from God, they sought to establish their own. That's what all those rules and regulations were about.

Feeling to achieve true righteousness with God through Jesus Christ, they developed a righteousness that can only fail: self-righteousness. Romans 10:3 says that the Jews stubbornly refused to submit to the plan God has offered in Christ.

Theirs was an Outward righteousness but not an Inward righteousness. They had religion, but not righteousness.

They didn't understand that Christ is "the end of the Law" or the completion or fulfillment of the Law, because only Jesus kept the Law perfectly. Jesus did what the Law could never do. He makes those who trust Him by faith, righteous! We could never keep the Law and please the Lord. But Jesus lived a sinless life and died in the place of every sinner. He fulfilled the just demands of the Law and set us free from it.

He provides righteousness full and free for everyone that will trust Him by faith (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:18-25). Salvation and righteousness are given to all those who trust Jesus by faith. Paul's conclusion is that salvation can be found in the finished work of Jesus alone!

IV. Because Good People Wouldn't Be Happy if They Did Go to Heaven

That seems like a startling statement because Heaven by definition is a place of eternal happiness. But Heaven will be a happy place only for those who truly belong there. Good people would be unhappy there because they don't belong there.

Who belongs in Heaven? Saved people. People redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

You may have learned the little chorus in Sunday School called "Heaven is a Wonderful Place:"

Heaven is a wonderful place, Filled with glory and grace.
I want to see my Savior's face, Heaven is a wonderful place.

Heaven is a wonderful place For Those Who Call Jesus Savior. If Jesus is not your Savior, then Heaven would not be wonderful for you, even if you went there.

Heaven will be a place of intense activity where we will spend our days praising our Lord Who saved us from our sins. Jesus will be the focal point of Heaven. All our activity will revolve around Him. Good people would feel out of place in Heaven, because only saved people will enjoy it. Heaven belongs to those who are saved by the blood of Jesus. No one else will get in.

What does it mean to be a Christian? It means trusting in Christ so much that you risk your eternity on what He did for you in His life, death, and resurrection. Have you done that?

GOD'S SIMPLE PLAN OF SALVATION

Romans 10:5-13

This is a very familiar passage of Scripture. Most of us know certain parts of it by heart. So, I won't be saying anything new or anything you haven't already heard. All I want to do is reinforce a truth that you already know to be true so that you will know that it is still true and so that you believe it more than you already do.

Many years ago, I learned a simple way to present the Gospel to someone called "The Roman Road of Salvation." It is one of the most popular means ever devised for sharing the Gospel because it consists entirely of verses taken from the book of Romans. There are four stops on the Roman Road.

Stop # 1: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Stop #2: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Stop #3: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Stop #4: "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. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness,

and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation ...For whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:9-10, 13).

Before we jump into the passage, let's begin with a simple multiple-choice theological quiz: How good do you have to be to go to Heaven?

- A. Pretty good
- B. Really good
- C. Better than Uncle Joe
- D. Perfect

The answer is "D." If you want to go to Heaven, you have to be perfect. Most people, about 99.9 per cent of the world, believes the answer is either "A" or "B" or "C." Most people are quick to compare themselves to Uncle Joe or Aunt Jane. That's what most people do: They compare themselves to someone who isn't as good as they are. But that's not what God does. When God makes a comparison, He compares us to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We all fall short of His divine glory (Romans 3:23.)

God demands perfection. If you ask people, "Do you have to be perfect to go to Heaven?" most will answer "No." But the answer is "Yes." God is perfect and He will not allow imperfect people to join Him in Heaven.

If you want to go to Heaven, you've got to be perfect from the moment of birth till the moment of death with no failure at all in between. God's standard is absolute perfection in thought, word and deed 100 per cent of the time. That means we are left with only two options if we want to go to Heaven:

1. We've got to be perfect ourselves.
2. We've got to find Someone Who can be perfect in our place.

Since we've all blown Option No. 1 years ago, the only thing left for us is Option No. 2. God has provided Option No. 2 for us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The Access to Salvation Romans 10:5-8

Paul says in Romans 10:5 that for a person to be righteous by keeping the Law, he would have to keep every detail of the Law every moment of his life. If he failed one time, he would face an indebtedness that he couldn't pay.

In these verses Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 30 where Moses gives his final message to the people of Israel. Knowing that he would never speak to them again, he reminds them that God had already revealed Himself to them on Mount Sinai, so they could never say that they didn't know what God wanted from them. God had also proclaimed His message to them through Moses for forty years, so none of them had any excuses. Moses is telling his people, "The Word is near to you, not far away. It is in your mouth and in your heart." If God had spoken through the Law, how much more has He now spoken to us through Jesus Christ.

No one needs to say, "I want to bring Christ down from Heaven," because He has already been here. And no one needs to say, "I want to bring Christ up from the dead," because He rose from the dead, now, 2,000 years ago.

When it comes to providing salvation, God has already done the hard part. He sent His Son from Heaven to earth, allowed Him to live among us and be crucified by wicked men and then buried in the ground, be raised on the third day from the dead, and 40 days later ascend into Heaven. You don't have to go to Heaven and try to bring Christ down. He's near you now. He's not far away from you!

God has come near to us. He is as near as your heart and your mouth. How near is Jesus to the sinner? Just open the door of your heart and invite Him in.

Not only has God done the hard part by sending His Son to die for our sins and then raising Him from the dead, but God has brought His Son very near to everybody on earth. All you have to do if you want Jesus is reach out the empty hand of faith, and in the act of reaching, He will come to you. Anyone can be saved, anytime, anywhere, under any conditions. It doesn't matter what their sins have been or what they have done in the past.

II. The Availability of Salvation Romans 10:9-10

Think about the phrase, "Jesus is Lord." It means Jesus is God incarnate, the Son of God dwelling in human flesh, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Notice the words in Romans 10:9-10. Rom. 10:9 says CONFESS first and then BELIEVE. Romans 10:10 says BELIEVE, then CONFESS. Why is that? Because it is possible to say "Jesus is Lord," and not mean it in your heart. But no one is saved by repeating a few words. It is the heart that matters to God because out of the heart flows all the issues of life. First you believe in your heart, then you confess with your mouth. Confession means nothing unless it is backed up by deep heart belief in Jesus Christ.

What Brings Personal Salvation?

1. The Mouth's part is to Confess Romans 10:9

To confess that Jesus is Lord is not a simple acknowledgment that Jesus is God and the Lord of the universe, since even the demons acknowledge that to be true (James 2:19). This is a deep personal conviction and acknowledgment, without reservation, that Jesus is that person's own Master and Sovereign. This phrase includes repenting from sin, trusting in Jesus for salvation, and submitting to Him as Lord. This is the act of the will of submitting to Jesus in faith that He is the only Source of salvation and the only Way to the Father in Heaven.

2. The Heart's part is to Believe Romans 10:10

This is more than just head belief. It means to trust, rely on, to have faith in who Jesus claims to be, the only begotten Son of God, and that the Father has accepted His sacrifice in the place of sinners.

You believe on Jesus when you see your desperate condition and cry out to Him for mercy based on His death and resurrection. You reach out and take God's free gift.

The mouth confesses what the heart believes, and what the heart believes when it believes that God raised Jesus from the dead, is that Jesus is Lord.

Saving faith consists of three elements:

1. Mind: The mind understands the Gospel and the truth about Christ.
2. Emotion: One embraces the truthfulness of the Gospel with sorrow over sin and joy over God's mercy and grace.
3. Will: The sinner submits his will to the Will of Christ and trusts in Him alone as the only Hope of salvation. Genuine faith always produces authentic obedience.

III. The Assurance of Salvation Romans 10:11-13

Look at God's promise in Rom. 10:11. Eugene Peterson (The Message) puts it like this: "No one who trust God like this – heart and soul – will regret it." You will never be disappointed or regret that decision.

Notice Rom. 10:13: "Whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved." Whosoever. It doesn't matter who you are. God opens the doors of Heaven and invites anyone who wants to, to come in.

We must "call" or make our appeal to the Lord to save us in accordance with Who He is and What He has done.

Have you done that?

ISRAEL'S FINAL FUTURE

Romans 11:1-36

Let me remind you that Romans 9, 10, 11 is a picture of the history of the Nation of Israel.

- | | | | | |
|-------------|---|------------------|---|------------------|
| • Romans 9 | – | Israel's Past | – | Chosen by God |
| • Romans 10 | – | Israel's Present | – | Chastised by God |
| • Romans 11 | – | Israel's Future | – | Converted by God |

Israel has had a future ever since the call of Abraham. Israel has had her ups and downs, but God has had a plan and purpose for Israel since Abraham.

Romans 11 presents not just Israel's future, but her final future – showing God's complete fulfillment of His plan for the Nation of Israel.

The theme of Romans 11 is that God is not through with Israel – the people or the land. God promised the people of Israel that He would Never Forsake them and that He would Always Deal with them.

- I Samuel 12:22 “For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great Name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people.”
- Psalm 94:14 “For the Lord will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance.”
- Nehemiah 9:26-31
- Isaiah 54:5-10
- Romans 11:29

God's sovereign election of Israel, like that of individual believers, is unconditional and unchangeable, because it is rooted in His immutable nature and expressed in the unilateral, eternal Abrahamic covenant.

A little over 100 years ago the king of England said to his chaplain, “Give me proof that the Bible is the inspired word of God.” The chaplain replied, “Your Majesty, I can give you proof in one single word that the Bible is the Word of God.” The king looked at him in amazement and said, “What is that word that carries such a weight of proof with it?” The chaplain replied, “Your Majesty, that word is 'Israel.'” And he was right!

I. A Common Error Romans 11:1-6

Down through the years people believed that God had set aside the Nation of Israel and that God replaced Israel with the Church. Not so!

Notice the words “cast away” in Romans 11:1. The words mean to “wad up and throw away.”

God's people have always had enemies, some that God has brought against them because of their sin, but God will never wad them up and throw them away.

Israel's situation is described in four terms: Blindness (verse 7); Stupor (verse 8); Darkness (verse 10); Blindness again (verse 10).

A. Sightlessness of the Nation of Israel Romans 11:7.

The word “blinded” means hardened or calloused. It is a medical term referring to a stone, like a gall stone or kidney stone. So, a blinded person is one who has become hardened – in this case, hardened against God's revelation of Himself through Jesus the Messiah.

The word describes not only the Jews, but Gentiles also in their unbelieving state. When something is like a stone there is no ability to sense or feel at all. That is the way the hardened heart responds to the things of God – without feelings or sensibility.

B. The Stupor of the Nation of Israel Romans 11:7.

The word “stupor” means to be insensitive, drugged or sluggish. It makes you think of someone who has been drugged medically and therefore cannot respond.

There is coming a day when a spirit of stupor will be sent by God again upon those who reject the Gospel before the Rapture of the Church takes place. Following the Rapture, a spirit of stupor will blind them from believing during the Tribulation period – II Thessalonians 2:121-12.

There will be no second chances during the Tribulation for those who rejected the Gospel before the Rapture.

C. The Snare of the Nation of Israel Romans 11:9 (quotes Psalm 69:22)

The feasts and sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 23:6 and Deuteronomy 14:23; 27:7 were, in a sense, a meal in the presence of God.

It was as if the Israelites were actually eating and drinking with Jehovah, their God.

But these religious meals eventually became a snare for Israel. They got so involved in the rituals, the externals of the sacrifice, that they lost the sense of the presence of God. They were going through the motions but it meant nothing to them.

D. The Slavery of the Nation of Israel Romans 11:9

The bowing of the back is obviously a picture of slavery.

It reminds us of the 400 years Israel bowed their backs in Egypt under the heavy loads and whips of the taskmasters.

Or how they bowed their backs under the hobnail boots of their German oppressors.

During the time of the Tribulation in the time of Jacob's Trouble, Israel will once again suffer oppression.

But the day will also come when they shall break free from all their snares – Jeremiah 30:7; Zechariah 12:10.

II. A Clear Explanation Romans 11:11-32

Paul uses one of three symbols of the Nation of Israel found in the Bible.

1. Vine – which symbolizes Israel's Spiritual Privileges.
 Pictures Israel up to the time when the Nation rejected Christ.
2. Fig Tree – which symbolizes Israel's National Privileges.
 Pictures Israel in this age until the Second Coming of Christ.
3. Olive Tree – which symbolizes Israel's Religious Privileges.
 Pictures Israel in a coming age when national and religious privileges of Israel will be restored.

Paul is speaking of Israel's future, when Israel will regain her national and religious privileges.

Let me ask you to mark some words and then I will explain them.

Romans 11:16	Root; Branches
Romans 11:17, 19, 20	Branches broken off
Romans 11:17, 19	Grafted in
Romans 11:17	A wild olive tree
Romans 11:17, 21, 24	Olive tree; natural branches

- The Root (Romans 11:16) of the tree speaks of Abraham, Father of the Jewish people.
- The Olive Tree and natural branches speaks of the Jewish race and people.
- The Wild Olive Tree with its branches speaks of the Gentiles.

The key verse is Romans 11:23; and the key word is the word "Again."

Because of Israel's disobedience the Natural Branches (Jews) were broken off (set aside or removed temporarily because of her failure), and the Gentiles (Branches of the Wild Olive Tree) were in-grafted to the Olive Tree.

But the Jews will be in-grafted "Again" into the Olive Tree – which will take place after the Rapture in the midst of the Tribulation.

Notice Romans 11:25-26.

The word "mystery" refers to something hidden in former times but is now made known; a New Testament truth previously not revealed.

"That you should be wise in your own opinion" is a warning to the Gentiles against spiritual pride and arrogance.

"Blindness in part." The Nation's blindness does not extend to every individual Jew. All through history God has always preserved a believing remnant.

"Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in"

Notice Luke 21:24. The word "until" refers to a specific point in time; "fullness" refers to completion; "has come in" refers to the

salvation of the completed number of Gentiles has come to be saved.

Israel has paid a high price for their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. They have been hated and suffered as no other nation in this world.

- In the Old Testament the Philistines, the Jebusites, the Hittites, the Ammorites hated them.
- In the New Testament the Greeks and Romans hated them.
- Hitler tried to exterminate them, and most nations of the world today hate the Jews and Israel.

The only real friends that Israel has ever had have been those nations in which evangelical Christianity has flourished.

Why do Christian nations support Israel?

1. We support them because God has promised to bless those who bless Israel and to curse those who curse Israel, and evangelical Christians are Bible believing people.

2. Because we are indebted to Israel because it was through them that the Lord Jesus came.

For over 1,900 years there was not a nation called Israel. Then in 1948 the United Nations created a nation called Israel.

Since that time there have been many attempts by their enemies to destroy them and take their country from them. But God has continued to preserve them. Their darkest day has not yet come. During the Tribulation period, Romans 11:26-27 will be literally fulfilled.

God will purify His people so that when Jesus returns in glory and power, the Jews will fall before Him and receive Him as their King, their Messiah, and their Savior.

Zechariah 13:6 "And one will say to Him, 'What are these wounds in your hands?' Then He will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'"

Isaiah 25:8-9 "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Zechariah 12:9-10 "It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."

Zechariah 14:3, 9 "Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations (which gather to do battle against Jerusalem). As He fight in the day of battle ...And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – The Lord is one and His Name one."

III. The Closing Exhalation Romans 11:33-36

Paul closes the chapter and the section on Israel with a thankful doxology:

A. He Praises the Lord for His Greatness Romans 11:33-34

God is all-knowing and all-wise. No one can give God advice.

B. He Praises the Lord for His Grace Romans 11:35

God is not a debtor to anyone. He owes man nothing. We owe Him everything!

Every heartbeat is His grace manifested. So is our home, every lung full of air, our family, our job, our health, our talents. That's why we ought to honor Him and obey Him in everything.

C. He Praises the Lord for His Glory Romans 11:36

Everything in this world exists because the God of Heaven willed it to be here. "All things were created by Him and for Him." The world doesn't revolve around you or me, but around Him.

All glory and praise is due His Name!

GOD'S ALTAR CALL

Romans 12:1

Paul arranges all of the books he wrote with two major sections: Doctrine and Duty. But in the Book of Romans, Paul adds a third section. There is Doctrine (1-8), Dispensation (9-11), and Duty (12-16).

Why did Paul arrange his books that way?

In the Christian life, Doctrine and Duty always go together. What we Believe helps to determine how we Behave. What we Learn must be translated into Living. After Revelation, Responsibility; after Principles, Practice. After Creed comes conduct. It is never enough simply To Know The Truth; at some point we must begin To Live The Truth. We must not simply Embrace The Truth; the truth we believe must at some point Embrace Us.

You see, Christianity is a Person – the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Christianity is a life – His life lived in and through those who have trusted Him as Savior and Lord. That means that His life must be involved in our life 24/7. What we Profess ought to be a part of what we Practice!

Paul has spent considerable time telling us How we are saved, What we are saved from and What salvation has Done for us. In this last section of the Book of Romans, Paul tells us what God expects from us and how we are to achieve His goals for our lives.

Romans 12:1 is God's alter call to every believer. If you have ever watched Billy Graham preach in a stadium, after the message he invites people to come forward at the end of the message to make a public decision for Christ. An alter call simply means to invite people to make a definite personal response to the message they have just heard. When Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren," he is saying, "I Appeal to you."

In Romans 12:1 God's alter call builds upon all that has gone before in Romans 1-11. It calls Christians to a new commitment. It comes as a tender personal appeal. It flows out of the abundant mercy of God. It leads to a total personal transformation. It results in knowing and doing the will of God.

The heart of God's call is "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice" unto Him. God's call is intimate, personal, and inescapable. If we are Christians, we come to this call again and again and again. As Warren Wiersbe puts it, "The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the alter."

I. The Request Romans 12:1

The background of God's alter call of a living sacrifice comes from the worship of the Old Testament where the priest killed bulls and goats and offered them before the Lord. It took all the blood offered in

sacrifice to God over a 1,500 year period, it would be like a river of blood.

But though you had the river of animals' blood before you, not one sin could it forgive. Not one! "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4).

It is right at this point that we discover the difference between Old Testament religion and New Testament Christianity. The entire legal system of the Old Testament was meant to prepare the day when John the Baptist saw Jesus and exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is God's Lamb sent from heaven to earth. All those animals the priest put to death were meant to point directly to Him.

Jesus is God's Lamb offered for our sins and the sins of the world. Out of His death comes our life.

Did anyone bring a goat to church last Sunday or park a bull outside the church? You didn't because now that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, there's no need to do that anymore. The one sacrifice of Christ has paid the full price for our salvation. He did what a river of animal blood could never do. We don't do anything to provide for our salvation. Jesus paid the full and complete price.

What does God appeal for us to do? To present our bodies a living sacrifice unto God. Don't miss Paul's major point. In the Old Testament God wanted dead sacrifices because those dead animals offered on the alter pointed to the dying Son of God who gave

up His life for our sins. But He did not stay dead! On the third day, God's Lamb came back to life, raised from the dead, never to die again.

So now what does God want? Living sacrifices! He wants men and women who have received His divine mercy through Christ, who having themselves been raised from spiritual death, who having drunk deeply at the fountain of grace will now gladly offer themselves as living sacrifices to the Lord.

Note how specific it is – “present your bodies.” Don't skip over that or think that it simply means, “Present ourselves.” The word literally means your physical body. Don't skip over that or think that it simply means, “Present yourselves.” The word literally means your physical body. Present your body to the Lord as a living sacrifice. Someone may ask, “Why would God want my body?” Because if He's got your body, He's got you wherever your body goes, you are sure to follow.

Understand that before we became a Christian, most of the sin that we committed had a whole lot to do with our body. Our body is that part of our flesh that is always craving. That's why drunks have to have alcohol and drug addicts have to have drugs. The flesh cries out to be satisfied and appeased. So, our bodies were responsible for a lot of the sinning we did. So, we must present our bodies to the Lord.

The traditional evangelical invitation is that we give out “HEARTS” to God, our bodies are not mentioned.

But God cares about our body, not just about our soul.

- Psalm 139:13-16 tells us that God formed your body, knitting it together while you were still in the womb.
- I Corinthians 6:19 says our body is the temple is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The same passage says, “Glorify God in your body.”
- One day our body will be raised immortal and incorruptible (I Corinthians 15:53) and our earthly body will be transformed to become like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21). Between now and the day of our resurrection, God intends that the life of Jesus be manifested in our body (2 Corinthians 4:10).
- When we stand before the Lord, we will answer for the deeds done in the body (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- Therefore, we must keep our bodies pure from the defilement of sin (2 Corinthians 7:1) by putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13). This means offering the parts of our body as instruments of righteousness to the Lord (Romans 6:12-13). We should pray that Christ will be honored in our body, whether by life or by death (Philippians 1:20).
- If we do not discipline our body and keep it under control, we can be disqualified from ministry (I Corinthians 9:27).
- We are to control our body in holiness and honor (I Thessalonians 4:4).
- God intends that our body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 5:23).

Your body matters to God. Your salvation is being worked out, not just in your soul or your spirit, but also in your physical body. God has no lips except your lips yielded to Him. He has no eyes except your eyes yielded to Him. He has no ears except your ears yielded to Him. He has no hands except your hands yielded to Him. He has no feet except your feet offered to Him.

What we do with our body matters to God. This is the practical side of Christianity.

“Presenting our bodies” is an act of the will. We choose to present our bodies unto the Lord. It is a conscious commitment that we are aware of when we do it.

“Present” means “to place at one's disposal.” We no longer hold anything back from God, but place our all on His altar and to be at His disposal. It is Total surrender and submission to God. It is a one-time and an all-time commitment.

II. The Reason Romans 12:1

Why should we present our bodies to the Lord?

A. To Thank the Lord for what He has done for us: “By the mercies of God.”

We were lost sinners; on our way to hell, and deserving to go because we were guilty and condemned before God.

But look what God's mercies did for us:

While we were yet sinners, God commended His love toward us and so demonstrated His love by allowing His Son to die on the cross for us.

There is now no condemnation to us because we are in Christ Jesus. He bought us at Calvary and we belong to Him. By His grace we are saved.

B. Because we want to Please the Lord.

The word "Acceptable" means well-pleasing, satisfying. God is pleased when a living sacrifice is on the altar of His service and for His glory.

It honors Him like nothing else can. It tells a lost world that God makes a difference in the lives He touches by His power. We are either pleasing God or hurting Him by the way we use our bodies. If we want to please Him, our bodies must be placed on His altar, without reservation or hesitation.

C. It is one way we Worship the Lord.

The words "reasonable service" literally means "our spiritual worship." Worship means to bow down or to bow low and surrender our life to the Lord. It is reasonable, logical, sensible, credible.

Every day is a worship experience when our body is yielded to Him.

I Corinthians 6:19-20.

III. The Requirement Romans 12:1

A. It is to be Presented Willfully.

God doesn't "make" you present your body to Him. God doesn't hold a gun to your head or twist your arm to get you to present yourself to Him. A Christian can live in the flesh if that's what they want to do, but I want to tell you, that's a terrible way to live. It's a disappointing way for you to live. It's a discouraging way for you to live in the presence of God.

B. It is to be done as a Living Sacrifice.

"Presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice" sounds like an oxymoron. An oxymoron is putting two things together that don't belong together. For example: jumbo shrimp or Icy Hot.

A living Sacrifice. Something living is alive; but something sacrificed is dead. We are to be alive and dead at the same time! How can that be?

Galatians 2:20

"A living sacrifice" sounds dreadfully painful to us, because we know that a sacrifice, in Bible times, was an animal that belonged to the person offering it and that the animal was put to death, its blood was shed and its flesh was burned on an altar. That doesn't sound like something I want to be involved in. The difference between what the Lord is calling us to do and what He called those people in the Old Testament to do is this: Their sacrifice was to die. Our sacrifice is to live!

While that is true, there are also some similarities between our sacrifice and theirs. Now, just as then, the sacrifice the Lord is commanding each of us to make is Costly, Painful, Difficult, Personal, and Necessary. Basically, God is commanding every one of His people to lay the totality of their persons on the altar of sacrifice. But at the same time, this sacrifice must continue to function in the world around it.

A living sacrifice means that we are to be on the altar wherever we are. This body and all it is belongs to God.

A living sacrifice means a constant, continuous sacrifice. This is not something we do from time to time. We are to offer this body up to the Lord and never ask for it back again.

A living sacrifice means that the body sacrifices its own desires for those of God. Our bodies are not to live for the world, the flesh, or the devil, but that everything the body does is held to the guidelines of the Word of God.

A living sacrifice means that the body is devoted to the task of serving God. Every action and activity that the body engages in is an activity that glorifies and honors God. God must be in absolute control of our will, our emotions, our passions, our deeds, and our thoughts. All rights are released and the body is delivered to God to do with as it pleases Him.

Presenting our body as a living sacrifice means taking all that you have and placing it at the disposal of the King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the only sensible thing to do. It is an act of spiritual worship.

It is to be a “holy” sacrifice or something that is consecrated and set apart.

It is to be an acceptable or well-pleasing and satisfying sacrifice.

If we want to be pleasing to the Lord, then our bodies must be placed on His alter without reservation or hesitation.

Presenting our body to God is an act of spiritual worship. God wants worshipers who will seek Him, trust Him, follow Him, believe Him, risk all for Him and who will count it all joy and not loss to serve Him every day.

As I end this sermon on “God's Altar Call,” I want to end with a hymn of invitation:

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands and let them move, at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be, swift and beautiful for Thee;
Take my voice and let me sing, Always, only for my King.

Take my lips and let them be, Filled with messages from Thee;
Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in endless praise;
Take my intellect and use Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine, It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store;
Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

LIVING A TRANSFORMED LIFE

Romans 12:2

Romans 12:1-2 could rightly be called “God's Altar Call for the Saints.”

In Romans 12:1 Paul urges God's people to “present” or “yield” our “Bodies” a living sacrifice unto the Lord. The only way we can do that is to allow Jesus to live His live through us.

In Romans 12:2 Paul moves from dealing with the “Body” to dealing with the “Mind.” Here is the root of all our problems anyway. When we can get the mind to think as it should, then the body will obediently follow along. Two steps must be taken:

I. Don't Be Conformed to this World

The word form implies that Paul's readers were already allowing this to happen. Paul says that they must stop doing so – now!

What exactly does Paul mean when he says that we are “not to be conformed to this world?” Other translations bring out various shades of meaning.

- “Do not act like the sinful people of the world” (New Life).
- “Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking” (Amplified).

- “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world” (Living Bible).
- “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold” (J. B. Phillips).

That means that I must resist every attempt and pressure of this world to be pressured or squeezed into the world's mold.

This world tells us how we are to think, how we are to behave, how we are to live, what our value system is to be, and what standards we are to have. The problem is that the values and standards of the world fall far short of the standards that God has set for His people.

As a Christian, we are constantly swimming up-stream with the current of the world rushing against us. Don't be surprised and don't give in and don't get swept away when the world's pressures come against us.

When Paul says that we are not be conformed to this world, he is not saying that we should just avoid certain external things. I've heard preachers apply this verse to what they called the “big four” sins of drinking, smoking, dancing, and playing cards. Now, I don't think these are good, but I don't think that's what Paul is talking about. Others have said that it refers to things like women wearing lipstick, or men wearing long hair, or woman wearing mini-skirts and short-shorts, or listening to certain kinds of music, or going to the movie theater.

Sometimes the list of “don'ts” become so long that a Christian is defined by what he doesn't do. Christianity cannot be reduced to a set of rules.

Nor does Paul mean that we are to withdraw from the world around us and have nothing to do with it at all. Paul is not leading us into some monastery or some isolated cave in the desert or to run and hide somewhere.

Two words unlock the meaning of the word “world.” One word is “kosmos.” This word refers to this planet and the things made by our Creator God. He's not talking about physical things. He is not saying that we are not to enjoy the creation God has made. In fact, I Timothy 6:17 says that God “richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
 All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
 This is my Father's world; I rest me in the thought
 Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
 His hand the wonders wrought.
 This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise,
 The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise.
 This is my Father's world; He shines in all that's fair;
 In the rustling grass I hear Him pass
 He speaks to me everywhere.

So what world is Paul warning us about? The word Paul uses is the word “aion,” usually translated “age.” It is this present age of sinful darkness. It is the same word used in I John 2:15-17 that warns us against loving the world and refers to the organized system of life that leaves God out.

We are not to let this present sinful age that is opposed to God to influence us and to make us like it is.

The word “conformed” carries the idea of a “scheme” or a “trap.” It is like one of those e-mail scams or what we call “spam.” Since the devil is the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4), we should not be surprised that he would set traps for us on every hand. We should expect it.

A. T. Robertson offers this version, “Do not take the world as your fashion plate.”

The essence of worldliness is to live as if this age will last forever; that this world is the only world there is or ever will be; that this life is the only life there is so do whatever you want, indulge yourself, throw aside all restraints. Live as if tomorrow will never come.

But the Bible says that the world is passing away and all that is in it.

II. Be Transformed by the Renewing of your Mind

We can be transformed when our minds are renewed. How does that happen?

The word “transformed” or “transfigured” comes from the word “metamorphosis.” It is the same word used for the transfiguration of Christ when the true glory of Christ began to shine through His humanity (Mark 9:2-3).

The word means to be changed or transformed from one thing to another. It means a gradual change on the inside that produces a total transformation on the outside; to change from one thing to another. Think of it this way. When Jesus was transfigured, He did not cease to be Jesus. He was still who He had been moments before, but for a brief time, the curtain was pulled back, so to speak, and James, Peter and John saw as much of the true divinity of Christ as any man can see and still live. In that moment they saw the “real Jesus,” the true Son of God from heaven. He did not cease to be a man, but His true identity was revealed to them as “true God of true God.”

When a caterpillar enters the cocoon, only to emerge later as a butterfly, that caterpillar's basic nature is not changed. Metamorphosis reveals what was always there in the genes of the caterpillar. Caterpillars can't fly, but they were born to fly. When the caterpillar has been changed into a butterfly, it become what God always intended it to be.

Notice 2 Corinthians 3:18. Outside of the accounts of Christ's transfiguration and Romans 12:2, this is the only other place in the New Testament where this particular Greek word is used. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” Note that we are “being transformed” into the image of Christ. Being transformed into the image of Christ is the logical outcome of having the “mind of Christ.” Since we have the mind of Christ, we have the ability from God to estimate the true value of things.

We are not to allow the world to make us like it is (to squeeze us into its mold). You see, the world, and those who are controlled by its influence, are vastly different from that which God intends men to be. Galatians 5:19-21 gives a list of some of the works of the flesh.

God wants to transform our mind so that our flesh might be changed. What we must remember is that this flesh will do what the mind tells it to do. It is only when the mind is changed and brought under the power of God that the flesh can be brought under control.

How is this accomplished?

- By surrendering to the will of God.
- By filling our mind with the Word of God.
- By ordering our life after the teachings and command of God.
- By cutting our self off from the influence of the world and by allowing the Spirit of God to control our mind.

Then we will be able to “discern” the mind of Christ.

Paul describes the will of God this way:

1. It is Precious: It is good for us. God will never ask us to do anything that is not for our eternal good.
2. It is Pleasant: When His will is revealed to us, it is something that we are made willing to do.
3. It is Perfect: Nothing we could add to God's plan would improve it. God knows the path we will take and He knows the obstacles and valleys we will pass through as we go. He knows where the provisions are that He has already placed along the way. His plan cannot be improved upon, but it must be followed for there to be victory and blessing. We can be in no better place than the perfect will of God for our lives!

The secret of living a holy life boils down to God having control of our minds, our bodies, and our wills. Does that describe your life? Is God in absolute control of all you have and are?

THE AGAPE FACTOR: LOVING THE BRETHREN BY GRACE Romans 12:9-21

If we are full of God's love, it will overflow to others.

At first glance, Romans 12:9-21 seems to be an unconnected, miscellaneous exhortation, but a closer examination reveals that these verses flesh out what love looks like in the Christian life.

The theme of the passage is not hard to find: Love must govern all our relationships. This is Paul's recipe for love. Paul gives us 25 directives as how to love one another.

These are social actions that make us a pleasure to live with.

1. Love must be Sincere Romans 12:9a

The words “without dissimulation (KJV) means “without hypocrisy.” Let love be genuine; not phony or worked up. “Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it” (Peterson, The Message). Be honest in your love one to another, with no pretense.

After all, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us” (Romans 5:5). “Don't fake love for others in public, but have real love one toward another. Allow God's love to flow through you to others.”

2. Love must be Discerning Romans 12:9b

“Abhor” means to treat as if it were a contagious disease. We are not to love everything. Love hates evil! Love doesn't mean we lose our sense of right and wrong. We cannot love evil and love God at the same time. God's love rejects evil, but His love clings to good; God's love sticks like glue to that which is good.

Don't ever get over being shocked by evil. That's hard to do in a world where almost anything goes. Here is a good test. When was the last time you blushed? Things we use to blush over, we hardly notice any more, or we laugh at it.

Sometimes we say, “Love is blind.” God says, “No, love needs clear vision.” Our love needs discernment, or else we will end up loving things we ought not to love.

3. Love must Display Tender Affection Romans 12:10a

Real love gets involved. It doesn't just say, “I love you.” It is willing to get down to where the person who needs help is; it gets down to where the person is and helps them.

The words, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” means “to love warmly.” It's easy to love some of the Christian brethren warmly, but what about some who are obnoxious or those who have hurt you?

To dwell above with saints that we love,
That will be glory.
To dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

Sometimes it's difficult to dwell below with some saints, but it can be done. Let Christ love even those through us.

4. Love must Honor Others Romans 12:10b

“In honor preferring one another” actually has a sense of competition about it. The actual translation is “outdo one another in showing honor.” It means that we are to take affirmative action to make sure that others receive preferential treatment before we do. This obviously goes so much against our human nature that it is not possible without the infusion of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts.

5. Love must be Enthusiastic Romans 12:11

The word “business” doesn't refer to the world's business, but to the business of God or to the things of God. Don't hesitate about doing the business of God, but do God's business with zeal, be aglow and burning with the Spirit. The world will never be impressed with half-hearted disciples who “sort of” serve the Lord. Get and stay fired up and glowing for Jesus. A fervent spirit is contagious.

6. Love must be Patient Romans 12:12

Behind these three phrases lies the hope of our Lord's return. While we wait for Jesus to return from heaven, we must be patient in hard times, constantly praying, and rejoicing in the hope of better days to come. As someone put it, “Chin up and knees down.”

Being patient doesn't mean sitting passively and twiddling our thumbs, waiting for Jesus to come. In the Bible, patience is active trust in God, to believe whatever the pain and problems, all of it in the end is going to work out for our good and God's glory.

7. Love must be Generous Romans 12:13a

While we are to be kind to all people, this verse focuses on our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to have a genuine concern for

our brothers and sisters in Christ, and that deep concern causes us to act on their behalf (1 John 3:16-17). It also means we are to support God's work around the world.

8. Love must Pursue Hospitality Romans 12:13b

The word "hospitality" means to open a home, showing kindness to strangers. There were not many hotels in Paul's day and the few they did have were ill-kept and dangerous. They were little more than brothels and havens for robbers. The only way the Christian message could spread would be for Christians to open their homes to others.

There is something special about opening your home to someone. There is something about sitting around the kitchen table which enables you to get to know someone on an intimate level. Jesus loved hospitality. He was always sitting around the table, fellowshiping over a meal with someone. Jesus was a people-person and we ought to be too.

II. Grace Attitudes Toward Both Believers and Unbelievers Romans 12:14-21

There's a mood change here. Romans 12:9-13 deals basically with loving those in the family of God. Romans 12:14-21 deals with the love of Christ in us toward those who are not in the family of God.

1. Love must Be Kind Romans 12:14

People are going to hurt us. They will be hostile toward us, treat us mean, misunderstand us, lie about us, gossip about us and hurt us deeply which will leave scars that will last for a lifetime. Sooner or later people we love and trust will let us down and some will turn on us.

I heard about a little girl who wrote the following letter to her pastor. She wrote: "Dear Pastor, I heard you say to love our enemies. I am only six years old and I do not have any yet. I hope to have some when I am seven. Your friend, Amy."

Paul give us a positive and a negative response to those who persecute us.

The Positive Response: "Bless them."

The word means "to speak well of them; to speak a good word to them." We cannot do that in our own power. It must be done in the power of the Spirit.

The Negative Response: "and curse not" Matthew 5:43-45

In a sermon, D. L. Moody pictures the Lord Jesus after His resurrection, giving directions to Peter. The Lord said to him, "Go, find the man who thrust his spear into my side and tell him there's a much quicker way to my heart. Go, find the man who crowned me with thorns and tell him I would like to give him a crown of life." That is the true Spirit of Christianity.

2. Love must Show Sympathy Romans 12:15

Love gets involved. It doesn't stand stoically on the sidelines while others go through a hard time. We ought "to feel with one another." You may think it's easier to rejoice with people when they are rejoicing, because the motto of the world is, "laugh and the whole world laughs with you, but cry and you cry alone."

But think for a moment. Sometimes it's harder to rejoice with those who rejoice.

Here's a person who is rejoicing because something good has happened to them. Human nature says, "I'm not going to rejoice with you. I'm going to resent you. I'm going to be envious of you. I'm going to be jealous because you had something good happen to you and I didn't."

We ought to love someone enough to rejoice with them when something good happens to them and share their pain and sorrow when something causes them to weep.

3. Love must Live in Harmony Romans 12:16a

"Be of the same mind one toward another" could be translated, "Live in harmony with one another." Disagreements come even among believers. The important thing is, how do we react to those disagreements. Some react like children: "If I don't get my way, I'll take my toys and go home. I'll show them. I'll just quit giving to the church."

We are to have the mind of Christ – Philippians 2:5

4. Love must Show Humility Romans 12:16b

Don't be a spiritual snob. Don't get the big head. Don't think you're too good to hang out with people who are not in your social class. Don't think I'm better than somebody else or think, "I don't want that kind of people coming to our church."

The ground is level at the cross. We are all sinners saved by grace. Jesus was a true "friend of sinners" who welcomed everyone who wanted to be with Him.

5. Love Demonstrates Peace Among All Romans 12:17-18

Don't allow yourself to seek revenge or to repay evil for evil. Don't try to get even. "You can't sling mud without getting dirty yourself."

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. Don't give people a reason to treat you unkindly. This has many practical applications. It touches the way we treat others in public, things like common courtesy, having a cheerful heart, not being a trouble maker, not being grumpy or a constant complainer.

Live in such a way that no one can make an honest accusation against you. Live so that if someone is going to accuse you, they will have to tell a lie to do it.

Paul says we are to live peaceably – if possible, and as much as it depends on you. Sometimes despite our best efforts, some folks just tend to rub folks the wrong way.

Note that little phrase: "As far as it depends on you." The only person you can control is you. Do you remember the saying, "It takes two to tango?" I think we could rephrase that, "It takes two to TANGLE." If you refuse to tangle, at least you can't be blamed for causing the problem. You can't control other people or how they respond to you, but you can create an environment that makes it less likely for them to blow up.

We ought to at least offer peace. Go the extra mile. Offer the apology first.

Never create enemies from your disposition. Don't have a mean, angry, or hateful disposition. Some folks seem to always be looking for a fight. Our disposition must stay sweet and loving, but we must never compromise our convictions.

6. Love Does Not Seek Revenge Romans 12:19-21

It was John Kennedy who said, "Don't get mad, get even." That represents the wisdom of the world, and that's the way most folks operate.

By contrast, Let God handle the revenge. God is responsible for vengeance; not us.

As long as you try to get even, you're still living in the past. It may have happened years ago, but you are still stewing about it. And the hidden tormentors will continue to do their dirty work inside your soul.

7. Love Seeks Reconciliation Romans 12:20-21

What do you do when there is conflict and offenses between you and someone else? Some say, "Do the Christian thing and kill them with kindness." Let me say it another way: "Shower them with kindness." Do the unexpected.

Notice Romans 12:20b: "Yes, that's what I want to see. I want to see them shake like crazy. I want them to suffer." Proverbs 24:17.

No, what kindness does is that it lets them burn with shame. The goal is not to BURN them, but to BLESS them.

Let me tell you a little true story. I love this story. It occurred in the Great Depression in America. There was a certain man by the name of Judd Brewster who was a mean, hateful man. Nobody liked him. There was a family named Jansen who lost their farm and all their possessions during the Depression. They heard of a sharecropping farm they could work. The only problem was, the property adjoined the property of Judd Brewster, this mean man. Everybody in the area said, "Oh no, you don't want that farm, because you would have to live next to Judd Brewster, one of the meanest men on the planet earth." Mr. Jansen said, "I tell you what, if this Judd Brewster gives me any trouble, I'll just kill him." That is what he said.

So they moved in and started working this sharecropping farm. One day, their chickens got loose and got over in Judd Brewster's

yard, and Brewster came stomping over to the Jansen's house, pounding on the door, "Get those chickens out of my yard!

If you don't, you won't see them again!" So, they ran over there, and got the chickens and put them in a hen-house and locked the hen-house.

A couple of weeks later, Jansen's pigs got loose and got into Judd Brewster's garden. Once again Judd Brewster came storming up to the front door, pounding on the front door. He said, "Jansen, your pigs got in my garden. But they'll never get in my garden again. Here they are." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and there in the wagon that he had ridden up in was a pile of dead pigs. He had shot every one of the Jansen's pigs. Jansen didn't do anything except bury his pigs.

One day several months after that, one of Jansen's sons came running in saying, "Dad! Dad! Get your gun, get your gun quick, because Brewster's pigs are in our garden!" Already he could taste the sweet flavor of revenge. Jansen said, "No, we're not going to kill them. Boys, round them up. Load those pigs in the wagon."

You know, it's a whole lot easier to load dead pigs in a wagon than it is living pigs. But after a lot of work, that's what they did. They rounded them up and put them in the wagon. He pulled the wagon over to Brewster's property. He walked up to the front door, knocked on the door and Brewster came to the door. "What do you want?!"

He said, "Brewster, your pigs got in my garden today." And all the color just drained out of Brewster's face, because times were hard and nobody could afford to lose their livestock. Jansen said, "What do you want me to do with them? I brought them back." Brewster, knowing he killed them, said, "Pile them behind the barn. I'll take care of it later." Jansen said, "Well, I can't do that. If I put them behind the barn they'll just get loose again." And Brewster realized this man was showing kindness toward him.

That very afternoon, they had a long conversation. When Jansen left, Brewster had given him half of his pigs. And the next Sunday, for the first time in as long as anybody could ever remember in those parts, Judd Brewster was in church. And he became a Christian. Someone asked Jansen, "What did you mean when you said you were going to kill him if he gave you any trouble?" He said, "That's what I did. I killed him. I killed him with kindness, because that old mean neighbor we used to have is no more."

You say, "That's a pretty good little story, where did you hear it?" To me, this is the best part. It was told by Judd Brewster's grandson, who is now a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I think mainly because somebody was willing to obey this passage of Scripture and show kindness when they had been insulted.

III. Be Pleasant Romans 12:21

Don't be the kind of person who is always looking for something to be upset about.

There are people like that. They love nothing better than for someone to offend them so they will have an excuse for their bitter attitude.

Be a pleasant person by being Christlike in every situation.

We have no control over how we are treated by others, but we have absolute control over how we respond to them.

Be pleasant and the Lord will bless your life!

These are high standards, but our reactions reveal our true spirituality.

Some say Christianity has failed. It would be more correct to say it has never been tried.

THE CHRISTIAN AND GOVERNMENT

Romans 13:1-7

After discussing the Believer's Function in the Body of Christ in Chapter 12, Paul opens Chapter 13 addressing the Believer's Function in Society. What role do we as believers have in the society in which we live?

God has established only three divinely ordained institutions: the family (Genesis 2), the government (Genesis 9), and the Church (Acts 2). In each of them, there are levels of submission and authority. Romans 13 is the central New Testament passage regarding

how Christians should relate to human government.

I realize that government may not sound like a very spiritual thing, but understand, that everything we do as Christians is spiritual because, while we are citizens of the earth, we are at the same time citizens of Heaven. We live in a secular world and we live in a spiritual world, and we cannot dissect the two. In a real sense we cannot separate Church and state.

What is our responsibility as Christians toward the government? Jesus answers that question in Matthew 22:17-21. We are to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

Paul tells us three things in these verses about human government:

I. Human Government Is Ordained by God Romans 13:1-2

Paul defines government with that little phrase, "higher powers" (KJV) or "governing authorities" (NKJV). These "higher governing authorities" are ordained by God.

Notice that it is a universal authority: "Let EVERY soul be subject to the higher powers."

An "authority" is anyone who has the right to make decisions that directly affect your life. In the broadest sense, all of us live in two relationships at the same time. We have authority in certain areas and we are under authority in other areas.

- You may be a husband and thus the head of your home, but at work you are under the authority of your boss.
- You may be a teacher and thus the authority in your classroom, but you are under the authority of your principle who is under the authority of the school board.
- You may work in an office where certain people report to you while at the same time you report to someone over you.
- Thus, you are "in authority" and "under authority" at the same time.

Then Paul says, "Be subject to the governing authorities." No ifs, ands, or buts about it. Just the word "submit." The word "submit" is used over fifty times in the New Testament. The word "submit" means "to voluntarily take one's place in following the direction of those in authority over you." It speaks of taking one's place in God's order of things.

God is a God of order and God operates an orderly universe. If we as believers resist in any way civil authority, we upset God's order and God's plan.

Our God is a sovereign God. He is in total control. It is God who puts governmental leaders in place and it is also God who removes them from leadership.

- Daniel 2:20-21: "Blessed be the Name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding."

- Daniel 4:17, 35: "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men ...No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, what have you done?"

Let me give you some examples of God working behind the scenes, orchestrating events of history so everything will happen the way He wants it to happen.

Why do you think Caesar Augustus declared a census to be taken so everyone could be taxed? I'll tell you why. God needed a way to get Joseph and Mary out of Nazareth and into Bethlehem, the home of their ancestor. The Bible predicted the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem; not in Nazareth. It was predicted 500 years before it happened. Who gave Caesar Augustus the idea to have everyone go to his hometown to be taxed at just the perfect time? God was behind it all.

Who was on the throne when Paul wrote the Book of Romans? A wicked ruler named Nero, who hated Christians, had then rounded up, dipped in tallow, tied to the stakes, and burned like candles in his garden. Paul says to submit to them.

The most important thing is the attitude of our heart. We submit to the one in authority in the sense that we believe that God has put that person in our life for a purpose and that God's will is somehow being done through that person even if we don't see it or understand it. God stands behind the ballot box and behind the armies that march and the navies that sail. He is the Unseen Hand at work in the nations of the world.

That means that George Washington came to power by the hand of God. So did Abe Lincoln, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Does that mean that God ordained Adolf Hitler to come into power? What does history tell us? The nation of Israel would never have been born had not world sentiment, for a short period of time, been sympathetic toward the Jews because of Hitler's atrocities.

As World War II came to a close, newsreels showed the bodies of Jews being bulldozed into ditches, the mounds of glasses, false teeth, and shoes producing horror in the heart of humanity.

And so it was, that although it went right down to the wire, the League of Nations voted in favor of the establishment of the nation of Israel.

Our Lord knows where we are on the prophetic calendar. He knows exactly what time it is. He is lining up certain events that will fulfill prophecy, usher in our Lord's coming, and establish His kingdom. He is in total control.

That's why I don't lose sleep over the political situation. While I pray for those in authority and while I want to see salt and light have an effect in our society, I know all power is ordained by Him.

The word "damnation" in Romans 13:2 means "the proper judgment." Is there ever a time when we are NOT to obey governmental authority?

Civil disobedience is right when there is clear conflict between man's law and God's Law. Obey God rather than man on the rare occasions it happens, BUT we must be willing to face the consequences of civil disobedience.

1. Pharaoh issued the edict to slaughter all the Hebrew boy babies at birth. But some brave midwives and mothers committed civil disobedience and let the baby boys live. Moses was one of them.

2. King Darius issued a law stating that for 30 days prayer could not be made to anyone but Darius. Daniel disobeyed and was thrown into the den of lions.

3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow down and worship the statue and they were thrown into the fiery furnace.

Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate asked Him all kinds of questions and Jesus didn't answer him. He was like a lamb, dumb before His shearers. Finally, Pilate said, "Don't you know I have the power to kill you or let you live?" Jesus said, "You don't have any power except the power given to you from above."

II. Human Government Authorities are Ministers of God Romans 13:3-4

Twice in these two verses we are told that the government is the minister or servant of God to carry out His purpose. What is God's purpose for the servants in government?

A. To Protect Romans 13:3

God ordained for government authorities to restrain evil and protect the righteous. Think what would happen in our communities if there were no governmental authority or policemen. What if there were no laws or courts or jails or policemen with guns?

If you do what is right, you don't have to be afraid of the powers. It's when you do evil that you need to be afraid. If you obey the speed limit, you don't have to be afraid of the blue light special behind you.

B. To Punish Romans 13:4

While law enforcement officers are ministers of God for good for the protection of good men, they are also ministers of God for vengeance against those who do evil.

Understand this: The foundation of the institution of government in Genesis 9 is singularly based on capital punishment. God says that capital punishment WILL be a deterrent to crime.

Liberal lawmakers want to do away with capital punishment. They cite things like the law is not infallible and it is possible for a mistake to be made and an innocent man be executed in error, or that most serious offenses are committed by those suffering from mental illness or because they are poor or unfortunate. Yet, the basic issue is the sacredness of human life in the sight of God. God's divine decree has never been rescinded.

III. Human Government is to be Respected By God's People Romans 13:5-7

A. Christians must Obey and Respect those in Authority Romans 13:5

Christians should obey government authorities – not mainly because they will be punished if they don't, but out of a sense of obligation to God and to keep a clear conscience before God. We know it is the right thing to do.

B. Christians are to Pay their Taxes Romans 13:6

Christians are to be good citizens and that includes paying our taxes, because they are “due.” Our taxes are used on our behalf, to keep us safe and to benefit us.

C. Christians are to Honor those in Authority Over Us Romans 13:7

God commands that we show sincere respect and an attitude of genuine high esteem for all public officials. Policemen are not “pigs.” They are ministers ordained of God.

GOD'S MEDICINE FOR A SICK WORLD

Romans 13:8-10

“Love is the medicine for the sickness of the world.” So said noted psychiatrist Dr. Karl Meninger. He summarized his therapeutic approach this way: “Love cures. It cures those who give it and it cures those who receive it.”

Love truly is good medicine. It has been said that the three most powerful words in the English language are “I love you.” Such is the power of love. I know that our society sometimes confuses love with sex or with gifts. But even with all our counterfeits, and even with all the misunderstanding, and even in spite of the abuses committed in the name of love, it is still true that “what the world needs now is love, sweet love.” And not just the word “love,” we need the real thing. We need to see love and to hear it and to feel it and to experience it in our lives. And we need to know how to pass it on to others.

Three times in Romans 13:8-10 Paul speaks of our need to love others. Everything he says is based on one of the most familiar statements in the Bible: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). This, Paul says, is the fulfillment of all that God asks of us. Love your neighbor as you love yourself, and you will have fulfilled the Law of God.

Let's consider three simple statements about love.

I. Love is an Unpaid Debt Romans 13:8a

This phrase contains a negative command and a positive exception. The negative commandment is “Owe no one anything.” That takes us back to Paul's words in Romans 13:7. Christians must pay their debts, whether those debts are tangible or intangible.

Does this mean we should not borrow money? Does it mean we are to never buy anything on credit or on the installment plan? The answer is “No.” The Bible never forbids borrowing. It is a warning not to get so in debt that we will not be able to pay our debts. “Don't get over you head in regards to debt.” It also warns that the borrower becomes a servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7) and it repeatedly reminds us that excessive debt leads to shame and sometimes to crime.

Two rules should guide our thinking in this area:

1. Don't borrow more money than you can honestly repay.
2. Pay what you owe when you owe it.

For instance, if your house payment is due on the 15th and you pay it on or before that date, you have obeyed this commandment of Scripture. However, believers who consistently pay their bills late give themselves and the Lord a bad reputation. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is get out of debt. It's a matter of integrity and financial responsibility.

Then there is the positive exception: “Owe no one anything, EXCEPT to love each other.” Love is the one debt we can never repay. We are to love our fellow man in Jesus' name. We are to be an ambassador of God's love.

There is another, more pointed way of saying it. When faced with a difficult situation, we can never say, “I've loved that person enough. I'm going to stop now.” We live in a fallen world, we will often find ourselves surrounded by irritable, cranky, annoying, crabby, unreasonable, cantankerous people. And that's on a good day!

Sometimes people will say foolish things or do things to deliberately irritate us. And let's face it, some people are just very hard to love. We all know people who seem to have the "spiritual gift of irritation." They know how to get under our skin, how to "get on our one last nerve," how to make us edgy, flustered, and upset. But Paul says we can never give up on people who drive us nuts. You can never stop loving the mean-spirited people in your life.

II. Love Fulfills the Law

Romans 13:8b-9

Love is the fulfillment of the Law. When we truly love as God loves, we will keep the Ten Commandments. People sometimes shy away from the Law as if it were somehow in conflict with God's grace. But grace, rightly understood, leads us back to the great principles that stand behind the Ten Commandments: honesty, fidelity, truthfulness, contentment, and kindness.

All the "Thou shalt nots" ultimately flow from love. If you love your neighbor, you won't sleep with his wife. If you love him, you won't kill him. If you love him, you won't steal his money or his good name. And if you love him, you won't begrudge him his prosperity or get angry because you have less than he does.

Love leads us back to the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). He who loves fulfills God's Law because love always seeks the highest good of the one loved – which is what the Ten Commandments were meant to teach us in the first place.

III. Love Does Not Harm Others

Romans 13:10

Who is my neighbor? That's a good question. And it's not the first time someone has wondered about that. Jesus answered that question when someone asked Him that same question (Luke 10:25-37). He told them the story of the Good Samaritan.

Think of all this Samaritan did for a man he had never met, who was probably a Jew, and who, for all he knew, would not have done the same for him. It's not as if the man on the road "deserved" help. He didn't, but he sure needed help. The Samaritan owed him nothing. But he stopped anyway. That's what love does.

As Jesus told the story, He emphasized that all three men "happened" upon the man by the side of the road. No one planned on seeing him. No one got up that day and said, "I wonder if I'll have a chance to be merciful today." It happened by chance. That's the way it always is. It happens as we travel down the road of life, turn the corner and there before us we see a man beaten, stripped, bloody, and unconscious. He didn't plan to be there, and he didn't plan to see him.

What will we do? Will we show mercy? The priest was there. The Levite was there. The Samaritan was there. All "happened" to pass by. One man, the least likely, stopped to help.

Note the final words of Jesus to this curious lawyer: "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

The real question is not, "Who is my neighbor?," but, "What kind of neighbor will I be?"

That man is all around us. He is young, old, male, female, rich, poor, white, black, a child, a beggar, a divorcee, a cancer victim, a single parent, a lonely widow. God has put him in my path. I cannot avoid him. What will I do? Will I walk by or will I reach out to him?

IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP!

Romans 13:11-14

What time is it? Paul uses terms of haste and urgency! It's time to wake up – spiritually. He is not talking about literal slumber or sleep, of course. He's talking about waking up from spiritual slumber and hearing God's alarm to wake up.

Why? Because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. Paul challenges his readers to "know or understand the present time." The word "time" refers to a "season of time." This whole verse has to do with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people.

The idea here is that the believer is to keep his eyes on the changing world around him and understand that the coming of the Lord is near. All one has to do is cross-reference the daily news with the Word of God to see that His coming is near.

Matthew 24:42-44: "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the

house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

The word “salvation” is used in a spiritual sense in at least three tenses:

1. There is a Past Tense when we were saved from the Penalty of sin. “The wages of sin is death.” Not just physical death, but also spiritual death and eternal death and separation from God in hell forever and ever. We call this Justification.

2. Then, there is a Present Tense salvation when we are being saved from the Power of sin. That doesn't mean we will be sinlessly perfect in this life. Dr. Vance Havner use to say the only way to live above sin is to rent a room above a pool hall. As long as we live in this body of flesh, we have to struggle with the sin nature. Being saved from the Power of sin is called Sanctification.

3. There is a Future Tense of salvation where we shall be saved from the very Presence of sin. We call that Glorification.

Our future salvation is drawing near. It's nearer than it was when we first believed. Every day it gets a day nearer. But our future salvation is always associated with the coming of our Lord. We will be saved from the presence of sin – when Jesus comes back or when we go to heaven, whichever comes first. When Jesus comes back, we won't have to worry about sin any longer.

In light of the return of Christ and the lateness of the hour, how should we then live? Our text suggests four answers to that question.

I. Wake up From Spiritual Apathy Romans 13:11

God's alarm clock is going off. Do you hear it? The words “high time” means that a specific hour has arrived.

What does it mean to be spiritually asleep? What does it mean to be in a state of apathy?

According to the dictionary, sleep is “a state of inactivity with a loss of consciousness and a decrease in responsiveness to the events taking place around you.”

- To be spiritually asleep means you are just totally unconscious of the activity of God in this world and in His Church.
- Sometime people are so content spiritually they hang a “Do Not Disturb” sign around their necks.

What is spiritual apathy? It's when you don't care about what's going on in the world or in the Church. You're content to leave things as they are.

Paul wanted us to be aware of where we are in relation to prophecy. Prophetic Flashing Lights are going off all around us and we seem to have our eyes and ears closed to the fulfillment of prophetic events going on all around us. Since Satan knows his time is short, he is pulling out all the stops in our day.

II. Wise Up to the Time Romans 13:12

Do you know what time it is according to God's clock?

Let me give you three sure signs that our Lord's coming is at hand:

1. In 1948 Israel became a nation again.
2. In 1967 Israel regained control of Jerusalem and Jews from all over the world began to return to their homeland.
3. Today, the Jews are working to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

III. Clean Up From Your Deeds of Darkness Romans 13:13

Paul mentions three pairs of unacceptable behavior:

A. Public Sins: Rioting and Drunkenness

1. Rioting - Revelry – Orgies

This word refers to parties of excess with a lack of moral restraint. These all-night parties include drunkenness, drug use, and every

form of sexual immorality – including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, pedophilia, and pornography. These things are forever “out of bounds” for the Christian.

2. Drunkenness

This refers to habitual and intentional intoxication. This is a sin that even the heathen abhorred because it showed a lack of self-control. How many people have fallen prey to the lie that they need alcohol to relax, or forget their problems, or loosen up? It is interesting to note that the New Testament usually speaks of drunkenness and rioting and brawling together (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; I Peter 4:3).

B. Private Sin: Chambering and Wantonness

1. Chambering

The word “chambering” is from the Greek word that means “beds” and refers to the immoral activity that takes place in the bedroom. It is lewdness and all kinds of sexual sin, whether it is premarital sex, extra-marital sex, pornography, it covers them all.

2. Wantonness

Scholars call this one of the ugliest words in the Greek language. It refers to brazen, shameless sin. The person who commits this sin has a scared conscience. He not only sins, but he does it publicly and then brags about it. He parades his sin and immorality down main street. It includes mental lust and impurity and personal activity related to both sexes.

C. Personal Sins: Strife and Envy

1. Strife

This word refers to a mind set that seeks its own way first and foremost without regard for the cost to others. It speaks of those people who are constantly bickering, engaged in unhealthy competition and petty disagreements. It speaks of people who are just plain mean; always looking for a fight. They walk around with an attitude and a chip on their shoulder. Sadly, the Church is filled with this kind of people.

2. Envy

Envy refers to a spirit of jealousy. It refers to anger at the success of others when you have failed attempting the same thing.

IV. Dress Up in the Armor of Light

Romans 13:12b, 14

There is a positive and a negative approach mentioned:

A. The Positive Approach

Romans 13:12b: “Let us put on the armor of light;” Romans 13:14a: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The “armor of light” is the Person of the Lord Jesus. We are to adopt His character as our character. His lifestyle is to be our lifestyle.

Put on Jesus! He's always appropriate for every occasion. Put on His holiness. Put on His beauty. Put on His humility. Put on His purity. Put on His compassion. Put on His wisdom. Put on His forgiveness. Put on His patience. Put on His love.

Clothe yourself with Jesus early in the morning and you will be well-dressed all day long.

B. The Negative Approach

“Do not make any provisions for the flesh.” Don't make any plans that will make it easy for you to respond to desires which are wrong. Don't make any plans to do that which will break fellowship with the Lord.

Jude 23 says to “Hate even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Don't put yourself in the place of temptation. Remove from your life anything that will lead you into temptation. Get rid of any books, tapes, pictures, alcohol, pornography, computer sites or TV hook-ups that will lead to evil desires.

When He shall come with trumpet sound
Oh, may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless to stand before the throne.

THE DANGERS OF A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT

Romans 14:1-12

Churches have struggled with the problem of a judgmental spirit for 2,000 years. When Paul wrote to the Church at Rome, he devoted almost two full chapters to this difficulty issue. Paul teaches us the importance of accepting other believers.

The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of individuals at every possible level of spirituality. There are those who are fully aware of the freedom and the liberty that they enjoy in Christ and they live accordingly. On the other end of the spectrum are those who walk in fear of becoming defiled with the contamination of the world and they live accordingly. If that were the end of it, there would be no problem.

However, those who realize and enjoy their liberty in Jesus and are constantly being judged by those who think they live too loose of a life. While those who are strict in their application of biblical standards are constantly being criticized by those who have adopted a lesser standard.

You see, there are some things in life that are crystal clear. However, there are other areas of life that are not so clear. These are called doubtful areas. We must understand that there are people all around us who see things differently.

Romans 14 reveals conflict in the Church in five areas:

1. New converts and long-time believers
2. Converted Jews and converted Gentiles
3. Vegetarians and meat-eaters
4. Observations of special days and those who observe no special days
5. Total abstainers and wine-drinkers

God's Word puts great importance on the unity of His people.

1. Psalm 133:1: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity."
2. John 17:20-21: In His High Priestly prayer, our Lord prayed for unity, not only for His disciples, but for us as well; "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that all may be one, as You Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us."

Our Christian Unity is of utmost importance. At the same time Diversity is also important in the Christian community.

I Corinthians 12:17-18: "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where would be the smelling? But has not God set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleases?"

These two great realities – unity and diversity – are to co-exist in the Body of Christ. Normally diversity does not make for unity, because our human tendency is to judge those who do not conform to our customs or standards, but in the Body of Christ, both are important.

As brothers and sisters in the family of God, we have several things in common:

1. All of us who are in the family of God have received the same Savior.
2. We have all experienced the same Salvation.
3. We all have the same Heavenly Father because we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
4. We are all indwelt by the same Holy Spirit.
5. We all belong to the same Lord.
6. We shall all stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ
7. We will all give an account to the Lord.

But, at the same time, there are also a number of differences about all who are in the family of God.

1. We do not all have the same spiritual gifts.
2. We don't all have the same abilities. Some can sing; some cannot. Some teach Sunday School, some cannot. Some can work on electrical things or plumb or give great amounts of money; all can't.
3. We do not all have the same vocational calling. God calls some to be preachers, others to be missionaries; some to be faithful laymen and lay-women.
4. We do not all live at the same level of spiritual maturity; some are strong, some are weak.

Romans 14:1-12 contains four basic exhortations:

1. Accept one another – God has accepted you! (Romans 14:1-4)
2. Have your own convictions – Jesus is your Lord. (Romans 14:5-9)
3. Don't judge others – we will each answer to God. (Romans 14:10-12)
4. There are strong and weak believers; mature and immature believers. And, we will all deal with Disputable or Questionable (or gray areas) that the Bible does not Directly deal with; so, how will we deal with them?

Some Christians will only fellowship with believers who look, act, think just like them – and that's wrong.

Listen to this poem:

Believe as I believe; Look as I look.
No more, no less; Do always as I do;
That I am right, Then and only then
Will I have fellowship with you.

Feel as I feel; Think as I think.
Eat what I eat, and Drink what I drink.

The key verse here is Romans 14:1: "Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful disputation." Notice the word "Receive." Receive them without passing judgment on them; even in disputable matters. Genuinely and Graciously receive them. It is more than just Acceptance of them, it is Receiving them into our fellowship without judging them.

In these verses Paul deals with:

I. Three Kinds of Conduct

A. Some Conduct is Right and Some is Wrong.

The Bible declares that there are some moral absolutes. Some things are always right and some things are always wrong.

This actually happened in a Sociology class at Southern Methodist University. The professor, who was not a believer and did all he could to discredit the Bible and the students who were believers, said to his class, "There are no moral absolutes. Everything is relative. No moral absolutes. No right and no wrong."

One of the students who was a committed Christian, said, "Sir, are you absolutely certain?" The professor said, "Yes, I'm absolutely certain!" (Think about that for a moment.)

There are some things that are always Wrong. It's always wrong to lie, to commit adultery, to murder, to steal, to engage in homosexual behavior.

There are some things that are always Right. It's always right to be faithful to your mate, to be honest, to be loving, to show honor and respect to your parents.

B. Some Things are a Matter of Personal Conviction Romans 14:5-9

Romans 14:5 says it plainly: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." To be fully convinced means that after looking at all the evidence and considering the various views on a given issue, you have come to a settled conclusion in your own mind. It assumes an honest investigation coupled with an open mind.

Paul relates our lifestyle choices directly to our relationship with Jesus Christ. If we are fully surrendered to His lordship in our lives, then we are free to make up our own minds in these disputable areas.

Seven times in these five verses you see the words, "the Lord," to show our lifestyle choices are directly related to our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul deals with two uncontroversial things: Diets and Days.

The Day: Which day do we worship the Lord? On Sunday or Saturday? The weak brothers said worship is to be on Saturday. The mature brother said worship should be on

Sunday, for that was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

Diets: Was it alright to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols? The weak brother said they would not eat the meat sacrificed to a false god. The mature brother said he would eat it. The idol is nothing anyway but stone and wood; and the meat was better and cheaper. Do you eat the meat? Rejoice that you know Jesus. Are you a total abstainer? If so, rejoice that you know Jesus. Are you a total abstainer? If so, rejoice that you know Jesus. If Jesus is your Lord, you can make your own decisions, knowing that He alone will be your judge.

C. Some Things are a Matter of Personal Opinion

It's amazing the things people argue over that the Bible gives no direct teaching on. Let me give you a short list that conversation evangelicals have sometime argued about:

Movies; Hairstyles for both men and women (too long or too short); Eating out on Sunday; Fishing on Sunday; Women wearing pants; Women wearing jewelry; Instrumental music in church; Bible translations; Birth control; Mixed swimming; Women working outside the home; Working at a restaurant where liquor is served. Home schooling; Speaking in tongues; Halloween; Death penalty; Clapping in church; Tradition versus contemporary worship; Cosmetics; Playing cards.

Are there any guidelines for us to go by?

1. Ask: "Is this prohibited in the Bible?" If it is, that settles it!
2. Ask: "Is this something I can ask God to bless?"
3. Ask: "Would you like to be found doing this when Jesus comes?"

II. Two Kinds of Believers

A. Weak Christians (Legalism)

A weak Christian is one who is still living under legalism. Let me give you a couple of characteristics of a weak Christian who is a legalist.

1. Their list of what's right and wrong is longer than God's.

They add the traditions of men and man's commandments to the Word of God.

2. They often condemn those who don't follow their list.

They have their lists of what's right and wrong and if you don't follow their list, you're not right with God.

A legalist sees Christianity as a set of rules and regulations. In his heart he believes he can gain God's favor by doing certain things and abstaining from other things. Basically, he is still trying to earn a right relationship with God and has not yet accepted the way of grace. A legalist lives in mortal terror that some Christian somewhere is enjoying himself.

3. A weaker brother is more easily offended by the practices of another.

We need to understand that there are people all around us who see things differently than we do.

B. Strong Christians (Liberty)

1. They are set free from man's list and follow God's list.

2. They are careful never to offend a weaker brother. They don't want the way they live to be a stumbling block to their brothers.

III. One Essential Attitude

Again, Paul says to Accept one another. That doesn't mean Tolerate one another. It means to embrace and accept one another, even those who disagree with you about some of the matters of personal conviction.

A Protestant Reformer put it this way:

In the essentials, there must be UNITY

In the non-essentials, there must be LIBERTY

In all things, there must be CHARITY.

Why should this be our attitude toward all our brothers? Romans 14:10-13

Do not write a brother off because he doesn't see things the way you do. You are not his judge. Every Christian will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give account for the things he has done for the Lord's glory in obedience to Him. But until that day, we can't know what the motives of men are. That's why Paul says we are not to judge.

LOVE IS BETTER THAN LIBERTY

Romans 14:13-23

Romans 14 deals with two kinds of Christians: the Weak Christian, who is still living under the rules and regulations of legalism, and still lives by "do this and don't do that."

Then there is the Strong Christian, who has learned that he has been set free from the Law in Christ. But there is a warning: Don't let your freedom in Christ lead to a license to sin.

The Christian life is a relationship with Jesus; not a relationship with a rule-book. People are more important to God than rules and regulations.

Love is better than liberty. Love limits its own liberty out of respect for others. The best definition of liberty is the freedom to lay down one's rights or desires for the well-being of another.

Notice the possible ways we can affect each other. We can cause others to Stumble (Romans 14:13), to Fall (Romans 14:13), to be Grieved (Romans 14:15), or to be Destroyed (Romans 14:15).

Believers must help each other to grow and they must not force their opinions on others.

This passage explores the whole area of how to handle disagreements among believers. How do Christians get along when they can't agree on everything; especially secondary issues? Paul gives us four principles in this passage.

I. The Principle of Liberty

From the moment of Paul's birth as an orthodox Jew, he had been taught the difference between clean and unclean foods. Leviticus 11 contains a long list of foods that were either permitted or prohibited to the Jew.

The "Do Not Eat" included all pork products, camel meat, rabbit meat, birds such as ravens, owls, and vultures, and most shellfish.

The Jews were permitted to eat animals with a split hoof that chewed the cud, such as cows. Fish with fins and scales were permitted, as were certain insects, such as locusts and grasshoppers. The permitted food was called "kosher" and observant Jews still "keep kosher."

Paul proclaims the principle of liberty very clearly in our passage.

- Romans 14:14: "I know and am convinced by the Lord that there is nothing unclean of itself."
- Romans 14:20: "All things indeed are pure."

Those are radical statements coming from a man who was raised as an orthodox Jew. Nothing could have been more revolutionary for the converted Jew than learning that the kosher laws no longer applied. This left men like Paul in a dilemma. Should they continue to keep the kosher laws out of habit? Should they change their diet to demonstrate their new freedom in Christ? Most importantly, what should they say to others wrestling with these questions?

One part of the answer involves the doctrine of Christian liberty. Stated simply, redemption in Christ sets the believer free from trying to please God through a system of rules and regulation. Salvation is wholly a work of God's grace and nothing we do or don't do could ever bring us closer to God.

Christ has liberated us from the terrible burden of having to prove our worth by keeping a set of rules. We are free from the Law, free from rule-keeping, and free to please God with the choices we make.

But we are NOT free to sin. The Ten Commandments still apply to the believer. No one ever has the “right” to lust, the “right” to hate, the “right” to steal, the “right” to lie, the “right” to commit adultery. No one has that right because no such “right” exists.

Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

We have the right to live as we please, BUT we have a duty to our fellow believers. Believers are free to make their own decisions, guided by God's wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit, in those areas where the Bible does not give a specific command to obey or principle to follow.

I Corinthians 6:12: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient (profitable or beneficial): all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (I will avoid those things that have the potential to control my life, like alcohol, drugs, and sexual addictions.)

I Corinthians 10:23: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me but all things edify not” (all things do not build up or promote growth in Christ).

Galatians 5:13-14: “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’” We are either a stumbling block or a stepping stone to those around us.

I Corinthians 8:9-11: “Be careful that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Or if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who has this knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So, this weak brother for whom Christ dies is destroyed because of your knowledge.”

Matthew 18:6: “If one of you causes one of these little ones (a little, young, immature Christian) who believes in me to sin, it would be better for a millstone to be tied around your neck and cast into the depth of the sea.”

II. The Principle of Conscience

Paul states this principle very clearly in two different places:

- Romans 14:14: “There is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”
- Romans 14:23: “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

Here is a shocking truth: Some things are wrong for you that are right for others. And some things are right for you that are wrong for others.

Sometimes your conscience will tell you, “Don't do that. Don't touch that. Don't join that club. Don't take that job. Don't date that person.” In those cases, the Bible says you should follow your conscience. Don't do something you believe to be wrong even if others are doing it.

There are some places you just can't go. There are some shows you shouldn't watch, and there are songs you shouldn't listen to because they will pull you down spiritually. There are some books you can't read because they won't do you any good. There are some people you shouldn't hang around because they will lead you astray.

But someone says, “Is your conscience always reliable?” No, not always, because our conscience can become seared or dulled by sin. But when your conscience is informed by the Word of God, guided by the Holy Spirit of God, and submissive to the will of God, you may follow your conscience with confidence. Never do something you believe to be wrong.

Paul says, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." When you act against your Christian conscience, you have sinned even if the activity in itself is not sinful. You did what you believed to be wrong. That's what sin is – violating the standard of right behavior. You set the standard ...and then you violated it.

III. The Principle of Peace

When liberty and conscience come into conflict, believers are to follow the path of peace, love, and edification. The believer with liberty is to exercise special care lest his freedom somehow hurt another Christian. Don't put a "stumbling block" or "obstacle" in the path of another person.

Notice Romans 14:15-17, 19-22. Don't flaunt your liberty before a weaker brother.

Five bad things may happen because you misuse your liberty in Christ:

1. Your behavior may be a stumbling block to another Christian (Rom.14:13).
2. Your brother may be "grieved" (Rom.14:15).
3. Your behavior may cause a brother to fall away from God (Rom.14: 21).
4. You may destroy (cause complete devastation to one's spiritual growth (Rom.14:15).
5. God's work may be destroyed (greatly hindered) in his life (Rom.14:20).

Is your "freedom" worth all that to you? Must you demand your own way without caring for how you impact others? Be sensitive to the feelings of others. Show courtesy to those who differ. Be willing to set your own desires aside for the greater good of the kingdom of God.

IV. The Principle of Silence Romans 14:22

"So, whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God."

We don't all have to think the same on every point or act the same way. There is incredible diversity inside the body of Christ. On lesser or secondary matters we will often come to differing conclusions.

Hold your convictions and hold your tongue.

In Romans 14:15 Paul says don't destroy your brother "for whom Christ died." Christ is the controlling issue of time and eternity. Nothing is more important than His death and resurrection.

On that great day the only thing that will matter is what we did with Jesus Christ. Did we believe on Him as Lord and Savior? Did we love and serve Him? Did we attempt to follow Him to the best of our ability?

Remember that love is better than liberty and if we are to live right before God and man, we need to apply this five-fold test:

1. What does the Bible say about this issue?
2. Can I ask God to bless what I'm about to do and thank Him for it?
3. If Jesus returned while I was engaged in this, would I be embarrassed?
4. Would it make a weaker Christian stumble?
5. When in doubt, DON'T.

I heard about a guy who was back in his bedroom, and his wife was in another part of the house. He was getting dressed and he said, "Honey, is this shirt too dirty or do I need to put on another one?" She said, "Put on another one."

Later he walked in where she was with the other shirt on and said, "You didn't look at that shirt. How did you know it was dirty?" She said, "I didn't have to. I know you. If you had to ask, it was too dirty, believe me."

The same is true with a lot of moral issues. If you have to ask whether it's right or wrong, chances are, you don't need to mess with it. There's a great verse in Hebrews 13:18. Can you say this? "Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience." That's the issue. Can you live with a clear conscience with that you do and you don't do and desire to live honorably in every way?

THE BEAUTY OF UNITY

Romans 15:1-7

(in verse 1, "scruples" is "infirmities" in the KJV)

Romans 13-16 deals with how we are to relate to each other as believers. Paul says that believers are to love one another, help one another, accept one another, and have a spirit of toleration toward one another.

You may have noticed that we are all different. We come from different places, with different backgrounds, with different types of upbringing. Yet, the call of God for believers in Christ is to live together in peace despite our differences, especially in secondary issues.

Notice Romans 15:6. We are to glorify God with "one heart and one mouth." How do we do that?

Picture an orchestra warming up before a concert. The violins play one thing, the trumpets work on their scales, the trombones practice something else, the clarinets are doing their own thing, and the flutes, well, the flutes are in their own little world. That's the way it is when you warm up. There is no melody, just a lot of unrelated sounds. But everything changes when the conductor lifts his baton. Suddenly the noise stops. Every eye is on him. When he brings the baton down, the music starts, and what had been unconnected noise now becomes beautiful music. If each person played whatever he wanted, the result would be chaos. But when those different instruments blend together on the same song, following the same conductor, the result is wonderful.

In the Church we are called to blend our hearts and our voices to the purpose of our Conductor, the Lord Jesus Christ. When we follow His lead, the Church produces a symphony of praise that the world can't ignore.

The key word in Romans 14 is edification. Edification means "to build up;" it is the opposite of the tearing down that occurs when we focus on our rights and our expectations instead of meeting the needs of others and promoting the health of the Church as a whole.

Edification is mentioned 18 times in the New Testament and 15 or those times it is mentioned by Paul.

It was one of his favorite topics. Listen as Paul tells us in Romans 14 how we are to promote edification in the Church:

- Romans 14:1 Welcome weaker brothers
- Romans 14:1 Don't quarrel over secondary matters
- Romans 14:2 Don't despise someone you disagree with
- Romans 14:3 Don't pass judgment on another believer
- Romans 14:5 Be convinced (follow the dictates of your conscience) in your own mind
- Romans 14:5-7 Live for the glory of the Lord
- Romans 14:12 Remember that you will answer to God someday

- Romans 14:13 Don't put a stumbling block in front of someone else
- Romans 14:14-15 Respect the conscience of others who see things differently
- Romans 14:15 Your thoughtless words can destroy another person
- Romans 14:16 Be careful about your actions
- Romans 14:17-18 Christ matters more than our opinions
- Romans 14:20 Your thoughtless words can destroy God's work
- Romans 14:21 Unity matters more than your personal freedom
- Romans 14:22 Keep your mouth shut about your personal opinions
- Romans 14:22 Enjoy your freedom but don't flaunt it
- Romans 14:23 Don't violate your own conscience
- Romans 15:1 Carry those who are weak
- Romans 15:1 Don't just please yourself
- Romans 15:2 Focus on how to help others
- Romans 15:3 Remember the example of Christ

If we actually lived like this, most church conflicts would disappear. We will never live like this on our own. We need God's help.

I. God's Principle of Unity Romans 15:1-4

Psalms 133:1: "How good and how pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity" (And how sad and unpleasant it is when there is no unity among Christians).

The Church ought to be a place of unity and joy.

Jess Moody said that people choose a church with their noses. They can smell the joy. Here is how he put it:

“Most people can smell the joy on Sunday morning if it's there. And they can smell the other stuff too. Sometimes it's easy to smell the manure of church conflict. Most of us have had the experience of visiting a new church and without knowing anything about it, we sense that something is wrong inside the church. People look distraught, upset, disinterested, and sometimes you can feel the tension in the air.

I have been on both sides of the fence regarding the spirit of unity. I know what it is to be in a congregation where the people love each other and where there is a sense of love, joy, peace and harmony. And I know what it's like to go to church when the people don't like each other anymore. I know what it's like to pastor a church filled with rumors, gossip, and unkind accusation.

I've been to church on Sunday morning and felt the tension and seen the angry faces. I know how painful that can be. My experience as a pastor has led me to these five conclusions:

1. Unity is a precious gift from God.
2. Where unity is present, all things are possible.
3. When a church is divided, nothing works right.
4. Unity is easily lost and hard to regain.
5. True unity does not happen by accident. We must pray for it and we must work at it.

Unity is hard work. It demands an on-going commitment from every believer.

Ephesians 4:3 says, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Philippians 2:1-2 (The Message) says, “If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if His love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care – then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends.”

In John 13:35 Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Every Christian is either in the construction business or the demolition business.

We cannot create unity. Only God can do that. We can DISRUPT unity. We can KILL unity. Or we can KEEP and MAINTAIN unity.

God, Himself, is the Source of unity.

Romans 15:5: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.”

Notice that this is a prayer. Paul asks God to give a “spirit of unity,” because unity is a gift that comes down from the Father in Heaven. So, we must pray for God to grant it to us.

The phrase “spirit of unity” means to “be in the same mind” or to be “like-minded” or in “complete harmony.” The word “unity” also means, “pulling on a rope at the same time in the same direction.”

We have lots of “pullers” in the local church, but too often the “pullers” are pulling in seven different directions at once.

The last part of Romans 15:5 says we are to pull “together according to Jesus” or, better, “following Jesus.” He is the Head of the Church and the Foundation of the Church, and the Lord of the Church, and the Leader of the Church. That's what a Christian is anyway – one who follows Christ. He said, “I Am The Way.”

II. My Promotion of Unity Romans 15:6-7

“With one mind and one mouth glorify God the Father” in praise to our Lord. The ministry of winning folks to Jesus produces an atmosphere of praise and worship in the Church.

If souls are being saved, you won't have to cook up or work up some excitement; people being born again will produce an atmosphere

of praise and worship in the Church.

Notice again Romans 15:6. When we all with one voice, sing praises to the Lord in our church, that promotes and enhances the unity of the church. When a lost person comes in the door of our church and sees Christians singing praises to God with one voice, glorifying God together, that always has an impact on them.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee tells a funny story about a little community where there were three churches on the same corner – a Presbyterian Church, a Methodist Church and a Baptist Church. One Sunday night the three churches had their windows raised and they could hear each other singing. The three churches didn't get along too well.

The people in the Presbyterian Church began to sing, "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?"

When they finished, the Methodist folks started singing, "No, Not One."

Then the Baptist folks started singing, "And That Will Be Glory For Me!"

It would have been for better if they had sang together, "We Are One In The Bond of Love."

Here is a sad, but true story. A number of years ago in Canada, a little two-year-old girl wandered away from her home. It was a cold, winter day. Her parents alerted the neighbors and they saw some tracks in the snow, but there were a lot of other tracks, so for hours the searchers went in all directions, calling her name. They didn't find her.

A little before sunset one of the men said, "Instead of us all working separately, let's join hands and form a long line and walk through the fields together. That way we cannot miss a square foot." That's what they did. They joined hands and, together, walked as one, calling the little girl's name. Tragically, they found her frozen body curled up on the ground. One of the men said with great anguish, "Oh, why didn't we join hands sooner?"

There are people without Jesus. What we need to do is to join hands and together show them that Jesus is the Answer.

III. The Prayer for Unity

St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century gave us this prayer.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

GOD'S MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

Romans 15:7-13

Romans 14-15 speaks of unity.

In Romans 14 Paul says that Love is better than Liberty. We are free in Christ from rules and regulations, BUT, if our freedom causes our brother to stumble, we are to show love to that brother by restricting our freedom to keep a weaker brother from being offended.

Romans 15:1-7 speaks of promoting unity between the stronger and the weaker brothers. We are to be like-minded toward one another.

Now, Romans 15:7-13 says that there is to be unity between Jew and Gentile, because Christ died for both. He wants both to be saved. He wants both to experience abundant living in Him.

Jew and Gentile are to Receive or Accept one another in the same way that Christ has Accepted or Received us. We are to Work with each other, Love each other, Support each other, Lift one another's burdens.

Pastor Stu Weber recounted an experience he had while in training in the U. S. Army's Ranger School. His platoon had been running nearly all day in full field gear. It was the worst exhaustion they had experienced. They had been told before leaving for the day's training that they were to leave together, train together, and return together. In fact, they were told that if they didn't all come back together, they were not to come back at all.

At the end of the grueling day as they were running in formation back to the barracks, Stu noticed a soldier ahead of him who began to wobble and weave. Exhaustion was about to overtake him. But then, the soldier on his right, on his left, and behind him began to relieve him of the burden of his equipment. One took his rifle, another took his helmet, and two behind him carried his pack – all in addition to their own gear. Shedding the extra weight allowed the soldier to regain his strength and make it back with the rest of the platoon.

“We left together and we returned together, and we were all the stronger for it,” Weber said. Together is better!

Together is also better in the body of Christ. Christianity had entered a divided world: Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Jews, slave and free, literate and illiterate, religious and pagan.

Paul's central point is that redemption tears down the walls of division and disunity between Jews and Gentiles. Christ accepts them all as equal.

In the beginning of the formation of the Church, the Church was almost entirely Jewish. But beginning with God's revelation to Peter in Acts 10, and the conversion of Cornelius, Gentiles began to be added to the Church.

- More Gentiles than Jews were being saved then, which led to the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) to discuss the problems that had developed between Jewish and Gentile converts.

- Some Jewish Christian leaders were teaching that Gentile converts had to be circumcised according to Jewish law in order to join the Church.

- Paul and Barnabas journeyed from Antioch to Jerusalem where Paul fought for the principle that Gentiles should be accepted into the Church on the basis of one thing: salvation comes through Christ alone (Galatians 2:26-28).

I entitled the study “God's Multicultural Church.” I know that because of the media, there is a negative side to multicultural, but there is also a positive side. Jesus told us to “Go and preach the Gospel to every nation” for “God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” and, so, all kinds of people are welcome in the Church. In the larger university cities you will find students from India, China, Korea, Japan, Brazil, Sweden, Israel, Russia, and dozens of other nations. God wants to reach them all.

From a biblical point of view, the human race is divided into two distinct groups – the Jews and everyone else, or Gentiles, or non-Jews. Since there are perhaps 15 million Jews amid a total world population of over 6 billion, nearly everyone falls into the category of Gentile.

In Romans 15:7-13 Paul lays out five marks of a truly multicultural Church:

I. It Is An Accepting Church Romans 15:7

This verse tells us that when we truly welcome believers from different backgrounds in the local church, God is honored and His Name is blessed.

If the perfect, sinless Son of God was willing to bring sinners into God's family, how much more should forgiven believers be willing to warmly embrace and accept each other in spite of our differences.

Christ came for both the Jew and the Gentile. Although Jesus was a Jew and the first Christians were all Jews, God never intended for Christianity to be limited to the Jewish people. God gave promises to Abraham and Isaac that specifically included all the nations of the earth.

Paul quoted from the Psalms in Romans 15:9, from Deuteronomy in Rom.15:10, and from Isaiah in Rom.15:12. Thus, the three categories of the Jewish Bible – the Psalms, the Law, and the Prophets.

- The first quotation is from 2 Samuel 22:50 and says that Christ will be praised among the Gentiles.
- The second is from Deuteronomy 32:43 and says that the Gentiles and Jews will praise God together.
- The third quotation is from Psalm 117:1 and calls on all the Gentiles to praise the Lord.
- The fourth quotation is from Isaiah 11:10 and looks forward to the day when Christ will return and reign over the nations of the earth.

Don't miss the key point. God always planned to include the Gentiles in His kingdom. He wanted His family to include many different kinds of people from many different backgrounds. These verses prove that our God is a multicultural God with a heart as big as the entire world.

III. It Is A Worshiping Church

Romans 15:9-11

Three times in three verses God calls the Gentiles and the Jews to rejoice together. Praise is the universal language of the Christian Church. Go anywhere around the world and you will discover how true this is.

IV. It Is An Evangelistic Church

Romans 15:12

This is why we send English teachers to China and Bible translators to Japan. This is why we preach the Gospel and share Christ with our friends. It's the reason we pray for the unsaved and invite them to trust Christ as Savior. God's plan reaches to the nations of the world. To the Gentiles who have no hope, God says, "There is hope in my Son, Jesus Christ."

V. It Is An Overflowing Church

Romans 15:13

God has a big heart. Let me tell you what all this means in a practical sense:

God's heart includes all the ethnic and racial groups in the world. Revelation 7:9-10 pictures an amazing scene when Christ returns to the earth.

- A. Note: The Number of the Redeemed. There is a vast crowd before the throne, so huge that it defies human calculation.
- B. Note: The Variety of the Redeemed. There are saints from every nation, tribe, people and language group.
- C. Note: The Posture of the Redeemed. They are before the throne of God, standing like an army before its Commander-in-Chief.
- D. Notice The Appearance of the Redeemed. They wear white robes, a symbol of purity, and they hold palm branches, a sign of victory.
- E. Note: The Song of the Redeemed. They sing about salvation that comes from God and from the Lamb.

Three words describe the abundant, overflowing life Christ gives:

1. Joy

This is not walking around with a silly grin on your face all the time. This joy is not determined by external circumstances. It doesn't come from the Outside, but from the Inside.

Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:4; I Peter 1:8; Nehemiah 8:10

The world didn't give us joy, and the world can't take it away.

2. Peace

The word "peace" means to join together. Worry means "to pull apart." Peace of heart and mind comes from knowing that whatever comes in life, all is in the hand of the Lord.

John 14:27; Philippians 4:7

3. Hope

This word "hope" doesn't mean we hope something will happen. Bible hope is positive expectation. It is a clear word from God and a deep settled conviction based on God's Word.

Titus 2:13; Colossians 1:27

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' Name.

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN CAPSULE

Romans 15:14-29

We are entering the final section of the Book of Romans. Throughout this great book, Paul has been dealing with the great doctrinal themes of the Christian faith. Now, as he nears the end of the letter to the Romans, he begins to speak of things that are personal in nature. Before he closes, Paul wants to share his heart and his motives for service with the believers in Rome.

One of the things that becomes clear about this man in this passage is that he had a heart and a passion for the lost. Paul was a great preacher and a prolific writer, having written 13 and maybe 14 of the 27 books of the New Testament, if he wrote the Book of Hebrews. He was also a pioneer missionary, traveling from place to place, starting churches and feeding the sheep of the Lord. Yet, running through all of this was the fact that Paul had a deep, burning desire to see men saved.

Everywhere he journeyed, Paul told men about Jesus. When he was chained as a prisoner of Rome, Paul was telling men about Jesus. When he stood before kings and world rulers, he was telling men about Jesus. When he encountered a group of women praying by a river, Acts 16, Paul told them about Jesus. His heart was aflame with the message of the gospel and he wanted men to know the same Jesus he himself knew so well.

What made his ministry so effective? Here are some principles that can help us be effective in ministry and service, also.

I. Paul's Encouragement Romans 15:14

This is not just idle flattery. Paul had never seen a single member of the church at Rome, nor worshiped with them, nor fellowshiped with them. All he knew about them was through second-hand reports, but he was optimistic that the spirit of God and the power of God and the goodness of God was at work in their lives.

I don't like being around pessimistic people who are always looking down instead of up, or who see a glass half-empty instead of half-full, or who are always critical, negative, or see only the bad in everything. Being optimistic is a good trait for ministry.

Paul said, "I myself am persuaded of you ...I myself am confident concerning you ...I myself am satisfied about you." Paul wants to encourage them in the Lord. He wants them to know that he believes in them and in their heart for the Lord.

I think any of us would like to be a part of a church where the people are Full of Goodness, Filled with all Knowledge, and able to Admonish or Instruct one Another.

We just saw in Romans 14 that Paul makes an eloquent plea for the strong and weak Christians to live together in unity. Clearly the church in Rome was a mixture of young and old believers, Jewish and Gentile Christians, wine-drinkers and total abstainers, people who observed special days and those who observed no special days at all. And sometimes they didn't get along very well. The church at Rome was filled with problems because it was filled with people, and wherever you have people, you have problems.

Then, how can he say such nice things about the church in Romans 15:14? He can say it because his heart is for them and not against them. He says it because it is true in spite of their human weakness. He says it because he loves them and longs to see them grow to full maturity. Most of all, he can say it because he has enormous confidence in God's grace at work in their midst.

If they are full of goodness (high moral character who hated evil and loved righteousness), it is because the God of goodness is at work in them.

If they are filled with all knowledge (sound doctrine), it is because God Himself has filled them with knowledge.

If they are able to instruct each other (to encourage, warn, advise, and even correct each other in love), it is because God has equipped them by His Spirit. They had a genuine desire to help others achieve spiritual maturity and to do so in a humble spirit.

It is always easy to criticize and pick out the faults of others, but the fault-finder is like a spiritual vulture, flying over the landscape, looking for the failures of others so he can pounce on them. How much better to be like Paul and believe the best and not the worst.

II. Paul's Explanation Romans 15:15-29

Paul explains something of how he ministers. In Rom. 15:15 Paul says that he wrote "BOLDLY" to "REMIND" them of certain truths. Here is how Paul looked at preaching:

- Preach the Word.
- Do it all the time.
- Do it many different ways.
- Be patient as you do it.
- Pray as you do it.
- Be sure you do it.

Don't miss the phrase, "as reminding you" ("as putting you I mind" – KJV).

Why do we need to be reminded of basic truth?

- Because we are forgetful.
- Because we are easily distracted.
- Because we think we know more than we do.

Someone has said that repetition is the first law of teaching. Few of us master a truth the first time we hear it. We do better if we hear it a second time. Repetition in a sermon is like jogging in place. By rephrasing a point, it gives people a chance to catch their breath. Then you can move on to new truth.

But it's more than a preaching method. This is God's plan for spiritual growth. We must tell people the great truths of Scripture, and then we must tell them again. Once is never enough.

This might be called "the ministry of reminding." God's people need to be reminded of what they already know.

- "Now I would remind you, brothers" (1 Corinthians 15:1).
- "For this reason I remind you" (2 Timothy 1:6).
- "Remind them of these things" 2 Timothy 2:14.
- "Remind them to be submissive" (Titus 3:1).
- "I always intend to remind you" (1 Peter 1:12).
- "It is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live" (2 Peter 1:13, NLT).
- "I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of remembrance (2 Peter 3:1).

II. Paul's Explanation Romans 15:15-29

In these verses Paul explains something of the ministry to the Gentiles and his current mission to the Jews.

A. Paul's was a Priestly Ministry Romans 15:16

A priest is someone who speaks to God on behalf of man and to man on behalf of God. Paul sees himself in a priestly role in sharing

the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles.

Paul is not referring to the Old Testament priest, but to the unique priestly office. He calls himself a minister who makes a priestly offering. The word he uses clearly has Old Testament connections to the work of the priest in the temple. Just as the priest brought animals to sacrifice before the Lord, even so the pastor labors to bring his people as an offering to the Lord. But there is one huge difference. The priest presented dead animals to the Lord. The pastor labors to present his people as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) to God.

We all know that the ministry is about people. It's not about building and programs. These are secondary means to help us minister to people.

The goal of the ministry is not to build numbers, but to build people so that one day they can be presented to the Lord Jesus Christ as mature saints. Colossians 1:28: "We preach Christ, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

B. Paul's Ministry was Characterized by Praise Romans 15:17-18

Paul does not boast about himself. Rather, he was glorying in what Christ had accomplished through him. Paul was careful with his words! He didn't say, "What I have accomplished through Christ," he said, "What Christ has accomplished through me."

We hear too much today about what WE have accomplished and too little about what Christ has accomplished through us. Sometimes we make it sound like we're giving God credit when we're wanting it ourselves. Someone said of us, "We don't mind giving God the glory for what is done as long as we get the credit. Yet, John 15:5 says, "Without me, you can do nothing!"

C. Paul's Ministry was Characterized by Power Romans 15:18-19

Where there is an effective ministry, there is the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a wonderful thing to be in the power of the Holy Spirit; it's a terrible thing to "try" to preach without the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit shows up and the power of God begins to fall, that's when preaching becomes real and lives are changed because the power of God is in the midst!

Notice that Paul didn't just preach, he "fully preached" – with liberty, freedom, and power – not just salvation messages, but messages on growth, discipline, resolving conflicts, instruction and encouragement.

D. Paul's Ministry was done According to God's Plan

God's plan for Paul was not to build on another man's foundation, but to go where no one had gone before and start a new church.

Romans 15:25-29: Paul was also engaged in a mission to the Jews in the church at Jerusalem. Notice that Paul said that the Gentile church was "pleased" to contribute to the poor church in Jerusalem. The reason: They owed the Jews a great debt spiritually. The least they could do was to share with them their material blessings.

We are laborers one of another in the Lord!!

PAUL'S PRAYER REQUEST

Romans 15:30-33

When we come to Prayer Meeting time, I always ask, "Does anyone have a prayer request?" Sometimes request is made for someone who is sick or for someone who has a special need or problem, and we always want to remember our church and our nation.

Paul had a prayer request. Paul wanted the Church to pray for him. All of us are co-laborers together with God in ministry. We need the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ if we are to be effective in ministry.

In his book on prayer, Warren Wiersbe begins by saying, "All of us know we need to pray more than we do." That simple statement is true and undeniable. We all feel the need for a deeper and more meaningful prayer life.

Sometimes we need instruction in the "how-to's" of prayer. Sometimes we need encouragement in prayer.

Romans 15:30-33 is not Paul's prayer; it's his prayer request. This is the great Apostle Paul asking the Roman Christians (whom he

had never met) to pray for him. He offers Instruction (how to pray) and Encouragement (why we should pray).

Several times in his writings Paul asks the people of God to pray for him.

1. Second Corinthians 1:11: Paul prays that the church will pray for him that he would be delivered from death.
2. Ephesians 6:18-19: Paul asks the church to pray for him that he might have boldness in faithfulness to proclaim the Gospel to the unsaved.
3. Colossians 4:3: Paul asks the church to pray for him that God would open the door of opportunity for him to share the Gospel even while he was in chains.
4. Second Thessalonians 3:1: Paul asks that the church pray for him as he preached that the Word of God would continue to spread rapidly and that it might be received with the honor it deserved.

When Paul asks the churches to pray for him, he assures them that in their praying for him, they have the privilege of becoming a part of his ministry and work for the Lord. He invites them to join him as he serves the Lord.

Paul also reminds us of the importance of intercessory prayer.

Notice, too, how personal he is. Six times in these verses he uses the words "I," "me," "my."

Three truths I want you to see:

I. There is a Call For Diligence in Prayer Romans 15:30

"I beg you ...I beseech you ...I plead with you." It is the same strong word used in Romans 12:1 when Paul calls us to present our bodies a living sacrifice unto the Lord.

The word means, "to call to one's side, or to draft into service." It gives the impression of an S O S. Paul is saying, "I need your help! I am drafting you to come alongside of me and help me pray about some things.

Prayer involves agony. The words "strive together with me" carries the idea of entering into a fight with someone. It pictures prayer as wrestling. It is the same word used by Jesus when He prayed in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).

I don't care what you name in the Christian life, it is easier than praying, because the devil and the forces of evil will fight your attempts at a consistent prayer life more than anything else you do. The devil fears a Christian who prays effectual prayers. Paul isn't referring to the casual approach to the throne of grace that we engage in most of the time! No! He's talking about people who come boldly before the Lord and labor to lay hold on God. Striving in prayer is spiritual warfare against principalities and powers and the forces of evil all around us.

When was the last time you and I agonized in prayer? Or wrestled in prayer? Or shed tears in prayer? We will learn what agony means when we have a sick child or when our marriage is on the rocks. Sooner or later we all learn to agonize in prayer.

II. There is a Call For Detail in Prayer Romans 15:31-32

Paul wants them to pray Intentionally (for me) – Intensely (strive together) – Intelligently (Romans 15:31-33).

Paul understood that the church advances on its knees! Paul is very specific. Most of us have seen those signs that say, "Prayer Changes Things." Prayer does change things, but the thing it changes most is us! Prayer humbles us, stretches us, shapes us, encourages us, deepens us, and leads us along the pathway of spiritual growth.

What does Paul want them to pray for?

1. That he might be delivered from spiritual opposition.
2. That his service for Jerusalem might be acceptable to the saints.
3. That he will be able to visit Rome and see them face to face.

When we pray specifically, prayer causes things to happen that would not otherwise happen.

Don't pass over the little phrase "so that" (Romans 15:31-32). Many times our prayers are Good but Aimless. We ask God to "bless" someone or "strengthen" someone, but we have no specific reason why we want them blessed or strengthened. When we add "so that" to our petitions, it forces us to ask ourselves, "What do I really want God to do in this person's life?" If we don't have a reason for praying a particular prayer, perhaps it's not worth praying in the first place.

The "so that" principle is very challenging and encouraging because it focuses my wandering mind and causes me to think about why I ask God to do something.

Paul used this principle:

- Romans 15:13: "So that you may overflow with hope."
- Ephesians 1:17: "So that you may know Him better."
- Ephesians 3:17: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."
- Philippians 1:10: "So that you may be able to discern what is best."
- Colossians 1:11: "So that you may have great endurance and patience."
- 1 Thessalonians 3:13: "So that you will be blameless and holy."
- 2 Thessalonians 1:12: "So that the name of our Lord may be glorified in you."

The power of the Church lies not in money, plans, buildings, preachers, programs, or anything else that comes from the hand of man. Our only true power is the power of prayer. When we pray, God moves from Heaven. By prayer all things are possible. If we want to see the Church move forward and the kingdom of darkness vanquished, we must pray and pray and pray. We have no other secret. If prayer won't do it, there is no Plan B.

III. There is a Call For Delight in Prayer Romans 15:33

Prayer promotes unity. Though the Roman Christians were hundreds of miles away from Paul, they became one with him through prayer. Distance doesn't matter when we are on our knees. We can be anywhere in the world and yet in the realm of the Spirit through prayer. We can be joined with brothers and sisters thousands of miles away. By prayer I can influence the world.

This final verse is a glimpse into Paul's heart. He is able to leave all these matters in the hand of God and rest in the assurance that God will take care of the Roman believers.

Paul is telling them, "God will take care of you!" When we have prayed about a matter in faith and have committed it to the will of God, then we can have peace in our hearts that He will take care of it for us. He may not answer it the way we want Him to, but He will always do what is right with the things we ask Him. Therefore, when we have prayed well, we can rest in His peace.

Did God ever answer these prayers? Yes, He did! Look in Acts 21-23 and you will see that Paul was protected, just like he prayed. He was well received in the Church in Jerusalem, Acts 21:17. And, he was able to rejoice with the Roman Christians in the Lord's time, Acts 28:15. Yes, God heard and answered their prayers for Paul!

FRIENDS ALONG PAUL'S JOURNEY

Romans 16:1-16, 21-27

The Book of Romans would have been just as Complete and just as Authoritative and just as True if it had concluded with Chapter 15.

There is not much theological teaching in Chapter 16. Rather, there is a list of 33 names of men and women who were important in the life of Paul. There is little that holds your attention in this chapter, and yet, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write Chapter 16. Why?

These are co-workers and people who had encouraged and inspired him along his way. They have encouraged him, and now, he wants to encourage them. They have loved him, and now, he wants them to know how much he loves them. He also wants them to be warm and friendly and to show love to one another. He wants to say "Thank You" to these friends who had helped him so much. We, too, should express our appreciation to those whom God has used in our lives.

Let me mention some who meant much to Paul:

1. Phoebe (Phebe) Romans 16:1-2

Phoebe was a great servant of the early Church. There is a statement in some Bibles after Rom. 16:27, that says the following: "Written to the Romans from Corinthus, and sent by Phebe servant of the Church of Cenchrea."

When she left Paul at Corinth to go to Rome, she carried in the folds of her robe the greatest declaration of Christian doctrine the world had ever witnessed. Evidently, she was a much trusted worker in the early Church.

The word "comment" in Romans 16:1 means to "introduce or recommend to another." Paul is taking the time to introduce Phebe to the believers in Rome because he wants them to know that she will be a blessing to them. It appears that in those days, when a person left one church to go to another, they carried with them a letter of commendation from the home church. We still do this today, to a certain degree, although we do not do as good a job with it as we should.

When someone leaves this church to go to another, we ought to tell the church they went to the truth about them. That way, good Christian workers could be identified and trouble-makers could be identified. I have known some church-hopping folks who are trouble-makers who just tear one church after another apart. That ought to go for preachers, and staff members as well. I have known some preachers and staff members who are problems everywhere they go and the next church they go to should be aware of it. Paul warned the churches of such folks (I Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17-19).

Paul used three words to describe Phebe:

a. She is called a Sister Romans 16:1a

She had a Father/Daughter relationship with God. Her name, Phebe, means "radiant or bright" and speaks of her Christian character.

b. She is called a Servant Romans 16:1-2a

The word "servant" here is the same word that is translated "deacon" elsewhere. This does not necessarily mean that Phebe held the office of deaconess in the Cenchrean church, but it does mean that she carried out the spirit of that office in her work for the Lord. You see, the word translated "deacon" and here "servant" means "a table waiter, or one who waits on orders from his master." At times it referred to "one who kicked up dust." The idea being that the servant was so busy carrying out his duties that he left a trail of dust behind him. Of course, we believe that only men are qualified to hold the office of deacons (I Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-4). But, there is application here to women who act as servants to the Church as well.

Deacons are to be servants of the people of God. A deacon who tries to rule is a deacon who is out of his place. A deacon who thinks he is a watchdog of the Church is overstepping the bounds of his authority. Did you see the phrase, "of the Church"? Phebe was under the authority of the local church.

In Romans 16:2, Paul calls on the Roman Christians to receive Phebe "as becometh saints." Why? Because by her life and her work she has demonstrated that she is a saint of God and worthy to be honored because of her dedication to the Lord.

c. She is called a Succorer Romans 16:2b

The word "succorer" is an old word that means "to come to another's assistance." She is a helper. She cares for the affairs of others and aided them with her resources; her talents, her time, and her tenderness.

2. Priscilla and Aquila Romans 16:3-5a

This is a great family made up of just a husband and a wife. This couple is mentioned six times in four books of the Bible. Each time they are mentioned by Paul himself and this indicates that they were special to his life and ministry.

This couple was forced to leave Rome, so they traveled east toward Corinth. There they met Paul. When Paul discovered that this couple were of the same profession as himself (tentmaking), he formed a partnership with them, moved into their house, and they worked together to provide for their needs (Acts 18:1-3, 18-19).

It was this couple who ministered in Ephesus and encountered a preacher by the name of Apollos (Acts 18:25-28). Apollos was a great speaker with great ability who knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well and boldly preached in the synagogues.

But, he was a man with an incomplete message. His message stopped with John the Baptist. He was still preaching about the Messiah Who was to come, not realizing that He had already come. Apollos knew nothing of the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus. He didn't even know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

When his path crossed with that of Aquila and Priscilla, they heard him speak and they realized that he never heard the whole truth. They invited him home for dinner and explained the Word of God to him more perfectly. It's important to note that they did not publicly humiliate Apollos. They took him into the privacy of their home and taught him so as not to embarrass him. They did not ridicule his lack of learning. As Apollos went on his way, he was mightily used of the Lord because this family had a burden for the Word of God.

It's interesting to me that in the six times this couple is mentioned, Priscilla's name is seen first four times. Why is this significant? Because in those days, the man's name was always mentioned first. Thus, it is agreed by virtually all commentators that Priscilla seems to be the one who had the more dynamic and powerful ministry. Yes, they traveled together – but it seems as though Aquila, realizing his wife had special and beautiful gifts, facilitated them and was not threatened by them.

3. Epaphroditus Romans 16:5b

Epaphroditus was special to Paul because he was Paul's first convert in Asia Minor and was disciplined by Paul. He was the "Firstfruit" whose name means "praiseworthy" and special to Paul because he was the first one he led to the Lord in Asia Minor.

4. Andronicus and Junia Romans 16:7

These were relatives of Paul who were saved before Paul and may have even prayed for Paul to be saved. They were "fellow prisoners" who probably actually shared the same cell or adjacent cells at some point with Paul.

5. Tryphena – "Delicate" – and Tryphosa – "Dainty" Romans 16:12

These were probably twin sisters. They were one in appearance and one in Christ. They labored together in the Lord.

6. Rufus and his mother Romans 16:13

Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene who came up from Africa to Jerusalem to celebrate and observe the Passover proceedings. When he lined up along the Via Delorosa on that Good Friday, suddenly a Man collapsed before him under the weight of the cross. He was forced to carry the cross for Christ. No doubt he stayed to watch the proceeding of the crucifixion and was saved. Then he went home to tell his family and his wife and two sons, Rufus and Alexander (Mark 15:2), were saved as well.

Paul closes out Romans with grace and glory Romans 16:20b, 27.

By grace through faith we are saved for His glory!

HOW TO HANDLE TROUBLEMAKERS IN THE CHURCH

Romans 16:17-20

Ever since the Church was formed, she has been plagued by troublemakers. These people have desired to either see the Church destroyed, or to see it shaped to their own will. This should not be surprising; after all, Jesus Himself predicted the rise of troublemakers in the Church in Matthew 7:15: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Ever since sin entered the world when man yielded to sin, there has been a war between good and evil.

Paul had seen with his own eyes the danger of troublemakers in the Church. So, before he finishes his letter to the Romans, he warns them to keep their eyes open for those who would destroy the unity of the Church.

This is an important message because every Church has trouble sooner or later. Sadly, conflict always draws a crowd. A church may have difficulty getting enough members together to make up a quorum for a business meeting or a prayer meeting, but there is one way to draw a crowd: Announce a moral scandal or a vote to get rid of the pastor or some staff member or what color carpet to put in the church, or whether to cut the large oak tree in front of the church, and the sanctuary will be jammed with people. All kinds of

folks who are not faithful on Sunday morning will come out of the wood-work. What is it about human nature that makes us interested in a stink? And, as someone said, "The more you stir a stink, the stinkier it gets!"

Paul had seen churches split into arguing factions and lose their effectiveness for Christ. He had seen some churches that started well but were destroyed because of conflict.

Could that happen in churches today? The answer is, Yes! Could that happen to our church? Again, the answer is, Yes!

It may be that our church has no serious problems at the moment. It may be that ours is a congregation of Spirit-filled believers who love the Lord, love each other, and love those outside the Church. But, increasingly one hears stories of churches torn apart because of controversy. It may have started over something small that didn't matter to anything, but when you let man's pride and ego get involved, it begins to snowball and then it becomes a runaway train. Churches and Christians can quickly lose their influence and the Name of Jesus will be dragged through the mud!

On that last point, let me add a word. Anonymous criticism generally ought to be disregarded. That kind of criticism is essentially worthless. Anonymous criticism allows the critic to say anything he wants, free from any accountability for his words. Church leaders would do well to ignore unsigned letters and e-mails because there is no way to evaluate the credibility of the comments or the motives of the writer.

The anonymous writer will usually try to make it sound that his criticism is held by many people. He will use words like "we" or "most of us" or "more than you realize" think this way. If a man doesn't have the courage to sign his name, why should anyone listen to what he has to say. Few things rip a church apart like anonymous criticism.

Remember: Some folks just look for things to criticize. It takes no size to criticize.

Let's look at what Paul says about How to Handle Troublemakers in Church:

I. The Deeds of the Troublemakers

There are some tale-tell signs associated with those who would cause trouble in the Church. Their deeds prove them to be just what they are. Remember what Jesus said, "Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20).

A. They are Divisive Romans 16:17

Paul uses two words here that describe what the troublemakers do in the house of God.

1. Division: It means "to splinter or cause dissension.
 2. Offences: This means "to lay a trap or snare in the path of another to cause them to stumble."
- We get our word "scandal" from this word.

They often do this by teaching doctrines that are not biblical, thereby leading people astray. Watch out for people who possess a divisive spirit and enjoy arguing the Bible.

B. They are Dishonest Romans 16:18

These pretend to have pure motives and the good of the Church at heart, but they do not. Many of these folks are not even saved. They don't care about the Church, but only about their personal opinion, their power and influence, and their personal gain. Philippians 3:18-19 calls these folks "the enemies of the cross."

C. They are Deceptive Romans 16:18b

These people have a way with words and they use their ability to twist the truth and deceive the "simple." The word "simple" does not refer to stupid folks, but to those believers who have not matured enough to know that everything that sounds good is not always good. They are not mature enough to recognize a counterfeit when they appear before them.

Paul says these folks are good at using "smooth words" and "flattering speech." Titus 1:10-11; 2 Timothy 3:6; Jude 16

Romans 16:18 says that these folks "serve their own belly." Their motivation is their own "belly" or their carnal, self-centered interest. Whether their motivation is greed, fame, or notoriety, it is anything but service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The Directions for the Troublemakers

How are we to handle ourselves and the troublemakers?

A. They are to be Examined Romans 16:17

Watch for them! In the Church there are disagreements and then there are disagreements. Obviously, not all are of the same importance.

Paul says we are to “mark them” or “note them.” It means “to look at, observe, to fix one’s eyes and attention upon someone or something.” The idea here is to watch the enemy lest he slip in on us and cause problems in the Church. We are to keep our eyes open for those who would infiltrate the Church to do it harm.

It’s like going to the doctor and he finds something suspicious so he says, “Let’s watch that for a while.” When you find people who have a tendency to cause trouble, watch them carefully.

B. They are to be Excluded Romans 16:17

Withdraw from them!” “Avoid them” or turn away from them. Avoid communication and communion with them.

Not everyone is welcome in Church. That’s a truly shocking thought in these days of ultra-inclusion when we emphasize the unconditional love of God. Sometimes we sound as if in our desperation to welcome people that we are willing to compromise everything we believe in order to fill our pews.

“It’s better to divide over truth than to unite around error.”

The word “avoid them” literally means “to turn away from.” Don’t get caught up in arguments with false teachers. It’s a waste of time.

See 2 Timothy 2:16 and 2 John 10-11.

III. The Defense Against the Troublemakers Romans 16:19

A. Be Committed to God’s Word

The surest defense against intrusions and troublemakers is to be strong in the Word of God. Listen to it. Learn it. Live it.

Listen to it when it is preached. Take advantage of every message God sends through a man directly to our heart.

Learn it. Grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Live it. Just hearing the Word and studying the Word is not enough. We must obey the Word.

James 1:22

B. Be Christ-like Toward Good Works

Be wise or skilled in good living. Give your life to knowing and doing that which is good. Be holy people. Walk like Jesus walks. Talk like Jesus talks. Follow His example.

C. Be Child-like Toward Guilty Ways

To be “simple concerning evil” carries the idea of being naïve or innocent or untainted by evil. “Don’t even be beginners in evil.” It speaks of a person who has not tasted of the fruits of the world.

Sometimes we like to hear the testimony of those who have been saved out of great sins and wickedness. But far better is the person who can stand up and say, “Jesus saved me when I was a small child and kept me out of sin and wickedness.”

You don’t have to be experienced in sin to be against it. You don’t have to drink poison to know it will kill you. You don’t have to handle a rattlesnake to know that it will bite you.

Christians should avoid evil like the plague it is. The best thing in the world is to come to Jesus at a young age and live for Him the rest of your life.

IV. The Destruction of the Troublemakers Romans 16:20

All troublemakers revive their energy from one source: Satan.

Paul closes by letting us know there is coming a day when the father of all troublemakers will get what's coming to him.

One day, Satan will be Vanquished and Saints will be Victorious!