



# Romans

*A Verse-By-Verse Study*  
*(Originally written one verse per day)*

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## CHAPTER 1

**Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God... Romans 1:1**

Christ the Lord has come and is revealed to us in the four gospel accounts. What was veiled and prefigured in the Old Testament is revealed and realized in the New. After the gospel narratives, the book of Acts is introduced. It shows the development of the church from its infancy to the point where it was ready to replace Israel as a light to the nations during Israel's second exile.

In the book of Acts, an immense amount of information and structure is given to show us how things transition from the early Jewish church to the predominantly gentile church which would carry the spiritual banner of the message of Jesus Christ for the next 2000 years. As incredible as it seems, this handing over the banner to the gentiles was prophesied in the blessing Noah pronounced upon his sons Shem and Japheth in Genesis 9:26, 27.

Acts begins in Jerusalem and Peter is the main focus of chapters 1-12. Acts ends in Rome and Paul is the main focus of chapters 13-28. Within these parallel divisions are underlying parallels which show the banner being passed and it is necessary to show them in order to understand the significance of what is coming in Paul's epistles –

Act/Chapter

1. Peter's work began by the Holy Spirit (2)
1. Paul's work began by the Holy Spirit (13)
  
2. Peter was thought to be drunk and then explains himself (2)
2. Paul was thought to be mad and then explains himself (26)
  
3. Peter's first sermon begins new section of book (2)
3. Paul's first sermon begins new section of book (13)
  
4. Peter has a time of work, preaching, and then persecution (2-11)
4. Paul has a time of work, preaching, and then persecution (13-19)
  
5. Peter has trouble after healing a man lame from birth (3)
5. Paul has trouble after healing a man lame from birth (14)

6. Peter says, "Silver and gold have I none" (3)
6. Paul says, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold" (20)
  
7. Peter's shadow heals (5)
7. Paul's handkerchief heals (19)
  
8. Peter is arrested in the temple and taken to Sanhedrin (4, 5)
8. Paul is arrested in the temple and taken to Sanhedrin (21-23)
  
9. Peter confronts Simon the sorcerer (8)
9. Paul confronts Elymas the sorcerer (13)
  
10. Peter performs an exorcism (5)
10. Paul performs an exorcism (16)
  
11. Peter raises Tabitha from the dead (9)
11. Paul raises Eutychus from the dead (20)
  
12. Peter lays hands for reception of Spirit (8)
12. Paul lays hands for reception of Spirit (19)
  
13. Peter worshipped (10)
13. Paul worshipped (14)
  
14. Peter imprisoned with miraculous escape (12)
14. Paul imprisoned with miraculous escape (16)
  
15. Angel stood by Peter (12)
15. Angel stood by Paul (27)
  
16. Peter called by vision to preach in Caesarea (10)
16. Paul called by vision to preach in Macedonia (16)
  
17. Peter's success brings Jewish jealousy (5)
17. Paul's success brings Jewish jealousy (13)
  
18. Peter heals the bedridden Aeneas (9)
18. Paul heals the bedridden father of Publius (28)

19. Peter ordains deacons (6)

19. Paul ordains elders (14)

20. Peter is “filled with the Spirit” (4)

20. Paul is “filled with the Spirit” (13)

Along with these many parallels, Paul will state in his writings four times that he is the Apostle to the Gentiles and twice that Peter is the Apostle to the Jews. This then is the significance of these parallels. They are highlighted for our understanding of the immense importance of Paul’s 13 epistles – Romans to Philemon. He is the instructor of the church which has been led by the sons of Japheth since the exile of Israel in AD70.

To dismiss Paul and his writings then is to reject church doctrine and thus there is no cohesion to the Christian message. This has increasingly been the case in the past 150 years or so as the church has become more liberal and turned from Paul in an attempt to be more “tolerant” and less firm on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Acts ends in Rome, it is fitting that God established the order of the epistles beginning with Romans. This is the “constitution of Christianity” and it gives wonderfully valuable insights into the Person and work of Jesus Christ and it also gives important information concerning the times when Israel will again carry the spiritual banner of God’s message. To misunderstand Paul’s words in Chapters 9-11 leads to a “spiritualization” of much of the Old Testament. These unfulfilled Old Testament passages will be realized in Israel of the future, not the church.

The book of Romans has 433 verses and so it will take more than a year to complete. When we are finished, hopefully we will have a much fuller understanding of the glory of what God has done for us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Although this is a long introduction so far, we could actually go on for much, much longer and still not glean all that is necessary to understand what is coming. However, to get to verse 1, we must move on. Here in verse 1 Paul introduces himself using four terms – bondservant, called, apostle, and separated. Two of these terms describe his state before the Lord – bondservant and apostle. The other two are how that state came about – he was called and separated.

Paul’s original name was Saul, however, in the book of Acts we see the transition of his name from Saul to Paul. Paul means “small” and he is actually prefigured all the way back in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah when Lot fled to a town

called Zoar. God selected Paul and placed hints of him in Genesis to show us what He would do through this wonderful and hardy soul.

As “‘a bondservant’ of Jesus Christ” he is a slave, belonging to Him entirely and he merits no payment for his duties. His calling by the Lord was as an apostle – a sent one; a chosen messenger. And finally, he was “separated to the gospel of God.” He was consecrated to be a herald of this message and as the book of acts and his personal writings reveal, he conducted his duties in a manner which brought great honor to his Lord. He performed his duties well.

*Heavenly Father, we have started on a great adventure and we ask that You be with us, guide us, and keep us from straying from the intent and purpose that You have desired for us as we consider this beautiful book, Romans. Thank You Lord for Your hand of instruction and your Spirit of wisdom upon us during our journey! Amen.*

**...which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,...** Romans 1:2

Paul builds upon yesterday’s verse and will continue to do so after this one and therefore we will continue a full quote to keep proper context –

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,...”

“Which He promised before” is speaking of the “gospel of God” and is therefore relating back to Paul’s status as “a bondservant of Christ” and his calling as an apostle. We have to remember as we read the New Testament, that there was no New Testament until it was written. Therefore, the promise came from the Old Testament. That which was given “before” is what Paul is speaking of and it came “through His prophets.”

Nowhere in the Bible will we find this thought contradicted and many times it will be supported. Two important verses to understand divine inspiration are –

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20, 21

Memorizing these verses is recommended, or at least memorizing their location. The Bible was received, in its entirety, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore God's word to mankind and thus there can be no other truly "holy" books. Any other religious or philosophical texts may have value, but none are authoritative when speaking of the things of God. The gospel message, which was anticipated in the Old Testament, stands as God's plan of salvation to the people of the world.

*Lord Jesus, Your word speaks of You and Your glory. Help us to read it, study it, cherish it, and live by it all the days of our lives. Give us the strong will and desire to share it with others as well. May You favor our studies and bless us as we seek Your glorious face through it. To Your honor and glory, we pray this. Amen.*

**...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,...** Romans 1:3

Again, to ensure context, we quote the entire thought thus far –

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,...”

Paul is establishing his baseline for the entire epistle and he is doing it in a way that no one except a fool or someone who comes to the text with presuppositions could miss. Paul is a herald of the “gospel of God” of which all of the prophets and the Scriptures testify and which concerns “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” If all of Scripture testifies to this One, then He is the focus of all that God is doing through redemptive history and therefore He is the Lord – Jesus is “Jehovah” of the Old Testament revealed in His fullness in the New.

Paul's explanation of Jesus begins with the fact that He is God's Son. This will be explained and clarified in the time ahead. Sonship can come through procreation or adoption, but we get a hint at where Paul is leading with his next thought – Jesus “was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.” This then tells us, as the gospels, Acts, and surely the entire Bible tells us, that Jesus was born into the stream of humanity. “Of the seed of David” ensures that we understand He is the fulfillment of all of the Messianic promises. These include everything from Genesis 3:15, through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. David was the final peg in the line of promises, and it is through His house that the realization of these promises would come about. We read of the Lord's promise to David in 2 Samuel-

““When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”” 2 Samuel 7:12-16

Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophecies and promises just as Paul notes in this early verse. Noting this establishes the coming context of the epistle.

*What an amazing and beautiful treasure Your word is, O God. It is woven together so beautifully and with such excellence that we can only look into its pages with awe and wonderment. Glory to You in the highest for the wonder revealed in its pages! Amen.*

**...and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.** Romans 1:4

Paul completes the opening portion of his statement which comes prior to naming the addressees of his letter. To ensure context let us quote the entire thought –

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

This final portion states that Jesus Christ is “declared to be the Son of God...by the resurrection of the dead.” This has wrongly led to the belief and occasional teaching that Jesus was only officially declared to be God’s Son because of the resurrection. This is not Paul’s intent here. Jesus is hinted as the Son of God even in the Old Testament and explicitly noted as such throughout the gospel accounts.

What this is stating is that the resurrection is the sure proof of the fact. His conception by the Holy Spirit in a virgin’s womb is all that is needed to assure us that Jesus is the God/Man. However, His resurrection proves it. Here are the necessary points and two syllogisms which work backward from the resurrection to demonstrate this –



Adam sinned and through him all have received his fallen state. The Bible treats this as an axiom. We are, as Jesus said in John 3:18 “condemned already.” Sin transfers through the man, but not through the woman (symbolized by the rite of circumcision – cutting away the sin nature). Thus, there was a need for a man to be born of a woman, but not of a man. This was hinted at in Genesis 3:15. This Man is Jesus.

Jesus was born of God and Mary and therefore He was born without inheriting Adam’s sin. And yet He is fully human. The resurrection is 100% conditional upon the virgin birth. No virgin birth equals no resurrection because inherited sin would disqualify that. This is why babies don’t resurrect even though they have never committed intentional sin.

However, the virgin birth doesn’t guarantee the resurrection. Nor does living a sinless life if one isn’t virgin born. Both the virgin birth and a sinless life are conditions for the resurrection. If Jesus wasn’t born of a virgin, then He would have inherited Adam’s sin. But even if He was born of a virgin, He would still need to live perfectly sinless throughout His entire life.

1) The resurrection is conditional upon a sinless life.

A sinless life is conditional upon the virgin birth.

Therefore, the resurrection proves the virgin birth.

2) The resurrection proves the virgin birth.

The virgin birth proves Jesus was born of God and of Mary.

Therefore, Jesus is God’s Son – the God/Man.

The resurrection is the definitive declaration that Jesus Christ is “the Son of God with power.”

Within this verse is also the note that this is “according to the Spirit of holiness.” This is probably speaking of the fact that Jesus is both divine and human rather than of the Holy Spirit. His divine nature, perfectly demonstrated in His sinless humanity, resulted in the resurrection. Either way, because both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are fully God, the end result comes out the same. Within the Godhead, Jesus Christ is the second member of the Trinity. Therefore, His Spirit is divine and the Holy Spirit testifies to this.

*What a glorious mystery is revealed in the Person of Jesus, O God. How wonderful it is to contemplate and search out these mysteries in Your word and to come to an understanding of who You are and what You have done through Him! Great and awesome are You! Amen.*

**Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name... Romans 1:5**

“Through Him” is speaking of Jesus – the One born of the seed of David as a human being and who is “the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” It is through this God/Man that Paul has “received grace.” Grace is unmerited divine assistance which is given to us and which will carry us through every need and step of our spiritual life in Christ. It is a virtue which comes externally from God and without our assistance. It cannot be earned because it is unmerited. This is the heart of the gospel message. What we can’t do for ourselves, God did for us through His Son.

Paul also states he received “apostleship.” It must be understood that this letter is written from Paul as an apostle to those who are “the called of Jesus Christ” (v 6) and “saints” (v 7). He is not stating that we are all apostles. Apostleship is a commission and is designated for a certain group of people at a certain time in redemptive history; sometimes called the “apostolic age.”

Jesus founded His church and anointed a group of men to establish it and then to receive and retransmit His message, which is the Holy Bible. The apostolic age ended with the sealing of the book of Revelation, because the purpose of the age ended at that time. Far too often, people attempt to claim titles to which they have no right. Such is the case with the title of “apostle.”

Paul continues by stating that he and those so commissioned have received this grace and their apostleship “for obedience to the faith among all the nations for His name...” Obedience to the faith is the gospel message, not the works associated with it but the very basis for any works – belief.

The gospel is one of faith which comes by grace (Ephesians 2:8, 9). The calling comes first and it is united with faith. Only then is a title bestowed. In Paul’s case, he is an apostle. The designation came after salvation not before, and therefore his commitment to the gospel message preceded his commitment to carry out the task of proclaiming it.

This is the logical progression for each person who is called. The grace is given, the faith is exercised, the title is granted, and the carrying out of the task is conducted. Far too often, the logical progression is violated and therefore confusion or cunning takes over. How many carry out the task without the calling? How many claim the calling without the faith? How many claim the faith without having received the grace?

If we follow the logical and necessary steps of the faith, we will keep from straying and our doctrine will be pure. It is “obedience to the faith” which will bring honor to Christ. Let us not skip steps or run ahead without the proper foundation lest we bring reproach upon the glorious name of our Lord.

*Lord Jesus, You have offered us Your grace. Now help us to accept it by faith and receive Sonship in Christ. Then O Lord, spur us on to great deeds for Your name’s sake and for Your glory. Be with us each step of the way and help us to be faithful and enduring witnesses to Your glory and the truth of Your gospel message. Amen.*

**...among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;... Romans 1:6**

For context, we will cite the entire thought thus far – “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;...”

As you can see now, Paul has drawn a distinction between his calling which was the same as the other apostles and those whom he is addressing in Rome. “Among all nations” includes the Roman addressees. Paul’s calling is one of an apostle to witness the work of Christ to others. Those others are counted among the “called of Jesus Christ.”

The word for “called” is *kletoi* and is a general term. Paul uses it for himself in verse 1 concerning his apostleship. Jesus uses the term in Matthew 20:16 when He said “...many are called, but few chosen.” In direct reference to this verse, Paul is saying that the recipients are the called. However, there were certainly many in Rome at the time who read the letter who weren’t Christians and there have been jillions since then who have read the book and are not saved believers.

The idea then is that the offer is given, and anyone can accept it, but not all choose to. Those who do are “the called of Jesus Christ.” As Paul will show us later concerning those from Israel who don’t believe-

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

-Romans 10:16, 17

Are you among the called? If you have heard the word, be sure to let it sink in and then respond to it. Eternity awaits.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the offer of salvation through Jesus! And thank You for offering it until we receive it. Not all accept it the first time they hear it and yet they later come to do so. And so, right now, I would like to pray for all those I know who have yet to make the commitment to this wonderful Lord. Please stir up their hearts unto salvation. Amen.*

**To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:**

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:7**

With this verse we move into a new section of Paul's letter. "To all who are in Rome" is speaking of the congregation specifically, not the city in general. As Paul says when speaking of his people Israel in Chapter 9, so can be said of the addressees in the letter – "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham."

The same thought applies here – "Not all who are in Rome are of the 'beloved of God' nor are they all 'called to be saints' because they live in Rome."

The reason we note this is because the church is an exclusive called out group of people in the world and not all, despite the common usage of the term, are "God's children." When Paul says these believers are "beloved of God" he uses the term *agapetois theo* meaning literally "God's love ones." It is these who are "called to be saints." The relationship – the calling – is offered by God and it is accepted by man. From that moment believers are set apart as holy and this is where the emphasis lies. Whereas we were once at enmity with God, there is now felicity and God sets His called ones apart from the world.

Next Paul gives what will become a standard greeting in his epistles, "Grace to you and peace to you." Grace is unmerited favor which cannot be earned. This is a common greeting among the Greek people. Peace however is a common greeting among the Hebrew people. In their language, the word is shalom. This is more than a greeting for calm or quiet but is a state of wholeness and completion in all ways. Paul unites the two terms just as the church is being united between Jew and Gentile during his time. Grace precedes peace because only after receiving the grace of God can a person experience the peace of God.

Paul extends this wonderful blessing on behalf of "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a greeting from the eternal God – both the unseen Father and His Son who reveals the Father to us. Throughout Paul's letters, as with the entire Bible, the deity of

Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept which simply can't be missed. It is the very heart of what God has done for the reconciliation of the people of the world.

In these seven opening verses enough theology has been presented to open the minds of the people of the world to the immensity of the work of God through Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of-

The surety of the gospel as was revealed through the Old Testament prophets,  
The inspiration of Scripture because of this surety,  
The Sonship of Jesus Christ,  
The Lordship of Jesus Christ,  
The humanity of Jesus Christ,  
The deity of Jesus Christ,  
The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,  
The unmerited favor and placement of those who have called on Jesus Christ,  
And an introduction into the nature of the Godhead by indicating the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

In all, these seven opening verses are a storehouse of theological wealth for the saints of God to ponder.

*Lord Jesus, not a word is wasted in the pages of Your Holy Bible. Every detail is given to lead us to an understanding of You and how You have revealed Yourself to us. Help us to never rush through its pages, but to ponder and cherish each word. Your word is more nourishing to us than the food we eat. Thank You for Your word. Amen.*

**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Romans 1:8**

After his greeting, Paul begins the main portion of the epistle with the word "first." There will be in Romans, as in all of Paul's writings, a logical sequence of thought and an articulate presentation of his arguments. As he is writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, everything he will say is the absolute truth in how things are in relation to God. We may disagree, but we are only disagreeing with God. We may interpret doctrinal points differently, but in the end, there is only one correct interpretation. Therefore, as with the entire Bible, a careful analysis is required.

Paul's first thought is to "thank my God through Jesus Christ." As intolerant as it may sound, there is only one path to God, and that is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and there is only one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). No

prayer to God is acceptable which has not gone through Him. No thanks to or praise of God is effective unless it is directed through Him. And so, Paul gives his thanks to God through Jesus on behalf of the believers in Rome. And it is a thanks grounded in the knowledge of their great faith, a faith “spoken of throughout the whole world.”

Although the reason for their faith being so widely disseminated isn't directly stated, the content of the epistle certainly indicates some of the reasons. Paul will speak on immorality and it is probable that the believers were either mocked or held in esteem for holding a moral stand. He will also speak on God's judgment, man's fallen nature and unrighteousness, and etc. Any of these issues could be the basis for the recognition of their faith by the world's people.

What Paul will do is logically defend our responsibilities and obligations towards God, both from His general revelation of Himself through nature as well as through His specific revelation of Himself through the Bible and through Jesus. As humans, particularly in our post-modern society, we may find Paul's words out of touch, but God doesn't. What is presented in this epistle reflects God's standards and we ignore them or attempt to diminish them at our own peril.

*Heavenly Father, give us hearts willing to accept Your precepts without diminishing them in any way. Help us then to stand firm on them even if we are mocked or receive physical harm for them. Your word is truth, therefore give us the moral rectitude to stand on it without wavering. To Your honor and glory this prayer is made. Amen.*

**For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,...** Romans 1:9

Paul draws God in as his witness for his thoughts in the next two verses. What he is going to convey then is the absolute truth. His vow is before God “whom I serve with my spirit.” The word Paul uses for “spirit” is *pneumati*. As he writes throughout his epistles, he consistently and carefully makes a distinction, and even a contrast, between the “spirit” and the “soul.” To Paul, the demarcation is absolutely clear. The spirit of a person, the *pneuma*, is not the same as the soul which is the term *psuche*. To him it is the difference between the spiritual life of the person and the natural/physical life of the person.

It's important to understand the nature of humanity as the Bible presents it though to fully understand and define what Paul is speaking of. Humans are a soul with a body. The two are united and are incomplete without the other. Paul assures us of this in 2 Corinthians 5:1-3 –

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.”

In these verses, he calls the soul without a body “naked.” This concept is known as anthropological hylomorphism – man is a soul/body unity. The natural man is a soul united with a body whether connected to God or not. This is similar to an animal. There is a body and a life force which propels that body but not necessarily a spiritual aspect. The “spirit” (*pneuma*) Paul is speaking of is the spiritual connection between God and man; it is that part of the man which is intimately connected to God.

Paul says that God, whom he serves with his spirit is “in the gospel of His Son.” The gospel is a spiritual force then. And, of course, this is so. In Ephesians 2:4, 5 Paul writes this –

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”

As you can see, a living person (a soul/body unity) can still be “dead.” What is needed is the regeneration which comes through the gospel message. When this is received, the spirit is made alive. We are now reconnected to God through the gospel – our soul/body unity is as God intended for us. Got it? Good stuff.

It is in this quickened state that Paul “without ceasing” remembers those in Rome in his prayers. Does this mean that Paul didn’t eat, write letters, sleep, or do other activities which would keep him from praying for them? No. Rather, his life was lived in a constant state of prayer which occurred at any given moment. He could pray while doing any of these things or not pray while doing them and not be found a liar. He, like each of us, should live in such a way that we are always connected to God. If we are, then we will simply pray as things which need prayer come to mind.

A good example of this connection is explicitly stated by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22–

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

The verbs here indicate that these things should be done now, that they are crucial to our spiritual life, and that we are to be active in pursuing them. This is the state Paul tells us we should live in because it is the state he lived in and which he knew was pleasing to God.

*Lord, I know that I was once blind but now I see. I know that I was once dead, but You quickened me to life. I know that through Your gospel I have all I need to live in the spirit and to be pleasing to You at all times. Help me to live the life that I should because of the gift I received through Jesus. Let me not squander my Christian life but live it to the fullest! Amen.*

**... making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.** Romans 1:10

The previous verse said, “without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” The prayers are what lead to Paul’s request in this verse - that he would be able to make a personal visit to those in Rome. “If by some means” indicates his tremendous desire to be there with them.

To Paul, it didn’t matter how it came about so much as that it would happen. In the book of Acts, it is seen that he did make it to Rome after being accused and imprisoned while in the land of Israel and then being taken on a long, disaster-fraught journey by ship to Italy and then up the peninsula to Rome. He prayed “if by some means” and the petition was eventually granted in a most remarkable and well documented way.

In his request, he also notes that if the trip to Rome is possible, that it be “in the will of God.” Paul could have simply gotten on a ship or taken one of the roads which led to Rome and been there in a short amount of time. But he understood that his was a ministry of obedience to his calling and that what he did needed to be within the will of God and not because of his own desires.

If and until the time selected by God arose, he was determined to continue with the ministry as the Lord directed. This is clearly seen in chapter 15 of Romans where he writes this –

“And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: “To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.” For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.



But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.”

-Romans 15:20-23

Paul gave the reason he was hindered from going to Rome – “To preach the gospel, not where Christ was named...” However, his ministry and goals to that end were being realized and so he planned on going as far as Spain to proclaim the gospel there. On the way, it was his intent to visit his beloved brethren in Rome.

What should be noted above all in this desire of Paul is that his intent in Rome was to share in Christ, not sightsee. Rome was the center of the world as far as things were concerned. There was royalty, pomp, wealth, and a million things a visitor could do and see. And yet Paul’s desire was one of fellowship, teaching, and building up of the church, not taking in the splendor of the city.

Is this your heart’s desire? How many of us go on short-term missionary journeys in order to see the world or to visit an interesting location? Our intent and goal should be one of service, not self-satisfaction. Let us remember this and pray that our goals are in line with His good news.

*Heavenly Father, give me a willing heart to share the good news of Jesus wherever I am and at any time. And please also give me the heart and desire to fellowship with other believers as I go through this walk of life. I ask these things that You will be glorified through my life and conduct. Amen.*

**For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—** Romans 1:11

Again, we note that it is Paul’s desire to see the believers in Rome and not the city itself. He was far less interested in the splendor of the buildings, the pomp of those who govern, or the wealth of the commerce and trade and far more interested in the establishment of the faith of those who were called saints.

Of particular interest and purpose was that he would be there to “impart some spiritual gift” to the church. There are two main views on this statement –

1. The first is that this “spiritual gift” was an extraordinary apostolic gift such as speaking in tongues, healing, future prophecy, etc. Within this view we will note two sub-categories.

- a. Once received the miraculous gift would be established and could then be passed on, such as charismatic churches believe is the case today.
- b. This gift was given by Paul because he was an apostle and would be to validate his apostolic office and help solidify their faith in the gospel. Beyond Paul, the gift couldn't be transferred because such gifts were given to and through the apostles only.

2. The second main view is that this “spiritual gift” wasn't a miraculous gift at all.

The second option is certainly the correct analysis. To assume that Paul was going to give them a miraculous gift to establish or solidify their saving faith is contrary to the gospel message. It is also a forced, unnatural reading of the intent, which will be explained completely in the second half of the thought (verse 12.)

Paul uses the term *ti metado* charisma “some that I may impart gift” which is certainly a general gift of edification such as instruction. His intent is to give it just as he is doing with his letter, but in person. There is no other instance elsewhere in Paul's writings where the words he uses in this verse denote the giving of a miraculous gift.

Paul was a builder of faith and an instructor in the gospel. He was given the gifts of an apostle, but he wasn't one to wield them in a showy manner, nor use them as a point of impressing others (1 Corinthians 14:20). Paul's ideas of spiritual gifts for the building up of the body in Rome are listed in chapter 12 and they fit the sound and established criteria of organizational development, not the unwieldy foundation of the sensational.

When we as believers put our trust in, or base our faith on, outward demonstrations of spiritual gifts we have an unsound foundation. The word of God, the Holy Bible, is what tells us of Jesus as spoken through the prophets and apostles. This is where the basis of strong faith should be realized.

*Heavenly Father, give me strong and sound faith in the word which You have delivered to Your people in the pages of the Bible. Help me to understand it and think clearly about what is presented there so that I may be built up in my faith. I ask this that our relationship will be grounded and sure. Thank You for Your word which tells me of Jesus. Amen.*

**...that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Romans 1:12**

Here is Paul's complete thought for reference – "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

As noted in the previous verse, the "spiritual gift" he desired to impart was most likely not a miraculous gift. Instead, he desired to impart a gift that they "may be established." This is sure because these were already believers and therefore a miraculous sign wouldn't get them anymore "saved." Therefore, the verse isn't speaking of establishment in this sense, but rather grounding in the salvation they already possessed.

In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul tells us the purpose of miraculous signs – "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe." Paul is writing to believers in Rome.

To confirm that this wasn't the imparting of such a gift, Paul completes the thought with verse 12 by stating first "that is." This term is a conjunction tying verse 11 with verse 12. Paul is directly connecting "that you may be established" with "that I may be encouraged together with you."

As an apostle, Paul didn't need a miraculous sign to be encouraged and it would make no sense to attempt to be encouraged by a sign which he was bestowing. Instead, he is speaking of a spiritual gift of edification for the building up of their faith; a spoken epistle to compliment the written one.

Such a spoken message would accomplish exactly what he desired "by the mutual faith of both you and me." He is quite clear that they have the faith already, just as he does, and he is hoping to add to that faith so that they will be productive, competent followers of Jesus.

In his second letter, Peter describes exactly what believers should do after exercising their initial faith. It is surely this thought, not an outward demonstration of the miraculous, that Paul is speaking of –

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8

*Lord, I would pray that You so establish my faith that I would never attempt to rely on an outward sign, but rather on the inward knowledge and surety of Your word. Help me to think clearly concerning what You have given us there and to trust that it is fully sufficient for my growth in You. Thank You, Lord. Amen.*

**Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. Romans 1:13**

Here Paul defends that it was his intention to come to Rome earlier and that he hasn't simply ignored the believers there. We've already seen that he is fully aware of the faith of those in Rome (v. 8); that he is constantly in prayer for them (v. 9); that those prayers included a requested way for him to visit Rome (v. 10); and that his intent was to build them up and thus be encouraged together with them in their mutual faith (v. 11).

Because of this sequence of thought, he lets them know that his heart for joining with them is honest and that his plans have included a visit to them all along. However, he has been "hindered until now." This is Paul's way of telling them that he has been following a set course of action which simply wouldn't allow him to venture to Rome. This was explained in our analysis of verse 10 which took us to Romans 15 to understand why.

The next thing Paul tells us is the reason for his desire to visit those in Rome – "that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles." Putting everything together, we see that the reason for him being hindered from joining them was because he desired to "bear fruit" for the sake of the Gospel. However, his greatest desire was to "preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation." (15:20). Therefore, because Christ was already known in Rome, it would be contradictory to his *modus operandi* to go there.

Now however (as Romans 15 goes on to explain) this will no longer be a hindrance and therefore his ability will be joined to his desire. We can look at Paul's example and learn from it. Often, we put our desires above our set goals and those goals then suffer because of it. This lesson is particularly important in matters pertaining to the faith and therefore we need to determine at the outset that we will let nothing hinder the goals we set. By doing so, we show that the ministry and gospel of Jesus is more important than the temporary things our eyes alight upon.

*Heavenly Father, You have given us the ultimate example of determination in our Lord Jesus. Along with Him we see many examples of how to exercise our priorities properly*

*through Your prophets and apostles. Help us to reflect on such things and to take them to heart. In the end, what we desire is far less important than what You proclaim. Help us to remember this lesson. Amen.*

**I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.**

Romans 1:14

This verse is a tie between the previous verses which spoke of Paul's desire to come to Rome and the following three verses which lay the foundation for an intense discourse on the nature of fallen man in relation to the holy God and Creator.

Paul says that he is a "debtor to Greeks and barbarians." The term debtor speaks of one bound in the performance of their duties or by an obligation. The distinction between Greeks and barbarians is noted and would be similar to the thought of those in the "first world" and those in the "third world." Greeks were the developers of a great and intellectual culture and therefore to them, everyone else was a lower class. The term "barbarians" is reflective of everyone who didn't participate in the Greek culture and speak the language. It comes from the sounds of non-Greek speakers "bar bar" or gibberish.

Paul claimed to be a debtor to both the high class and the low class. To him, there was only the saved and the lost and he wanted to convert as many as possible. The second distinction – the "wise and the unwise" is similar in concept because the message of the gospel cuts through the most intellectual argument and crushes the most inane. A hint of this is to be seen in 1 Corinthians 3:18-20 –

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

Paul clearly understood this, as we all should, and he therefore proclaimed the gospel in any and every way to save as many as he could. He spoke the gospel to King Agrippa, and he spoke the gospel to the slave Onesimus. He spoke it at the Areopagus to the intellectually elite, and he spoke it to tradesmen and prisoners. He spoke of Jesus to Jew and he spoke of Him to Gentiles. In 1 Corinthians 9, he sums up his audience for us –

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to

those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you." (19-23)

Life application: Let each of us be willing to speak the gospel message to any and all people in the manner which they are comfortable. We should use simple words to the uneducated and to children, but we should be capable of adjusting our words up when speaking to those of higher education. We need to be ready and willing to communicate properly and effectively to people of all of life's stations about the exceedingly rich glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Heavenly Father, You have created me as I am. Some people are smarter than me and others are less intelligent. Help me to be wise in how I approach each person so that I make the best of each opportunity laid before me. Just as Paul spoke according to the understanding of his hearer, help me to do so as well. Amen.*

**So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.**  
Romans 1:15

There are very few that truly mean what Paul states here, but when we see them, we can tell almost immediately what sort of person they are. "As much as is in me" means that with every fiber of his being and every calorie he has taken in... he will expend it all for the calling to which he's been called to. This then reflects as much on the Lord as it does on Paul. Whatever the Lord gives to him, this is what he will return to the Lord. We know that Paul had a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) which hindered him in some way.

This thorn may have been failing eyesight. In Acts, Paul speaks harshly to the high priest without knowing it was him even though they were standing in the same room (Acts 23:1-5). In the book of Galatians, he noted that at one time the congregation would have gladly plucked out their own eyes and given them to him (4:15). And his letters were very distinct because of the unusually large letters he used, an indication of poor eyesight (Galatians 6:11).

Whether this "thorn in the flesh" was his failing eyesight or something else entirely, it was a limitation placed on him to keep him reliant on the grace of the Lord and not to trust in himself. Therefore, his ability to proclaim the gospel was both by Jesus' grace

and in accord with his care of the opportunities and abilities that he had been given. This is the life of Paul and one to which we have been called, if we will only respond. Time truly is fleeting, and each moment can only be used in one way before it is gone.

For Paul, he was always “ready to preach the gospel.” There is no other message which can bring salvation and there is no other path to God. Paul understood the immensity of this and therefore he used everything he was and every gift he possessed to spread the message. And his intent for the days ahead was to do so for those “who are in Rome also.”

He was a man on a determined course as the Bible bears witness. He was reviled for his preaching, he was stoned for his testimony, he was mocked and jeered for proclaiming the truth, he was imprisoned several times, and eventually history tells us that he was martyred for his Lord. Is this what we are also willing to face? Each of us will stand before the throne of Christ’s glory and give an accounting for our time and gifts and so let us be ready to face Him with a life that was full of love, faith, and service to His name.

*Lord Jesus, I ask for the same heart which You instilled in Paul. Give me the desire, the ability, and the opportunity to serve You with so much as is in me that You will be honored and glorified through my actions. How I love You and wish to see You receive the praise You are due from the people of the world. Amen.*

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Romans 1:16**

In the Greek, Paul begins with the word “not” – *ou gar epaischunomai* – “Not for I am ashamed of...” In other words, what begins with a negative is the most positive statement of his life, belief, and actions. “For” refers to what he has just said about being ready “as much as is in me” to preach the gospel. He was willing to expend himself to the very end for the sake of this good news.

“I am not ashamed” is a theme throughout his writings and tells us that what he is proclaiming certainly seems ridiculous and even ignominious to the world or there would be no reason to be ashamed. People feel shame over making mistakes. We feel ashamed when we are caught doing something we shouldn’t do. We feel ashamed when we are found naked. We feel shame when we don’t measure up in one way or another. Shame is something that is tied to that which is regarded as disgraceful or dishonorable and Paul looked around him and saw that the world perceived his life and

actions in this way. In 1 Corinthians 4:12, 13 he cites his perceptions of how he was seen—

“Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”

Despite this, he was completely unashamed of his life and conduct because they centered on “the gospel of Christ.” This is the good news. It is the message of salvation to a world of lost people who are destined for hell. Paul understood that without this message, there is only a moment of existence which ends in death and condemnation. There is no other way out of this and therefore this message is of paramount importance to the people of the world.

He then specifically explains this gospel message by telling us that “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” The gospel of Jesus Christ contains the power to bring the dead to life, to quicken the spirit of man which died when Adam sinned. And being “the power of God” means that it is completely effectual in its ability to do so. God is the Creator and therefore there is no other power greater than He. If the gospel is the “power of God” for this purpose, then nothing can thwart it and its results will be complete in all ways. This is evidenced by Ephesians 1:13, 14 –

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Trust is placed in Jesus and the Holy Spirit then seals the believer as a “guarantee.” Therefore, what God has determined cannot be thwarted again by man’s actions. It is an eternal and unchangeable decision lest God be found to have erred. This is the “power of God to salvation” that Paul writes about and of which he was completely unashamed. His lack of shame in this follows on the noted shame of what brought it about in the first place –

“...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

The cross was considered the most shameful method of execution possible. Any dignity a person possessed was taken away there. One was stripped naked and crucified –



leaving no possibility of covering oneself. As the body struggled to stay alive, even the act of breathing was brought to humiliation – the lungs filled with fluid and the beautiful voice of the person would never be heard again. Instead, it would be mixed with gurgling and anguish. The horrors and shame of the cross became Christ’s resounding cry of victory and Paul was unashamed to proclaim it. The exact reason is found detailed in Philippians chapter two. Paul notes that it was God Himself who took on flesh and accomplished this deed for His creatures –

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:8

In the original Greek of this verse, there is no definite article before the word “cross.” Thus, Paul highlighted the absolute shame of the cross death. This is what Jesus Christ endured and this is what Paul found the most honorable of all. It is also the message that is meant for everyone who believes. There is no person outside of the reach of God’s grace and it comes through one definitive act – belief. It is faith and faith alone which saves a person. Nothing can be added to it and nothing can take away the life which is granted when that trust is exercised.

The message is for all, “for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” What Paul is saying here is an order of time, not an order of priority. The Jew first received the gospel, and it was then transmitted to the rest of the world. This is a confirming thought of what he had just written “for everyone who believes.” The world is divided in many ways, but the Bible’s preeminent distinction is that it is divided as Jew and Gentile. Despite the enormous distinction between the two, the gospel message is for and has the same effect on both Jew and Gentile.

Such is the power and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ and yet words cannot adequately describe it.

Life application – Are you timid in sharing your faith or stepping forward and telling others about the truth that there is but one way to be reconciled to God? Ask for strength and wisdom in this matter and bear in mind that the Lord of Creation hung naked and in agony for you. What can man do to you which would be worse than what He Himself bore? Now go forth and proclaim the good news.

*O God, that You would accomplish the work of the cross for one such as me is more than I can imagine. Give me courage and strength to stand up for the truth of Your word and for the proclamation of Your wondrous gospel. This I pray that You will be glorified through the message I speak. Amen.*

**For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” Romans 1:17**

This verse contains a statement which will define the entire structure of the epistle and, yes, even the Bible itself. To introduce it, Paul says “for” which is given to explain what he had just said. It cannot be missed though that the next verse also includes the word “for.” In other words, Verse 17 will explain what he has already said to the church in Rome (and thus to us) and then the discourse on the nature of God and our relationship to Him starting in verse 18 will explain what he says in this verse.

Paul is thinking clearly and presenting his argument in a logical order. Therefore, when he speaks about issues which are contrary to God’s nature and worthy of condemnation in his coming thoughts, there is a direct connection to this verse. The statement of such great weight and magnitude is “the righteousness of God.” There are many theories about what this is speaking of.

Is it speaking of His innate righteousness? “I Am Who I Am and therefore My traits such as righteousness define Me.”

Is it speaking of His goodness? The righteousness of God is defined by His benevolent nature.

Is it speaking of His mode and means of justifying fallen man? God’s righteousness is revealed in the gospel which contains the path to justification and thus our own declaration of righteousness.

The answer is that the “righteousness of God” Paul is speaking about is the gospel. God’s righteousness is an innate righteousness, and one doesn’t need the Bible to understand this even though the Bible does proclaim it. God is benevolent and forgiving as is evidenced in nature, such as in rains falling on all people whether they are good or bad. His benevolent nature is also seen in the Bible such as in the giving of prophets to again and again call His people to repentance. But these don’t get at the heart of why Paul was willing to expend himself (verse 17). Rather, he explains that it is the gospel message to which his efforts were directed.

The “righteousness of God” is the act contained in the gospel – “For in it...is revealed.” And then he explains the very heart and core of that gospel – it is “from faith to faith.” The gospel is the way in which God’s innate righteousness is transferred to fallen man so that he stands justified and forgiven for any and all of his transgressions, both inherited

through Adam and actively committed in the flesh. And this gospel is based solely on faith.

In order to set this thought into motion, he cites the Scriptures “for it is written.” Paul’s entire discourse explaining this righteousness will be based on a verse which comes from the time of the law and which was written by a prophet who lived under the law – “The just shall live by faith.” This quote comes from the prophet Habakkuk –

“Behold the proud,  
His soul is not upright in him;  
But the just shall live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:4

Habakkuk, under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells the people under the law (the obedience to its precepts is not of faith, but of deeds) that those who are just shall live by faith. From this one verse, Paul will lay out the “righteousness of God” as has been displayed in and through Jesus Christ. But he won’t start there. Instead, he will start with God’s natural revelation of Himself and logically proceed from that springboard all the way through to his final thoughts.

He is doing this to show us that in any place and in any time and to any person – whether they have the law or not or whether they have heard the gospel or not, God is just in the decisions He renders. No one can say, “I didn’t know” and no one can say “God is unfair.” In the end, we don’t need Jesus to go to hell, we are heading there already. Rather, we need Jesus to be saved from hell. Paul will detail this very clearly as we continue through Romans.

Life application – Are you living by faith in what God has presented in the Bible about Jesus fulfilling the law on our behalf, or are you attempting to be justified by some act or acts which are prescribed in the law, such as not eating pork or not getting a tattoo? Have faith that Jesus can and will save you when you call on Him.

*O God, surely You are righteous when You judge and I have no reason to accuse You of being unfair in Your decisions. You are the Creator and I am a part of Your creation. Therefore, O God, I ask that You lead me to a full and complete understanding of what You have done through Jesus and then give me the faith to stand on that alone as I seek Your favor. Amen.*

**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, Romans 1:18**

Paul now introduces the “wrath of God.” The word wrath is from the Greek *orge*, which in turn comes from *orago*. This word means to “teem” or to “swell.” Hence, this isn’t just a rash or sudden breaking out of wrath, but God’s measured and righteous indignation at the state of man which Paul will describe in detail.

However, before going forward, one needs to look back. The connector “for” tells us that Paul is basing his statement on what he just said. In verse 16, he spoke of the gospel message which is God’s means of salvation and that it is based on belief. In verse 17, he says “for in it, the righteousness of God is revealed.” In other words, the gospel which necessitated the torturous death of the Lord Jesus reveals the righteousness of God.

Jesus’ death wasn’t an isolated event which only applies to a group known as Christians and no one else. It resulted because of “who” God is, His very nature, and thus it applies to every human on earth. The wrath of God will be executed in all people – either directly as a result of their own unrighteousness, or indirectly by substitution. The substitution still deals with the individual’s unrighteousness, but it was taken out in Jesus and it is “revealed from faith to faith.” Therefore, “The just shall live by faith.” The faith includes the fact that God has dealt with their sin in the body of Jesus Christ.

Now we can understand “the wrath of God” which Paul introduces in this verse. This wrath “is revealed from heaven” meaning that it comes directly from the throne of God and therefore it stems from His very character. There is nothing arbitrary or impetuous about it. Instead, when it is seen, it is because a violation against His nature has occurred. It is this measured and righteous response which comes against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

The two words are translated from *asebeia* and *adikia*. The first is well translated as “ungodliness” because it reflects the opposite of godliness. What is demonstrated is the polar opposite of what is expected. An example of this would be homosexuality. Sex was designed by God to be between a man and a woman. This is the self-evident natural order of things. Therefore, sins such as this are committed against what God has naturally instilled in us and they are diametrically opposed to His very nature; it is ungodliness. The second word deals more with an absence of what is inwardly right in attitude and what is outwardly right in conduct. It is the intention behind the act leading to the act – “I don’t care what God says and instead I will do this.” This is “unrighteousness.”

God’s wrath is revealed in these things by those “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” What this is saying is tied into the two words just looked at. What is

natural and correct is instilled in humanity by God and thus we have a conscience about our actions. But this conscience is suppressed in order for us to do those things which are contrary to the conscience. As Paul will show us, this leads to a spiral of depravity which goes from one sin to another – each more depraved than the next.

This unnatural course isn't taken by individuals alone though. Instead, it is the path of societies throughout history as well. Examples of such depravity are given from the earliest pages of the Bible and are seen to continue to its last pages. We need to be clear on what Paul is telling us because this is what necessitated the death of the Lord. Looking to His cross is the only way apart from God's wrath being directly unleashed on us for the spiral to be stopped.

For an individual, accepting the gospel leads to salvation. In a nation, it leads to the restoration of morality and a right societal relationship with God. Unfortunately, as wickedness grows, the numbers of those who will accept the message dwindle until God's wrath is revealed, not in Christ's substitution, but in His measured response of destruction.

An important point to consider while reviewing Paul's words in this verse is that a full explanation of the good news is coming. However, before the felicity and favor we must see the enmity and wrath. Only then can we understand the great love of God which is found in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Life application: One sin caused man to fall, and all were condemned through that one sin. God has offered a cure: through one Man's righteousness, we can be healed and saved. Are you willing to put aside your enmity with God and accept His kind offer of grace?

*Lord God, when I realize that I am "condemned already" it makes me see sin for what it is – a violation of Your righteousness. How can I point fingers at others when Yours points at me already? Instead, I thank You for Your grace and mercy and I ask that You help me to be a light to others, intolerant of sin, but a light to the sinner. Amen.*

**...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. Romans 1:19**

To ensure continuity, here is the entire thought – "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them."

“Because” then is speaking of what was said in verse 18. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against these things...because what may be known of God is manifest in them.”

Paul is speaking about God’s general revelation of Himself to humanity. The creation displays the Creator, even if only in a general sense. And this display confirms His glory, His wisdom, and His divine attributes (as will be noted in verse 20). What we see about God is completely evident and absolutely unmistakable.

Many passages in the Bible confirm what Paul is saying here. David understood God’s manifestation through the created order when he penned the 19th Psalm –

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.  
There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (vss. 1-3 NIV)

If a man born 2700 hundred years ago as a shepherd and who became a military leader can figure this out, then anyone else can too. David had no training in philosophy or theology and yet he opened his eyes and looked up and saw the wisdom and glory of God in what He has created.

With only God’s general revelation of Himself man has deduced that there must have been a beginning to the creation and thus there must have been a Beginner. If nothing else condemns us, this thought alone would be sufficient. If there was nothing and then there was something, then everything that is came from the intelligence of God. And not only that, but it must also continue to be sustained by Him from moment to moment. Philosophers, Christian and non-Christian alike, have figured this out.

The Bible clearly speaks of these things, and it does so in detail. Therefore, even if it weren’t the word of God, it would still prove that these concepts can be deduced – because they are recorded in its pages. The human mind has the ability to grasp such ideas and to ponder them, but instead we shrug such hints about Him off and fill our time with the useless pursuits of life. And not only this, but we actively suppress the knowledge of Him because we want to work out our impulses which we know are contrary to the nature of this Creator.

This active suppression of the knowledge of God is reason enough for His wrath to be poured out. In the end when humanity stands before Him in judgment, there will be no excuses for our neglect of pursuing Him.

Life application: As Christians, we accept that the Bible is God's revealed word and thus His special revelation of Himself. We also then implicitly acknowledge that He has made Himself manifest through His creation in a general way. Because we make this acknowledgment, then aren't we doubly responsible for searching Him out and reflecting what we know to be true about Him? If the lost will be condemned for suppressing such truth merely from general revelation, then how much more should we be judged for not pursuing knowledge of Him through His word and through His creation? Let us be diligent in our pursuit of our God!

*Lord God, surely You have done great and wondrous things through Your creation. And You have revealed Yourself even more fully through Your Son, our Lord and Savior. Give us the wisdom to pursue the knowledge of You all the days of our life. Ever seeking out Your glory and then sharing it with us. Amen.*

**For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,... Romans 1:20**

"For" gar in Greek is our connector to the previous verse which said that God's wrath comes as a result of our thoughts and actions and in the suppression of the truth about who He is and our accountability to Him. He has shown it to us and yet we ignore Him. "For" since the creation of the world – meaning the moment that all things came into existence. The fact that anything exists at all confirms a Necessary Being; a Being that cannot not exist. We know this because the universe simply could not exist; it is contingent on something else to be and continue on being.

This is spoken of by Paul in Colossians 1:17 – "And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." It is mentioned again in Hebrews 1:3 – "...and upholding all things by the word of His power..." As noted in the previous verse, even if the Bible weren't the Word of God, it still proclaims these self-evident truths and thus it validates what Paul is saying about our relationship to Him.

And not only is simply being here proof of the existence of God, but what is here shows us who He is – "His invisible attributes are clearly seen." The universe displays immense wisdom in its timed perfection. Therefore, whatever created this timed perfection must be even greater. The harmony of nature shows wisdom at every turn – the structure of DNA is more intricate than we can possibly imagine; a spider's web is geometrically woven, immensely strong, highly flexible, and marvelous in its design; the galaxies stretch off beyond our range of sight – each immense and stupendous in complexity. And yet, all of the created order must be less glorious than the Creator who made it.

Despite this, man in his desire to pursue unrighteousness ascribes all of this design to random chance.

Despite our denials though, the truth is “understood by the things that are made.” The 2nd Psalm shows us the wickedness of humanity and our desire to cast off the rule and authority of God –

Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, “Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.” (vss. 1-3)

Man takes his stand. He writes books about the cosmos which theorize a universe without God in control and where man is supreme over his destiny. The governments of the world attempt to show there is no God by inventing “global cooling” and then 20 years later “global warming.” “Do you see...there is no God! We need to act!” But then their theory is shown false and so they further refine their cry against “climate change” which can mean anything and therefore it means nothing. It is man taking counsel together against their Creator.

But Paul goes on by stating that their folly is even an attack against “his eternal power and Godhead.” The truth of God is denied, but the truth of “gods” isn’t. By their words and actions, they admit forces beyond their understanding, but which aren’t ultimate in nature; they aren’t the true God. However, the creation itself demonstrates that He is omnipotent, and it even gives us the ability to perceive the Godhead. This word is *theiotes* and is speaking of his divine nature. We deny God and we deny that He is God, even though He proclaims Himself in every aspect of the created order. And His response to their folly is found in the 2nd Psalm as well –

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: (vss. 4-5)

His wrath will come forth against them and when it does, Paul says “that they are without excuse.” He uses the Greek term *anapologetus* which is literally translated “no defense.” There will be no one to stand next to them to defend them because as rational, moral beings they are accountable to their Creator. There will be no philosophical or logical argument which will stand up against the Source of all wisdom and logic. And there will be nothing they can use in their defense, because God is the Creator of all things and therefore all things bear His mark of ownership. When Paul



says, “they are without excuse” it means that they will stand completely and absolutely exposed before Him. There will be no hope.

Life application: As you look around you today, notice the wisdom and creativity of the Lord in all you see. Ponder it and give Him the credit He is due.

*Lord Jesus, I have called on You and have accepted Your Lordship over me. And yet I am guilty before You each moment that passes for failing to recognize Your glory in everything I see and perceive. I can only praise You for allowing me to continue when what I deserve is Your hand of wrath. Your mercy to me is far greater than I deserve. Glory to You in the highest! Amen.*

**...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**  
Romans 1:21

In this one verse is a sequence of events which shows us the depraved state of man as he spirals downward and away from God.

- 1) Man knows God; it is undeniable and self-evident. Paul treats the words “although they knew God” as an axiom. There is no valid argument against His existence and yet the arguments come. The Bible says when they do it is the fool who presents them –

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. Psalm 14:1

- 2) Man fails to give God the glory that He is due. With his innate knowledge of God, man should turn and give Him glory. “I exist and it was because of the goodness of God that I am here...glory be to the One who created me and gave me life!” Instead, though, we trudge through life in the pursuit of vanity, never stopping to simply thank Him or praise Him for life, beauty, food, joy, love, and blessing. Darkness covers the light that we should perceive –

The wise man’s eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness.  
Ecclesiastes 2:14

This leads us to the next depraved step –

- 3) The natural result of failing to glorify God is a state of ingratitude. Paul says, "...nor were they thankful." If you put someone on welfare because of a lost job, they will first think "I'm so thankful. I'll be able to eat this week." Very quickly though what was given as a temporary fix becomes expected and even demanded. If you don't believe this, go do mission work for a short time. People, out of the goodness of their hearts, set up kitchens to feed the inner-city poor. However, the recipient's appreciation quickly fades and eventually the thought that they are entitled to a free meal sets in. Strict rules must be set in place or fighting, and outbursts of immense selfishness arise. If we treat those we can see in this manner, how much more the God we can't see and who we never gave a second thought to anyway. This ingratitude leads to the next step downward...
- 4) The result of ingratitude is futility in thinking. The word here is dialogismos, a word which indicates the inward contemplations and reasoning of man. In other words, this is a state of rationalism about who we are, why we are here, the nature or even the existence of God, etc. The ungrateful naturally rationalize away their ingratitude. They are self-absorbed and so they are inwardly motivated to create a god in their own mind. They know what they have is undeserved, but they also know that by acknowledging the true God, they are actually accountable to Him. And so, they turn to any god that will suit their state at the moment. They begin to worship the creation rather than the Creator.
- 5) Because of this logical progression away from God, "their foolish hearts were darkened." This is a state of complete spiritual blindness. However, man in his most depraved state will often appear to be the most enlightened. The "intellectual elite" and the greats of world religions are often the most depraved. Peter speaks of people who have reached this state of spiritual darkness. They deny what is spiritually correct while espousing utter falsities about God, the natural order, and right reason. He labels these types "brute beasts." They are unreasoning animals who have lost all right sense and follow only the basest instincts –

"But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. 2 Peter 2:12-14

The people Paul speaks of and who are described by Peter fill the halls of religions around the world, including Christianity. Denominations are ordaining homosexuals, mixing false religion with the truth, and are pursuing money and fame rather than righteousness. In the verses ahead, Paul will continue to explain these things, all of which are to remind us that God is just in His wrath and indignation.

Life application: We are either moving toward God in holiness or away from Him into a state of depravity and spiritual darkness. There is no static state in our relationship with God and therefore we need to continually strive to glorify Him and be thankful to Him.

*Lord God, I once was blind, but now I see. Please continue to give me clarity of thought about who You are. Help me to be one who gives You the glory You are due. You have given me life, food, family, and friends. You have given me so much and yet I have returned so little. May my attitude towards You be corrected. Thank You for all good blessings. Amen.*

### **Professing to be wise, they became fools... Romans 1:22**

Paul is continuing to build on the thought of the previous verse. Those who innately know there is a God but who failed to glorify Him and give Him thanks then “became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” In this spiritually darkened state, they profess themselves to “be wise.”

The word “wise” is translated from *sophoi* (from the same word as Sophia). It is wisdom that would be ascribed to the intellectually and culturally sophisticated people of the Greek civilization. These would then be the religious and intellectual cream of the crop. However, without directing their attention to the truth about God, which is as simple and easy to understand as looking up and knowing that the universe didn’t create itself, they then “became fools.”

The single word for “they became fools” here is *emoranthesan* and yes, the “fool” portion is the source of our modern word “moron.” It is almost comedic to think about these people, then and now, strut around professing either religious or intellectual superiority and yet God’s word calls them morons. But the stupidity of their arguments proves the title.

In Acts chapter 17, Paul speaks to these elite when he addresses the *Aeropagus*. It was an open-air forum where “all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.” (Acts 17:21) Paul walked into the center of this vast stadium and told them of the “New Thing” in his life

which was from before the creation of the world. In his short discourse, he actually quoted two of their own philosophers – Erastus and Epimenides, using their own contemplations to demonstrate what he has thus far been saying in Romans – that we innately know certain things about God.

In both the Old Testament and the New (as is highlighted in Acts 17), man sets up idols which are a part of creation – wood, stone, gold, or whatever – bowing to them and giving them credit for the good stuff that happens in life. Paul says that these people have become foolish because of such things.

But there is also the foolishness of denying God exists. A modern “deep thinker” and atheist is Richard Dawkins. During one filmed interview he actually said that maybe aliens had seeded life on planet earth. This supposed wise thinker of the atheist community simply pushed the origins of life back one step, but he could give no ultimate answer for where the aliens then came from. In his futile attempt to deny the obvious, he made himself look like the moron he had become. His lack of religion is his religion, and he is spreading the inane message to a world hungry for anything except the truth.

Life application: Here we are. Will we give the credit for our existence to the Creator or to a part of the creation? Will we acknowledge that we are wise by acknowledging His wisdom, or will we prove ourselves morons when we shut our hearts and minds to the truth? Be wise and stand on the obvious – “in Him we live and move and have our being.” (Act 17:28 as cited by Paul when quoting Epimenide’s Creatia).

*Lord Jesus, I don't profess to “know it all” but I know that You are God and that it is You who has given me life and happiness. I fully intend to search out Your wisdom for all eternity as You reveal Your unseen Father to us. How I cherish Your word and O! How I cherish You. Amen.*

**...and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Romans 1:23**

As Paul noted in the previous verse, which is a part of this sentence, “Professing to be wise they became fools...” The reason this happened is based on the logical sequence of events which preceded it. As man rejects God, the knowledge of Him must be replaced with something; all vacuums look to be filled. These people, wise in their own eyes, become fools and trade what is glorious for what is ignoble, what is of highest value for that which perishes, of what is holy for that which is profane.

Paul gives four categories of idolatry, each more base than the next. First man changes “the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man.” Man was created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26) and so in ignoring God, he moves to the next visible part of the creation in worship; he worships himself. And in order to glorify himself, he makes an image of himself. If you see what is happening, God created man in order to bring Himself glory. By creating a sentient being who can appreciate the rest of His creation and also fellowship with Him, man was intended to glorify God through thanks and praise (see verse 21).

However, the thanks and praise weren’t forthcoming which led to where man is now – exalting himself through self-deification and making an idol in his own image; He is attempting to emulate the God of creation. By taking this action though he actually degrades his perception of the real God and thus the spiral continues down.

The next step is to make images of things that are even beneath him - “birds and four footed animals and creeping things.” Amazingly, not only is man now directing his worship toward creatures that are beneath him, he worships images of creatures. He has taken what is even below the lowliest creeping thing – inanimate objects such as wood, stone, or metal – and fashioned it with his own hands into something... and then he prays to the thing he has made which resembles something beneath his own category of life. His mind is completely lost in idolatry.

Isaiah writes about this attitude and the sheer folly it displays –

Those who make an image, all of them are useless,  
And their precious things shall not profit;  
They are their own witnesses;  
They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.  
Who would form a god or mold an image  
That profits him nothing?  
Surely all his companions would be ashamed;  
And the workmen, they are mere men.  
Let them all be gathered together,  
Let them stand up; Yet they shall fear,  
They shall be ashamed together.  
The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals,  
Fashions it with hammers,  
And works it with the strength of his arms.  
Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails;  
He drinks no water and is faint.

The craftsman stretches out his rule,  
He marks one out with chalk;  
He fashions it with a plane,  
He marks it out with the compass,  
And makes it like the figure of a man,  
According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.  
He cuts down cedars for himself,  
And takes the cypress and the oak;  
He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest.  
He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.  
Then it shall be for a man to burn,  
For he will take some of it and warm himself;  
Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread;  
Indeed he makes a god and worships it;  
He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.  
He burns half of it in the fire;  
With this half he eats meat;  
He roasts a roast, and is satisfied.  
He even warms himself and says,  
“Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.”  
And the rest of it he makes into a god,  
His carved image.  
He falls down before it and worships it,  
Prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”  
They do not know nor understand;  
For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see,  
And their hearts, so that they cannot understand.  
And no one considers in his heart,  
Nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say,  
“I have burned half of it in the fire,  
Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals;  
I have roasted meat and eaten it;  
And shall I make the rest of it an abomination?  
Shall I fall down before a block of wood?”  
He feeds on ashes;  
A deceived heart has turned him aside;  
And he cannot deliver his soul,  
Nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” Isaiah 44:9-20

Idolatry isn't an affliction of ages past. It is found in religions throughout the world today and it is found in every human heart at one time or another. Anything which replaces our devotion to God becomes an idol and therefore we must protect against falling into this trap. The Bible's wonderful advice in Hebrews 12:2 will help us to keep from straying – "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus..."

Life application: Do you read daily horoscopes? Do you "knock on wood" in hopes of favor? When you break a mirror do you even in a kidding manner say, "Oh that's bad luck."? Giving credit to any created thing for chance or destiny demonstrates a wrong attitude toward the Creator who has written our destiny. Stand firm on giving Him the praise, honor, and glory that He is due and let your actions and words reflect His value at all times.

*Yes, Lord God, give me a willing and obedient heart that will direct all of my thoughts and attention toward You alone. Keep me from the sins which so easily beset, and which then move to take over my relationship with You. On my own, I know I will fail, and so I ask You to actively keep me from such things. To Your glory I pray this. Amen.*

**Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,...** Romans 1:24

"Therefore..." When you see this word in a passage, go back and see what it is there for. An argument has been submitted and now comes the conclusion. In this case, "therefore" is referring to verses 18-23. Because of these things that Paul has spoken of "God also gave them up to uncleanness." They have turned from Him and now He gives them up. The 14th Psalm, speaking of the atheist, gives insights into this condition –

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good.

The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.

-Psalm 14:1-3

It's important to understand that this is not a universal condition as some theologians claim. Calvinism uses a portion of this psalm, quoted by Paul in chapter 3 of Romans, to make an all-encompassing claim on the state of man. However, when Paul cites a verse, its context must be taken into consideration. David was a man who sought after God and he wrote the Psalm. Therefore, it would be a pretext to claim a universal application to "none who does good" instead of applying it to those who deny the existence of God.

This is therefore speaking of those who turn from God as Paul describes, moving from one level of depravity to another as their foolish hearts are darkened. As they progress into a more and more depraved state, God gives “them up to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves.”

In their rejection of God, they become mere sensual beings without rational thought. Remember though, some of those who appear most intelligent are those who are “professing to be wise” and yet they fall into this category. Their supposed wisdom is directed by the “lusts of their hearts.” The Greek word is *epithumiais* and indicates a desire of some sort. In Paul’s context the word “lust” is spot on. They are filled with an animal instinct which directs their thoughts and hearts, even to the point of dishonoring “their bodies among themselves.”

Life application: The more we turn to idolatry, intentionally or unintentionally, the more we separate ourselves from God. Not walking under a ladder is a smart way of not having a hammer fall on your head, but if your intent is to avoid bad luck then it is a step in the wrong direction. Each step of life takes you either forward or backward in your spiritual walk. Step carefully and with thoughtful consideration.

*Heavenly Father, You called me out of darkness when I trusted in Jesus. Help me to continue on the right and proper path all my days, never going backward or straying from the right and true course. Thank You for being with me and directing my steps! Amen.*

**...who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Romans 1:25**

This thought shows the continued progression of the idolatrous heart as it continues down the spiral of depravity. God has given these people up because of their rejection of Him. And the way they did it is to exchange “the truth of God for the lie.” The particular structure of this phrase, reflecting the Hebrew mind of Paul, means “the true God.” When two nouns come together, one is used in the form of an adjective and thus qualifies the other. They have made an exchange – something of no value for that which is of infinite value. They have sold their birthright for a bowl of soup. They have accepted the lie and shunned the Truth. The word for “lie” is *pseudei* – it is a falsehood, a pseudo god, and not the true God.

In so doing, they have now “worshiped and serve the creature rather than the Creator.” This is any form of bondage in sin. Perhaps it is addiction to alcohol, perhaps drugs, or perhaps it is something seemingly as innocuous as vegetarianism. What was supposed



to bring freedom has now enslaved them. Once caught in this bondage, it seems to be the only right course of action. Vegetarianism is mentioned simply because it is contrary to God's law. Man was given authority over the creatures of the earth. In Genesis 9:3, after the Flood of Noah, God said this to him, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs."

At the time of Moses, certain dietary restrictions were introduced for a single group of people and for a specific purpose. This group was Israel, and the purpose was the Law. Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf (Matthew 5:17) and therefore all men of Christian faith (including Jews) were told that there were no longer any dietary restrictions for those who have called on Him –

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well." Acts 15:28, 29

However, when incorrect thinking about who God is steps into the equation, animals are elevated above humans. Invariably, when questioned about whether human abortion is acceptable, PETA members will answer in the affirmative. And yet they will guard a nest of turtle eggs with their life. In their attempt to throw off God's rule, they will have their agenda introduced into government legislation and thus bring others under their idolatrous practices. This is where Europe and America are both heading because of the far-left agenda. It is a two headed monster – a throwing off of God's rule and then replacing it with a humanistic attempt to subordinate man to the creation.

But sin is sin, and it will find its form in whatever means is comfortable for the individual. Some will bow to gods of stone or wood, some will bow to the opposite sex in reverence, and some will bow to their own sex in ungodly lust. Others will find their god in heroin or the pursuit of gold. The creature now is served "rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

What Paul means by introducing this phrase is that when all of these created things have perished, God will still remain – holy, unstained, and perfect. He is "blessed forever." Thus, our temporary idolatry will be seen in the true light which it always was. He is the Fountain of all existence, all life, and all goodness and therefore instead of shunning Him we should all proclaim to Him "Amen. The truth of God endures, and we give You our worship. So be it and Amen."

*Heavenly Father, You have shown us what is right and good in Your word. Please continue to open our eyes to the things we are allowed to do and give us the strength to reject those things which are forbidden. Please give us wisdom to discern these things and then the ability to continue in them all our days. Amen.*

**For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Romans 1:26**

Paul uses the term that God “gave them up” for a second time and this is the second instance where sexual sin is involved. When we reject God, a spiral of depravity results which leads inevitably to a state of sexual perversion – from one form to another, each building upon resentment for God and what He has ordained. Paul shows us that this inevitably leads to lesbianism and (as we will see tomorrow) homosexuality. Paul calls this particular sin “vile passions” because the “women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.” In the Greek of this verse, Paul uses the term *theleiai* for “women,” or literally “females.” In Matthew 19:4, 5 Jesus says the following –

“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?”

In these verses, he uses *thely* for “female” and switches to *gyniaki* for “wife.” She is a woman in right standing with the natural order in her union to the man. However, Paul doesn’t use this concept when speaking of the lesbian union in Romans 1:26. They are females exercising vile passions with females and are therefore working against the natural order.

He speaks of the women before speaking of the men. This is to highlight the immensity of the breakdown in what is right. Women are the bearer of the child in the womb and the home keepers as children are raised. Therefore, their degenerate attitude is noted first.

Paul’s words then ask us to realize that what he is speaking of is perversion. It is deemphasizing what is intellectually correct, what is spiritually noble, and what is emotionally pure. It emphasizes what is mentally twisted, spiritually ungodly, and emotionally obsessive and damaged. Paul will use similar wording in the next verse when speaking of such conduct between males.

Life application: Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:18, 19 to, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against

his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" Be willing to stand on moral purity and reject what is sexually immoral. If you are struggling with this in your life, ask the Lord to strengthen you.

*Heavenly Father, I struggle with the flesh in many ways and ask that You help me to stay away from that which is improper. Give me strength and keep me from falling into temptation. But should it come, help me to make the right decision and head for the exit before I succumb to it. Thank You for hearing my prayer which I make in Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.** Romans 1:27

Again, as in 1:26, Paul uses a word for "men" which indicates "males." What he will speak of concerns acts of debauchery and perversion in which "males" go against the natural order. What is normal and right with "man" is excluded in his thoughts here. "Likewise" is speaking about what he stated concerning the "females" in verse 26 and he will now apply that same logic to the "males."

These "males" whose mental state has fallen to the basest form of depravity leave "the natural use of the woman." Neither a rocket scientist nor a specialist in anatomy is needed to determine what the different sexual organs of the male and female are meant for. Like the knowledge of God, it is self-evident. It is the deviant who shuns this knowledge and goes about using their parts in an inappropriate manner.

Not only do they act out their abnormal thoughts, but they actually burn "in their lust for one another." The verb translated as "burned" is the Greek word *exekauthesin*. This is the only time it is used in the Bible and it is in a way (aorist indicative passive) that indicates these people "were set ablaze" in their passions. What we have seen is the morally depraved downward spiral as men reject God. When He is completely turned away from, there is nothing left but a total consuming of the individual in a mental state which is acted out in that which is contrary to nature.

Paul describes this mental/physical state as "men with men." Like the females in verse 26, these males have committed the ultimate act of what is shameful and yet because they have departed so far from normal and right thinking they continue on in their vile actions. Paul says that because of this they receive "in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." This penalty comes because "God gave them up" to their vile

passions.” (v. 26) This is what one would term “judicial abandonment.” Instead of active prosecution of the sin, God in essence removes Himself from the equation and allows nature to take its course.

If what is natural and ordained by God leads to life, then what is unnatural and opposed to Him will lead to death. Diseases such as AIDS are the inevitable result of such perversion. Throughout history, when homosexuality becomes prevalent in a society, the incidents of plagues targeted at the offenders arise. Venereal diseases mutate as the unnatural habits spread and, very quickly, they take over the entire population. Along with these obvious signs are those which need to be seen from a wider angle – mental problems, shortened life spans, societal conflicts, etc all result from the entry and acceptance of homosexuality into a culture. These are “the penalty of the error which was due.”

The most egregious part of what occurs though is the purposeful blaming of God for their penalty – as if He was mean or capricious. Rather, they are getting what they deserve by acting in a manner contrary to normalcy. Thus, even their concept of right and wrong about their judgment is convoluted.

Life application: How many times do we see people, even within the Christian community, who blame God for adversity? However, the opposite is usually not the case. Life, food, friends, income, etc. are looked as a deserved, and thanks aren't forthcoming. Let us be quick to be thankful to God for every good blessing and slow to blame or show anger when adversity comes.

*Heavenly Father, give me a grateful heart for the many blessings I enjoy each day. At the same time, help me to overcome thoughts which would accuse You for difficulties that occur in my life. I deserve far worse than I have ever received and with Jesus as my Lord, I know that eternity will be perfect. Help me to keep my eyes on that! Amen.*

**And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;... Romans 1:28**

In this verse, Paul shows that the responsibility for what has occurred lies solely with the wickedness of man and his rejection of God. “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...” is referring back to man's unwillingness to give God thanks or praise (verse 20-23). Because of this rejection, these things came about. The word “like” is the Greek *edokimasan* which means “to put to the test.” In their minds, they put God to the test of their own moral compass and found that they wanted to do things without Him. Because of this, “God gave them over to a debased mind.”

As a result of this, He then hands them over to their own wicked devices. The word for “debased” is the word *adokimon* – failing to pass the test. It is a different form of the same word mentioned above. They put God to the test and chose what they wanted rather than Him and so He gave them over to a failing of His test. Their moral perversion, which they willingly chose, has led to their mental perversion, which is the result of what they chose. The penalty they received for their ungodliness is a penal infliction of judgment necessitated by His holiness.

The debased mind they have brought upon themselves results in doing “those things which are not fitting.” As we have seen, this corrupt attitude leads to “the penalty of their error.” Nature, which God created, actively works to eliminate what is unnatural through disease and death. This shows the righteousness and judgment of God in and through creation. If what He creates works in this way, then how much more sure will be His hand of judgment when we as humans stand before Him?

Life application: Death entered the world through sin. Jesus came to take our place and grant us new life apart from sin. By faith in Him we are freed from its penalty forever. Though this isn’t yet realized, it is the glorious hope that we as believers have. Because of this hope, let us strive to live holy lives now, to His honor and glory.

*Lord, certainly I pray for a mind which is directed toward You and away from the wickedness of this fallen world. Help me to be a light to others and give me the ability to explain why You are just in Your judgments and how they too can be free from sin’s penalty. Thank You for Your guiding instructions which will allow this. Amen.*

**...being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,...** Romans 1:29

This verse is continuing on with those that God gave over to a debased mind that now “do those things which are not fitting.” Forthcoming from Paul’s hand is a list of 23 of these things and they fit people of every stratum of society and from the most backward of people groups to the most economic and socially elite in the world. Some people may be filled with many in the list and some with just a few or only one, but the depravity of the human heart finds its release somewhere in this list in fallen man.

Considering that man was made in God’s image and with the intent and purpose of bringing Him glory, this list is a scathing indictment on us. The first is “all unrighteousness.” This is a broad brushstroke of those who are in Adam and it speaks of every angle from which sin can attack – the thoughts, the words, the actions, the

inactions, the motivations, etc. This thought covers these both outwardly toward others and inwardly toward self. The man who was created to be spiritually connected to God is carnal and unspiritual.

The next in the list has been covered in the preceding verses – “sexual immorality.” This is any sexual thought, action, or contact which occurs outside of the bonds of a marriage between a man and a woman. God presented Eve to Adam and thus the pattern was established at the beginning. The Law of Moses, the arrival of Jesus, and the introduction of the Church Age all confirm the original intent and pattern. Sexual sins are personal and intimate and therefore they require one to be in tune with God’s intent at all times lest they take over the unsuspecting or unprepared.

Next on the list is “wickedness.” This word speaks of intentional harm against others. A good word to understand this would be malice. John Calvin states, “It is that depravity and obliquity of mind which strives to produce injury on others.”

From wickedness we move to “covetousness.” Coveting is the last of the Ten Commandments and so it isn’t perceived “as bad” as other sins. But this is the opposite of the truth. Coveting leads to the committing of the other sins. When one covets something else, they take their eyes off God and replace Him with that thing – thus breaking the first commandment. Coveting another man’s wife leads to adultery, thus breaking the seventh commandment, etc. We need to be thankful for what we do have and fix our eyes on Jesus, not on the things we don’t possess.

“Maliciousness” is next and indicates ill will which is fundamentally vicious in nature. One may consider a soul longing for revenge and filled with extreme bitterness in this category.

Another of the list is being “full of envy.” Webster describes it this way: “Pain, uneasiness, mortification, or discontent, excited by another’s prosperity, accompanied with some degree of hatred or malignity, and often with a desire or an effort to depreciate the person, and with pleasure in seeing him depressed.” The soul filled with envy is bitter indeed and will go to great lengths to injure another simply because someone else has received something they feel they deserve and which the other didn’t deserve.

“Murder” is in the list and is also the sixth commandment. Murder does not include the lawful taking of a life for a capital crime; the taking of a life in self-defense; or the taking of life in legitimate battle. The Bible is perfectly clear on these issues. What it does speak of is the intentional taking of another human life apart from these exceptions.

Man was created in God's image and therefore to willfully take another life is an attack against God's image bearer. This includes the crime of abortion. When a society devalues human life, either by authorizing the murder of others, including the unborn, or by withholding the execution of capital crimes, that society becomes implicitly guilty in the blood that was shed.

"Strife" can be summed as conflicting with others about words more than things. It is seeking glory and victory in speech and conflict rather than for the truth. This sin has become so commonplace since the introduction of the internet that it is everywhere at all times. Social media has given everyone the ability to attempt to seem authoritative on a matter whether they know what they are talking about or not. People strive for the sake of strife.

"Deceit" is engaging in deception. People engage in "philosophy and empty deceit" as Paul says in Colossians 2:8 and thus make boastful pretense to their own morality even though they are often the basest of beings.

The next on the list are those filled with "evil-mindedness." This is the mental state of someone who is filled with Satan and not by God. They abound in wickedness. It is an insatiable mental state which consumes every thought and then is displayed in every action. Because of this the inevitable result is that "they are whisperers." Gossip, whether of truthful things or untruthful things, has the main intent of conquering and dividing. The evil-minded don't have felicity and peace on their mind, but rather conflict and hatred. They sow the seeds of these things with their whisperings.

The list will continue as Paul describes the state of the human soul who is at enmity with their Creator. Only through the new birth which comes by calling on Jesus can this state be terminated in a person. This doesn't mean it will happen all at once, or even in this life, but that through His work we can be free of these things and thus work to please God until the day He glorifies us.

Life application: Take time to reread the list of the listed sins and think about where you can improve your own life and actions concerning any of them which still arise in you.

*Lord, test me and search me out. Find any root of bitterness, envy, strife, lust, hatred, or any other attitude which causes me to act in a manner which is contrary to what You would wish for me. And then Lord, please give me the ability to overcome these things that I might be a pleasing vessel, ready for Your use. Amen.*

**... backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,... Romans 1:30**

The lengthy list which began in the previous verse continues on now. Paul includes “backbiters” as our first of verse 30. A backbiter is similar to the “whisperer” of the previous verse, but what the whisperer says silently, the backbiter says openly – yet not in the presence of the one they are defaming. This is the person who would openly walk up and hug someone but as soon as they leave the room, they would find malevolent words with which to tear them up.

Next Paul lists “haters of God.” This is one of the most common sentiments found in the world and yet it is of the highest category of crime there is. The Bible says, the “fool says in his heart there is no God.” Such is the atheist. However, the person that says He hates God is a double fool because he openly acknowledges there is a God and yet he also shows contempt for Him. Nothing could be more astonishing and yet it happens all around the world all the time. The epitome of this hatred is directed by those at enmity with Jesus Christ. The reason for this is explained in John 15:24, 25 –

“If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’” John 15:24-25

When someone claims to love God and yet hates Jesus, they surely have distorted thinking. Jesus is the One who reveals the unseen God to us. He is the second member of the Trinity and therefore to deny Him is to deny God; to hate Him is to hate God. And this inevitably leads to the consequences of this – “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” (John 15:18) God’s people are hated because God’s Son is hated.

The next group Paul highlights are the “violent.” This word is translated differently by various translators. It comes from the Greek *hyperephanous*. The word *phaino* means to “shine forth” and hyper is “above” or “over.” Therefore, this is better translated as “prideful” or “proud.” They believe they shine over and above anyone else. This is one of the chief sins noted in the Bible because when pride steps in, then the proud person has only contempt for everyone around him, including God. It is self-deification. The NKJV translates this “violent” and this is often an inevitable result of pride. When someone who is prideful gains power and authority, it can be brought out in the most violent of ways.



Next come “boasters” in our list. This is a good follow up to those who are prideful because along with pride comes great boastings of self. Those who are boastful will trump their achievement above those of everyone else and nothing will satisfy their lust for praise. When it comes, more boasting comes in hopes of more praise. This is the person with the “I” problem. He sees himself and nothing else... “I, I, I.”

From boasters we move to “inventors of evil things.” The word is *kakon*, meaning “evil.” This is speaking of those who simply invent new forms of evil. Their minds think up perverse things, wicked things, and innovative things – all which will satisfy a lust for accomplishing evil in new and exciting ways. The porn industry fits this well. As people become numb to one form of perversion something new is introduced to excite the audience. This cycle eventually leads to such horrors as “snuff films.” When the sex is no longer enough to satisfy, murder is included in the act. The horrifying level to which the depraved mind will sink to seems to have no end.

The final category in this verse is those who are “disobedient to parents.” The family is the nucleus of a well running society. When the family structure breaks down, the society naturally breaks down as well. And so, discipline within the family must be maintained. So great is the necessity for this, that God when speaking the law to Israel included this –

“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.” Deuteronomy 21:18-21

Likewise, in Exodus 21:17, the Lord noted that anyone “who curses his father or his mother” shall be put to death. Unfortunately, modern society has completely reversed the roles and television shows commonly portray children who are insolent to their parents and who tell them what to do rather than the other way around. This can only lead to chaos within a society because God’s order of what is right has been rejected.

Life application: Take a moment and reread the types of inappropriate behavior Paul mentions in this verse and think about where you can improve the conduct of your own life. Stand firm on God’s word and know that He has not only shown us the proper way of conducting our lives, but He has shown us what displeases Him as well.

*Lord God, I have failed in being the perfect and obedient child that You would have me be. As I continue in this list of wrong conduct, I see my own faults clearly highlighted. Please give me right reason and a sound mind to do what is right and to shun what is evil. Thank You for Jesus who has granted me forgiveness of my transgressions. Amen.*

**...undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;... Romans 1:31**

Here, we see five more areas where depraved man falls short of God's glory and displays it in enmity against Him and His principles. The first concerns the "undiscerning." The Greek word is *asynetous*. The "a" is a negative and is followed by *synetos* meaning "knowing" and thus it is speaking of people without discernment. There is morally right and there is morally wrong, but there are those who can't tell the difference between the two. They are foolish in their decisions and confused in their thought processes.

All of this stems from an inability or a refusal to think clearly about the nature of God. When this occurs, everything else becomes muddled and confused as well. A perfect example of such mentally miniscule thinking concerns the issue of abortion. What is clearly wrong in the taking of a human life is rationalized away in order to justify the unjustifiable. At the same time, the protection of animals or capital criminals is elevated to the highest importance. This confused thinking permeates the social left in the world.

After this, Paul mentions the "untrustworthy." The Greek word is *asynthetous*. As you can see it is an alliteration of the first word – *asynetous* / *asynthetous*. Like the first word "a" is a negative and the word *syntithemoui* describes the making of a covenant. This alliteration by Paul is a literary style known as a paronomasia. This is the use of a word in different senses or the use of words similar in sound to achieve a specific effect such as humor or a dual meaning.

In this use by Paul, he shows that there is not only a lack of discernment, but there is also a lack of trustworthiness. Because they can't think clearly on moral issues, they also don't act clearly concerning moral responsibilities. Again, we can turn to the social left to see this. Not only is their thinking completely opposed to what is godly, their decisions can't be trusted. Very good examples in the world of "right now" are gun control and health care. The left seizes any and every opportunity it can to take away the very rights of those who could stop the initial reason for the calamity which has arisen. And in the process of doing so, they violate the initial promises that they made concerning the issue in the first place.

There is absolutely no trust in the words or promises of politicians on the left, from the lowest congressman to the US President. The same is true with liberal minded people in

all countries and in all vocations. What they speak is of no value because their word is organic and changing. It is an infection of the mind which transfers to every action of the person.

Next to be listed are the “unloving.” The word here comes from the concept of a person who lacks natural affection. This again transfers through what is moral to what is political. It points directly to the morally lacking thought process. The “natural affection” Paul is referring to is the bond between a parent and a child. What should be the strongest bond of all is missing when the knowledge of God is rejected. The Bible is replete with passages where children were sacrificed to Molech and causing them to “pass through the fire” such as in 2 Kings 17:16, 17 –

“So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.”

The cultures Paul was exposed to left female children out to die, preferring male babies. Some buried the children alive. Albert Barnes notes that during an earlier period, “In most of the Grecian states, infanticide was not merely permitted, but actually enforced by law. The Spartan lawgiver expressly ordained that every child that was born should be examined by the ancient men of the tribe, and that if found weak or deformed, should be thrown into a deep cavern at the foot of Mount Taygetus.”

The modern parallel is of course abortion. The left is rabid in their defense of abortion and any attempt at restricting or eliminating this legalized murder is met with the strongest opposition possible. They have lost any true natural affection and have replaced it with immoral sensuality and licentiousness. This moral depravity fits naturally with the next on the list, those who are “unforgiving.”

The Greek word comes from the thought of “no libation.” Pouring out a libation to a god was a way of making peace with that god and thus forming a treaty. The idea then is a person who is completely unwilling to make peace; they are implacable. A quote from this week’s news says this about the current administration, “What he does is position his political opponents as the enemy. Everything he did today in the debt limit Q&A in his press conference, and even in the setup, was about the enemy.” This is the very thought process Paul is describing. “There is no agreement, there is no reconciliation, and there is no felicity. Instead, there is only ‘us and them’ and we will never cede an inch in our battle of depravity and moral perversity.”

The last of this list speaks of the “unmerciful.” In the lack of human affection which leads to a lack of working together through reconciliation, Paul saw the result was a society which was destitute of compassion. In the world around him, the old, the sick, and the infirm were cast out and left to fend for themselves, find a charitable source to maintain them, or to die. The inevitable result of turning away from godly thinking in a society is that compassion flees and only self-gratification and ruthlessness is left. Healthcare which breaks down because it is engineered improperly inevitably leads to rationing and a hierarchy of those who will receive care. It is already taking place in Europe and Canada and it is coming to the United States.

The liberal left is forcing its morally depraved values upon an unsuspecting society. What is heralded as right and compassionate will be seen for what is – immoral and uncaring. The Bible is always vindicated because its Author peers into the heart and soul of man and sees his utterly depraved state moving logically from one twisted state to another.

Life application: Think clearly about moral issues – not as society sees them, but as God sees them. Hold fast to His word and His guidance and flee from the wicked and depraved thinking of those who have lost any moral compass as they drift in the sea of ungodliness.

*Lord God, I can see the logical progression of how individuals and societies move slowly and inexorably away from what is right to what is perverse. Help me to be a champion in speaking out against the moral decline in my own land and help me to stand firm on the unchanging and immutable values presented in Your word. Amen.*

**...who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1:32**

This is the last verse of chapter 1 and it sums up the discourse which began in verse 18. All that Paul has said since then shows that man is without excuse when God judges him. We can know enough about Him from the creation itself that we stand condemned when we go against what is right and obvious. We instinctively know about Him, and therefore we “know the righteous judgment” which will necessarily proceed from Him.

This judgment comes to those “who practice such things” as are described in verses 21-31 and which are “deserving of death.” This doesn’t mean that they will receive death, but that this is what is deserved. They are aware of it and thus it shows their guilt in

continuing on in the face of the looming judgment. When His wrath is poured out, there will be no valid reason to speak against it. Every mouth will be stopped.

However, knowing this, they purposely fail in the things they should do, and they intentionally act in the ways they shouldn't. But Paul goes on to say that as if that wasn't enough, they "not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them." In other words, they applaud as others take their perverted course. Sinful man doesn't want to act alone in his sin, but he wants to make a party of it. The common expression, "Come on, everybody does it" is what is being relayed here. Thus, there is not only an expected hand of judgment, but it will be doubly just. They have looked for hell and have brought others along to join them.

All of this leads us back to what preceded this discourse on depravity. Paul's words concerning the gospel can now be seen in a much clearer light –

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:16, 17

The spiral of depravity justly deserves God's punishment and condemnation, but God – who is rich in mercy – has granted a pardon to the fallen sons of Adam. He has meted out the punishment we deserve in His own Son, Jesus. By faith in that, we can be cleansed from our past sins and stand justified before our Creator. The gospel of Christ is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." The choice is ours – stand condemned for the deeds committed in the flesh or to have them judged in God's chosen Substitute. Heaven or hell waits for all people and there is only one way to heaven, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Life application: The old cliché "love the sinner, hate the sin" rings true. We have all fallen short of God's standards and all people have stood condemned before Him. But in His mercy, He sent Jesus to take the wrath we justly deserve. Therefore, let us continue to pray for and be a light to others who have yet to receive His indescribable gift.

*Lord God, over the past few verses, I have seen my own sin reflected again and again in the words Paul has written. As they were inspired by You, I feel the weight of them even more. I am so thankful for the rich mercy You have lavished upon me and the salvation that came at such a high cost. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 2

**Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.**  
Romans 2:1

In what is a masterpiece of subtlety, Paul now begins to address the Jews though he doesn't specifically state as much until verse 17. The reason for this is to build an argument to such an extent that by the time he actually names them, they have no way to turn back and claim innocence.

The natural revelation of God has been given to all men (Romans 1:18-32) and condemns all, how much more, then, the very stewards of God's special revelation of Himself, the oracles of God, the temple, the glory? The Jews looked at the people around them as heathen and outside of the graces of God. This is perfectly evident from innumerable passages in the gospels. But Paul says that they are inexcusable when they judge because when they do, they merely condemn themselves. The very acts for which they find fault in others are found openly displayed in their own writings about themselves. These acts led to the Babylonian exile, further written condemnation after the exile, the crucifixion of Christ, and eventually the Roman dispersion.

To understand that this concept surely applies to all men, even the greatest and beloved of God, we will refer to 2 Samuel 12 and the pitiful story of David's great sin –

Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and

Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.”

-2 Samuel 12:1-9

The “man after God’s own heart” coveted, committed adultery, and committed murder, and yet he was willing to condemn someone else for something far less serious. Such is the nature of sin in the human heart. It affects all people, and it blinds each of us in a way that what we perceive in others often seems more wicked than what we ourselves have done, even when our actions may be much more heinous.

John 8:1-12 gives a similar example for us to consider. Take time to read that passage and reflect on why the account is given as well.

Life application: It is true; the Jewish people of Paul’s time were actually more accountable for their actions because they had the Law and the Prophets to tell them what God specifically expected from mankind. As this is so, how much more accountable to God are we now that the New Testament is also written? The word is near to us, it is in our homes, on our computers, and broadcast on radio and TV. How can we escape God’s wrath if we neglect so great a salvation as is offered through Jesus? Read your Bible daily and then live out your life in accord with its precepts.

*Heavenly Father, reading Paul’s words and thinking on what they are telling me makes me realize the magnitude of what You have done by sending Jesus. How far short of Your glory I fall and yet You have offered me peace and reconciliation through His cross. I stand amazed at the greatness of what You have done for Your rebellious creatures. Thank You, O God, Amen.*

**But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.** Romans 2:2

“But we know” implies that it is perfectly understood by all. It is written on our minds as an undeniable truth. More so, then, is it understood by the Jews who had the written testimony of the history of the world and the repeated lessons which resulted from the disobedient heart of man. God’s word, maintained by them, holds one account after another of the judgment of God upon man’s disobedience.

This “judgment of God is according to truth.” This can be interpreted a couple ways. The first is that God’s judgment will truly come; it is inevitable based on our walking in a way

contrary to His precepts. The second view, which is more likely correct, is that God's judgment is based on the truth. In Him there is only holiness and perfection. There is no unrighteousness and there is also nothing capricious or vindictive. His judgment is based upon His perfection and not some type of personal vendetta or arbitrary whim. People who feel this way about Him have never taken the time to deduce what God is like. Instead, they simply accuse Him of being a cosmic bully or an uncaring Creator who allows innocent children to die for no sound reason. They are awash in their own myopic vision, dispelling any notion of an infinitely wise Creator.

God's judgment comes "according to truth against those who practice such things." All judgment is a result of sin and it is directed against the perpetrators of that sin. The list Paul gives in the previous chapter defines these things. But what about those who seem to be caught in judgment but haven't done anything wrong? There are two directions that must be considered. The first is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)." Sin came through Adam and all have inherited his fallen state. Therefore, no one can claim they are guilt-free. This is confirmed by Jesus' words in John 3:18 –

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already,..."

Man is condemned already and therefore there is no valid argument against God's judgment on any person. But secondly, some are taken away that are a part of the covenant community and have been cleansed of their past sins. Why has evil come upon them? The answer can be found in Isaiah 57:1 –

"The righteous perishes,  
And no man takes it to heart;  
Merciful men are taken away,  
While no one considers  
That the righteous is taken away from evil."

What we may perceive as some type of judgment may actually be God's grace in saving them from something worse which may occur. We don't have all the information and therefore we must trust that what we don't see is still the right avenue and is based on His perfect knowledge.

Life application: When we look at the course of life, politics, world events, etc. we should attempt to see them in the larger scope of things and not have a myopic view of what is happening. When we relate everything that occurs around us to ourselves, we



will never understand why things transpire and we will naturally take offense. But we... we are not the center of the universe. We are a small speck of God's immense plan which is being worked out for our good and for His glory. Keep this in mind and trust that He truly is in control.

*Heavenly Father, give me soundness of mind as I look at the world around me. Help me to understand that You are just in Your judgment and that You carry it out in absolute righteousness and against an ultimate standard of truth. With this assurance, I can be confident that all things will work out as they should. Amen.*

**And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Romans 2:3**

This is a direct question from Paul to the Jews of his day. There is a definite train of thought since verse 1.

- 1) When a person condemns another, it proves they have a sense that an offense was committed. If the one who condemns knows this and passes judgment but also commits the offense, then they have no excuse for their actions.
- 2) God's judgment on those who commit transgressions is based on His nature – He is absolute truth and therefore His judgment is perfect and must be executed equally in all. As Habakkuk says so clearly –

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil,  
And cannot look on wickedness. Habakkuk 1:13

- 3) Therefore, because the person who condemns does so when they know an action is wrong, and yet they commit the same type of actions, how can they expect to escape God's judgment? It would be unthinkable based on the standard of truth which defines who He is.

The Jew standing in judgment of the gentile actually condemns himself in his decision! What brought about his accusation of them – God's law, of which he was the steward – is what brings his own condemnation. The Jew is without excuse.

However, a point that should not be missed is that as time has passed, the question now appropriately belongs to the Christian as well. When Israel was exiled for their disobedience and rejection of Christ, the gentile world became the stewards not only of God's Old Testament law, but the Gospel of Christ as well. Now, the logic of verses 1-3

which Paul writes points a finger directly at the Church. How can we stand in judgment of others if we fail to first pronounce the gospel? If we keep it a secret and yet condemn others for being heathen or unconverted Jews, then aren't we "doing the same?"

Later in Romans 11, we will come upon this passage which is speaking of the mystery of Jewish exile and the grafting in of the Church –

“For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” (vss. 30-32)

We err if we point our fingers at the Jews and say how stupid they are for having rejected the Lord and His cross. Were that not to have happened, the church as we know it would never have come into existence. But God, in his infinite wisdom, blinded them in part so that salvation might come to the gentile people of the world. Let us not be so arrogant against our unbelieving Jewish brethren, but let us pray for them and pray for their eyes to be opened to the glorious gospel which saves all men.

Life application: The times are coming to their fulfillment and Jesus Christ's return is closer each day. By Jesus' own words He has promised to return to His people Israel and to their capital, Jerusalem. The Church Age will end and then will come the Tribulation period. At the end of that time, Jesus will return to set up His millennial kingdom from Jerusalem. Let your daily prayers reflect a desire for Israel's eyes to be opened to their long-rejected Messiah, Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, I hate the sin and wickedness in this world, and I will continue to speak out against it, but please help me to remember that I once also walked in darkness and yet You had mercy on me. Help me to avoid the sins of the flesh and to help others to put them behind themselves as well. Thank You for Jesus who makes all these things possible. Amen.*

**Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? Romans 2:4**

An alternative to what was just presented is now given – “Or.” Paul has been speaking about those who condemn others and yet are guilty of practicing the very sins which they condemn in them. And so, he asks, “Or do you despise...?” This is in the indicative mood and therefore it requires the answer, “Yes, in fact you do.”

The idea is that these people had been shown the unmerited favor of God and yet “despised” it by becoming ungrateful of it and even expecting that it should continue because they somehow deserved it. This is the sentiment of Luke 13:1-5 and which Jesus forcefully corrects –

“There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’”

Those who came to Him intimated that the Galileans must have been pretty big sinners to have Pilate mingle their blood with his sacrifices. Jesus turned around and brought their fallen state to mind. God had been abundant in His riches to them, and they had trampled on this grace by expecting it to continue on ad infinitum regardless of their conduct.

America has had this attitude for far too long. Because we have been so richly blessed, when calamity falls (such as 9/11) we try to project it on the wickedness of others and not look at it as deserved judgment. Anyone who speaks out against our moral impurity is sure to get an earful from those who either dismiss the judgment of God, or who only see their own perceived moral flawlessness and not a nation ripe for God’s punishing hand.

The “riches of” God Paul notes are His (1) “goodness” – this is His benign nature. He is a compassionate God who is in no way arbitrary or vindictive; (2) His “forbearance” – this reflects God’s restraint. When judgment would be expected under almost any conceivable circumstance, He still withholds His wrath, understanding that we are prone to sin from birth; and (3) because of His forbearance, He is also “long-suffering.” This concept shows that not only does He withhold His wrath, but He is also “slow to anger” as is noted in Exodus 34:6, 7 –

“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”

These are the riches which the people were despising. They looked at the world around them as fallen and ripe for judgment and yet they thought they had a free pass to act in the same manner with no expected repercussions. But Paul says that these riches of His goodness were meant not to promote license, but to lead them to repentance. He will take this concept and refine it in the chapters ahead. In chapter 6, we will read this –

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (vss. 1, 2) God’s grace is shown in the goodness of His riches, so why can’t we continue to sin in order for His grace to be seen in an even greater light? This is the perverse nature of man – looking for a way to excuse or even justify that which is contrary to normal order, right thinking, and holy living. Let us never presume upon the goodness of the Lord in this manner!

Life application: Do you look at yourself as of high value? Do you perceive others as sinful whereas you are guilt-free? What about the society in which you live? Has prosperity led you to believe that you are God’s favored and chosen and that you can therefore act in any way you wish? Let us never assume that we can flagrantly sin and be excused when we do.

*Heavenly Father, surely You are great and glorious – abundant in mercy and kindness towards us. Help me to see the sin in my own life for what it is and to never assume that I am above Your hand of correction. Instead give me a willing and obedient heart in following the proper path which You would desire for me. Amen.*

**But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,... Romans 2:5**

Verses 1-4 have laid out the argument for deserved judgment for those who should know better based on the nature of God that was revealed in the previous chapter. Verse 4 then said, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” Verse 5 now begins with “but.” This is to contrast an acceptance of the “goodness of God.”

“In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart” shows that instead of softening one’s heart and their stand on sin, they take the alternate course. The heart is hard and unyielding even in the presence of the mercy God offers, the blessings He provides, and the election He made. The Jew had received all these things and yet they walked heavily upon the good graces that were granted. The Greek term for

“impenitent heart” is used only in this verse in the New Testament and it reveals the height and epitome of unrepentant sin.

As noted in verse 2:3, this same logic must now apply to the Church. We have likewise been grafted into the commonwealth and have received the same goodness. But how many in the church flagrantly tread heavily upon these graces? This despicable attitude, in Jew or gentile, can only have one logical outcome – we are “treasuring up” wrath for ourselves.

We treasure up things that we desire the most. We may treasure up family photos. If we love sports, we may treasure up memorabilia. If we love money, we may treasure up silver and gold. We put these things in store because they are precious to us and they have our heart buried with them. Paul is saying that those who fit this verse’s description are “treasuring up wrath.” Based on his argument thus far, we know – without a doubt – that wrath is due for our belligerence and uncaring attitude toward the sins we commit. But we continue down the same path, actually storing up more and more of God’s wrath, knowingly and willingly.

This will be poured out “in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” It is not a question of “if” but of “when.” The things that God abhors based on His unchanging nature of goodness, justice, righteousness, etc. must be judged and it will come out in a terrifying way when it does. The cross of Jesus Christ proves it. The horror which He suffered to remove our judgment is reflective of what all people deserve. Therefore, it can be meted out in Him as our Substitute, or it will be meted out in each of us directly. No other option exists, and the judgment is final.

For those who have trusted Christ, the punishment is past. Judgment for the believer will be based on their life after accepting Christ – for rewards or losses (see Romans 14:10 & 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10). For all others, there is but one possibility – a finite crime against an infinite God requires an infinite punishment – the Lake of Fire. This will be executed in all remaining humanity as is noted in Revelation 20:11-15.

Life application: What treasures are you storing up? In the end, there is only one thing of eternal value, a relationship with your Creator. And this is only possible through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Treasure up for yourselves the knowledge of Him by reading your Bible each day, talking to Him each moment, and sharing Him with others always. This is true treasure; this is Jesus.

*O God, You have shown us what is right and good and You have offered us peace and reconciliation to Yourself through Jesus. Help us to pursue You and to know You more*

*and more. Thank You for Your word which allows us to know You, and thank You for Your Holy Spirit who illuminates our hearts and minds to its content. Amen.*

**... who “will render to each one according to his deeds”:** Romans 2:6

Care needs to be taken when looking at this verse and the verses that follow lest error come into our thinking about the nature of salvation or condemnation. If these verses are taken out of proper biblical context, one could make the case that “deeds” somehow affect our standing before God; that what we do brings about our justification. This is contrary to the entire tenor of Scripture and is not at all what Paul is speaking of. However, this has led to heresy within the church and in many denominations. Below will be listed several of the actual canons from the Council of Trent in 1546. These are antithetical to the intent of Scripture and are actually heretical, but yet they are primary theological tenets of the Roman Catholic Church.

Although you may not fully understand each of these, it is good to know what denominations teach. Does their instruction line up with the Bible or not? If not, is it merely error or is heresy involved? These are actually eternity-deciding principles concerning salvation if they involve heresy.

What Paul is saying is in this verse (in context with the surrounding verses and the rest of Scripture) is that we are either justified or condemned by God’s grace through faith (Ephesians 2:4) by calling on the name of the Lord for salvation (Romans 10:9 & 13). When this occurs, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit which is a “deposit” or “guarantee” of our eternal state (Ephesians 1:13, 14). However, our “deeds” will determine our amount of rewards, or what loss we will suffer, if saved (2 Corinthians 5:9, 10), or they will determine our level of punishment when condemned (Luke 12:42-48).

The equation for each person to remember is:

Grace through faith = salvation  
Works = judgment

The judgment of the believer is a judgment after salvation (which, once granted, is eternal) based on works. These works have no part in further justifying a person; justification comes by the work of Christ alone. The judgment of the non-believer comes based on the life they lived, having never been saved.

Life application: Take time to read the following canons which are still in force and effect today in the Roman Catholic Church and see if they are complimentary or

contradictory to the teachings of Scripture. After doing so, ensure that you obtain, study, and comprehend the principal tenets of your own church or denomination. You may be surprised, or even appalled, at what your time, talent, and money is being directed towards. You alone are accountable for your actions and allegiances. It is far better for you to remove yourself from a body which promotes tenets contradictory to God's will than it is to stay because of friendships, alliances, or convenience. These are either eternity-making decisions concerning your salvation if heresy is involved, or decisions which will affect your rewards and losses for all eternity if non-heretical doctrinal error is involved. Stand fast on Jesus Christ and His word.

Canon 10: If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

Canon 11: If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.

Canon 12: If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.

Canon 23: "If any one saith, that a man once justified can sin no more, nor lose grace, and that therefore he that falls and sins was never truly justified; or, on the other hand, that he is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial,- except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin; let him be anathema.

"Canon 24: "If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema."

Canon 30: "If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be

discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema."

Canon 33: "If any one saith, that, by the Catholic doctrine touching Justification, by this holy Synod inset forth in this present decree, the glory of God, or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ are in any way derogated from, and not rather that the truth of our faith, and the glory in fine of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered (more) illustrious; let him be anathema.

*Lord God, please direct me to an understanding of what my particular church or denomination teaches and then help me to make a right decision about my affiliation with it based on the knowledge You have led me to. Keep me from error and help my doctrine to be perfect in Your sight. To Your glory alone I pray this. Amen.*

**...eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; Romans 2:7**

As noted in verse 6, care needs to be taken when evaluating this train of thought from Paul. If this verse, which is a part of a greater whole, is quoted as a stand-alone, then of course one would come to the conclusion that, "Aha, eternal life is based upon works." This is contrary to the scope and reality of Scripture because after salvation, many have fallen – even such greats as Peter and Paul. Peter, in Galatians 2:11-16, was not "straightforward about the truth of the gospel." In essence, he failed to endure. Paul admitted his failings as well –

"Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (NIV)

We are bound by our human limitations even after salvation and therefore, if it were up to us to receive eternal life, then we would go through a terrible cycle of uncertainty as our relationship with God changed back and forth – saved, unsaved, saved, unsaved, saved, unsaved, saved...." What a neurotic bunch who call themselves Christians! And, how pitiful – woe to the one who happened to error prior to his final call home, "I knew you, and then I never knew you...!"

The great Bible scholar Albert Barnes erringly states this – "Nor has God ever promised eternal life to people unless they so persevere in a life of holiness as to show that this is their character..."



This is incorrect as is evidenced by 2 Peter 1:1-9 and which culminates in verse 9. In verse 1, Peter states that those he is addressing have “obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” In other words, they are saved believers. He then explains what that can mean for the called soul in verse 3 and 4. However, in verses 5-8, he states what the individual should do and which is what Paul is referring to in this verse in Romans 2:7. If one fails to carefully follow what is God’s intent and desire for His saved children, the result is verse 9 – “For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

Yes, there are those who have been saved and yet they “have forgotten” that they were “cleansed from” their old sins! One cannot continue “in doing good” in the biblical sense if they have forgotten their salvation. Therefore, eternal life is granted exactly as the rest of the Bible proclaims, by grace through faith. Abraham was declared righteous by simple faith prior to the sign of that righteousness (circumcision). Jesus Himself says that it is belief that saves –

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

Paul’s continued writing in Romans will bear this out as well. Understanding this, “those who by patient continuance in doing good” is speaking of rewards as was noted in verse 6; God will “render to each one according to his deeds.” These deeds are to result in:

- 1) Glory – This includes praise, high note, and what is renowned for that which is beautiful, majestic, splendid, etc. It is the highest point of exultation and could be considered as the greatest pomp and pageantry that God could bestow upon His creatures. This glory will be in a state which excludes anything which is lowly or base.
- 2) Honor – is the conferring of title and position in the heavenly realm for the deeds of righteousness. There will be varying degrees of honor just as there are varying degrees in the brightness of the stars. Each will be bestowed to commend the level of faithfulness exhibited. And yet, there will be no jealousy or contempt between conferrals. All will be rewarded with a filled cup, but the cup will be of varying size. No one will be dissatisfied with their overflowing container.
- 3) Immortality – This is the life which man was authorized to participate in at the beginning and which he lost. Never again will the redeemed face corruption,

death, and returning to the earth. There will be no sickness or sadness in this state; only eternal felicity.

Life application: Rewards will come to all of God's redeemed based on the level of progression they follow which is noted in 2 Peter 1. For those who forget their salvation in this earthly walk, God never will. They will be granted eternal life based on the faith they exercised which pleased God enough to call them His own, but the rewards will be fewer and of less magnitude. Let us each strive to please God with our lives now and not be "shortsighted, even to blindness." May the Lord bestow upon you the fullness of His riches.

*Lord, I know that even the greats of the faith, men personally selected by You, fell short of perfection. How much more do I! Help me to stand fast in my salvation and proceed willingly in my pursuit of Your kingdom. Use me to Your honor and Your glory O God. Amen.*

**...but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,...** Romans 2:8

This verse is in contrast to that of verse 7 as indicated by the word "but." If you will note though, in verse 7 Paul begins with the positive benefit "eternal life" and then explains the "who" and the "how" next. It is obtained for those who "by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality." However, in verse 8, he gives the "who" and the "how" first – it is "to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but unrighteousness." Only then does he give the negative result – "indignation and wrath."

In this structure, it seems that Paul wants to show that God truly wants to lavish His benefits upon those who are willing to accept them, however and in contrast, He is longsuffering with those who act contrary to His will, but there is an end to His patience.

Those who are "self-seeking" can also be rendered "contentious." The Greek translation of the Old Testament renders this same word as "rebellious" in Deuteronomy 21:20 – And they shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard."

These people have a will directed toward themselves and which is at contention with God. They hate his divine will and exercise their thoughts, actions, and attitudes against Him. What God detests, such as abortion, sexual perversion, or disobedience to parents is what they pursue, simply because they want to cast off His rule and authority. They

are unwilling to “obey the truth” and so they work out their own set of guidelines for living and conducting their affairs. Instead of pursuing the divine will, they “obey unrighteousness.” In this, they yield to sin and let it consume them.

This, of course, fits most people to some degree, but this is speaking of those who stubbornly knock on sin’s door and allow it to lead their steps. Instead of light, they live by darkness. For those who pursue this path, there is but one end – “indignation and wrath.” This phrase comes from the Greek *thumos kai orge*. This is an expression of God’s actual hatred of sin which results in the outpouring of His anger as is displayed in divine judgment. The “indignation” indicates what we would perceive as internal – the thing which displeases God. The “wrath” then is the manifestation of that displeasure in His action.

Those who act contrary to God may think that they have the upper hand or free reign to snub Him, but as it says in Hebrews 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” In the end, there will only be terror for those who fail to repent and bow the knee before the Creator.

Life application: God has shown us what leads to life and happiness and what leads to death and condemnation. He has done it through nature, and He has further shown us in His word. Take time to meditate upon what you perceive as morally right and morally wrong and then compare it to His word. If there is a conflict between the two, then it is you who needs to adjust. God is clear, but we often misunderstand.

*Lord God, thank You for Your tender mercies and thank You for showing us the right path to follow. When we stray, show us where and how and then help us to get back on track. Surely You are longsuffering towards us, and we can only praise You for this. When we deserved judgment, You sent us Jesus! Thank You, O God! Amen.*

**...tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; Romans 2:9**

This verse continues the anticipated rewards for the deeds mentioned in the previous verse – “but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath.” The consequences of unrepentant sin are two-fold – suffering in this life and suffering in the next life.

Along with “indignation and wrath” comes “tribulation.” This is the word *thlipsis* and the verb carries the sense of pressing, such as when crushing grapes. This then is the pressure and despair which occurs after sin is committed – perhaps getting an incurable

disease resulting from sexual immorality. This would be magnified if the sinner passed that on to loved ones. Another example may be receiving a death sentence for committing a crime. The pressure of what is coming becomes an overwhelming and crushing misery.

The word “anguish” comes from the Greek *stenochoria*. This is a word used exclusively by Paul and comes from two different words – *stenos* meaning “narrow” and *chora* meaning “space.” The thought here might be something like being buried alive in a coffin. There is no room to move and only complete anguish of the soul. Edgar Allen Poe, a master of understanding the terrors of the human mind, wrote these words in *The Premature Burial* –

“And now, amid all my infinite miseries, came sweetly the cherub Hope -- for I thought of my precautions. I writhed, and made spasmodic exertions to force open the lid: it would not move. I felt my wrists for the bell-rope: it was not to be found. And now the Comforter fled for ever, and a still sterner Despair reigned triumphant; for I could not help perceiving the absence of the paddings which I had so carefully prepared -- and then, too, there came suddenly to my nostrils the strong peculiar odor of moist earth. The conclusion was irresistible. I was not within the vault. I had fallen into a trance while absent from home-while among strangers -- when, or how, I could not remember -- and it was they who had buried me as a dog -- nailed up in some common coffin -- and thrust deep, deep, and for ever, into some ordinary and nameless grave.

As this awful conviction forced itself, thus, into the innermost chambers of my soul, I once again struggled to cry aloud. And in this second endeavor I succeeded. A long, wild, and continuous shriek, or yell of agony, resounded through the realms of the subterranean Night.”

This anguish of eternal hopelessness is the just and due penalty for “every soul of man who does evil.” The opposite is reflected in the Bible as well. In David’s writings he uses the terminology several times to reflect what can be expected for those who trust in the Lord. Instead of a narrow confinement there will be ease of movement in spacious places –

I called on the Lord in distress;  
The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.  
The Lord is on my side;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me? Psalm 118: 5, 6

And yet, in what is the most ironic twist of all, Jesus tells us that to reach the broad spaces of salvation, there is only a narrow gate. Likewise, to be sentenced to the torturous confines of eternity apart from God, there is a wide and easy path one may tread –

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7:13, 14

In the end, the choice is up to each of us and it includes all people, “of the Jew first and also of the Gentile.”

Life application: Is eternal confinement and misery worth a moment of sin? It is by far better to confine oneself now in this life than to lack in our eternal home. And it is surely better to reject the broad and spacious life of sin in order to gain eternal release in a paradise of glory. As you walk through life today, consider that each choice bears eternal consequences. Even if you are saved, your rewards will be lessened by following the wrong path now. Stay in tune with the Spirit and allow Him to fill you and guide you.

*Glorious Lord God Almighty! What an amazing thing You have done by offering us the choice to pursue You now in a narrow and restricted way in order to receive the eternally expansive glories of heaven. You look for those with the faith to perceive this and to thus choose Jesus. Help me to pick up my cross daily and follow where He leads. Amen.*

**... but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.** Romans 2:10

This verse, beginning with “but,” is set in contrast to verses 8 and 9. There are those who “are self-seeking and do not obey the truth.” They will receive “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish” whereas those who work “what is good” will receive an abundance of blessing. Paul defines their rewards as “glory, honor, and peace.” This is a partial repetition of verse 7 which exchanges the word “immortality” with “peace.” The two concepts do meet in thought and support each other.

Immortality is “the life which man was authorized to participate in at the beginning and which he lost. Never again will the redeemed face corruption, death, and returning to the earth. There will be no sickness or sadness in this state; only eternal felicity.” This corresponds with the idea of peace quite well. Paul was a Hebrew. To them peace had a much fuller meaning than it does to the Greek and western mind. It is more than just a

state of calm or quiet. Rather it signifies wholeness and completion in all ways. This was the original intent for man, and it is fully realized in our acceptance of Jesus and moving from death to life.

This however brings up the need for clarification concerning works versus faith. This was explained in 2:6 but will be expanded on now. We are saved and receive these things by faith in Christ and His work alone. Our “works” then are only of value after salvation and are used to determine our level of reward. Someone outside of Him, no matter how diligent in good works, can never receive these promises because they are a child of wrath by nature. Paul explains this in Ephesians 2:1-3 –

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

Prior to Christ, man is at enmity with God and deeds – even supposedly “good” deeds only increase that wrath. The reason for this is that by trusting in one’s own deeds it becomes a form of self-idolatry, something which only increases guilt. Any non-Christian philanthropist will make a good example. They give money and effort to causes – AIDS for example – in order to make the world a better place, or to perhaps help their fellow man. This brings about personal satisfaction and, of course, applause from man. But it failed to address the sin problem which already existed. The favor rests not with God but with man, and in particular – self.

Man must come to Christ first in order to be justified before God. Only when the wrath at sin is dealt with (in the body of Jesus) can the works merit favor and reward. The result is the “peace” Paul announces in this verse. Reconciliation with God through Jesus should lead us to accomplish works of righteousness leading to glory, honor, and peace. Peter notes the time when this will be fully realized –

“...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” 1 Peter 5:4

Life application: Are you saved and just waiting on your glorification without living a full and abundant life of works for Christ? Or are you actively participating in doing those things which will bring Him glory now and that will bring you rewards when He appears? This life is our one chance to work for our eternal rewards. We save money in banks for

the future, we go to college for the future, we buy insurance for the future... how much more should we add to our heavenly account then. Be wise with the time you have been given and determine to accomplish your works for that which will never perish.

*Lord God, give me wisdom to effectively use the gifts You have blessed me with and not squander them for that which is only temporary. Help me to do what is right and good in Your eyes and which will bring everlasting rewards. Thank You for Your guiding hand upon me. Amen.*

**For there is no partiality with God. Romans 2:11**

This verse begins with “for” and is being used as a confirmation of the previous thought which twice stated, “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” The anticipated wrath of God or favor of God comes equally upon all. There is no consideration of the outer appearance of the jar, but rather the favor lies with what is in it; God is not superficial in His judgments but determines the value of the contents rather than the showiness of what is externally apparent.

This thought permeates the Bible and yet it is often misunderstood, by both the Jew because of his heritage and by the church member who has entered into some denomination, sect, or cult and thus believes he has been elevated to an especially favorable standing with God because of that affiliation.

In Deuteronomy 1:17, we find that God expects our judgments to be fair and without partiality and the reason for that is given –

“You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.”

All judgment is ultimately God’s, so when we pervert justice, we slander His name by our actions. God sets the standards, and they are universal in scope and thus they should be in application as well. James clearly defines our responsibilities in this matter and how to carry them out –

“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at

my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” James 2:1-4

Having considered this, it must be noted that judgment and placement are not the same thing, but as the world is running towards ever more liberal thinking the two categories become confused. God does not show favoritism in His judgments of us, but as the sovereign Creator He has the right to place people in various locations and at any point in time. Therefore, they may be brought into the world in unequal status economically, socially, etc. These choices are at His discretion and do not imply partiality or favoritism. The founding fathers of America understood this when they penned these words –

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”

The founders did not say that all have the “right” to happiness, but that all have the right to pursue it. Owning a house is to be a pursuit, not a judgment. Feeding oneself is a product of placement and opportunity, not a universal right which is the responsibility of others. In other words, if a person is in a place where food won’t grow, it is their responsibility to move and work with their hands to grow it or purchase it from a supply line based on money earned from another vocation. Confusing these lines actually moves us away from what God ordains.

Life application: God doesn’t show favoritism in His judgments and He asks us to act likewise. However, God places us according to His wisdom and expects us to live within that placement or pick up and move to action based on the abilities He has made us with. Take time today to think clearly on moral and social responsibilities and don’t let the lines of your thinking become confused, lest it lead you to find fault in God where no fault exists.

*Lord Jesus, help me to think clearly on issues which often become confused in our society. Give me the wisdom to stand on what is morally right and to hold fast to that. But Lord, also help me to see Your sovereign hand in the workings of the world and the placement of the peoples – all which are leading to Your end goals for us. Amen.*

**For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...** Romans 2:12



This verse begins an amazingly sobering thought concerning the nature of man, our relationship with God as fallen creatures, and our desperate need to “get the word out” to the people of the world.

The thought begins with “for.” This begins a confirmation of what has been previously stated. To understand the context, take a moment to review verses 1-11. “For as many as have sinned without law” is speaking about the entire scope of the people of the world who had not yet received God’s law as given to the nation of Israel. The words “without law” are translated from *anomos*, the *a* is negative, and *nomos* is speaking of the law given through Moses to Israel.

This is the world at large and is speaking of all people since the beginning of the world. They “will also perish without law.” How can this be? If there is no law to instruct the people, then how can they be condemned? Where is the fairness in this? These are the often asked and obvious questions of the people of the world. “It’s not fair!” But this is making the assumption that there is no standard at all by which we can be judged. Paul showed in the previous chapter and will show in the coming verses that there is a universally understood “law” that is written on our conscience.

A major premise of the Bible is that man is fallen. In order to reconcile this, God has worked through several “dispensations” to show us that fallen state and our need for Jesus. Each of these dispensations leads us to a new understanding of our corrupt nature and our deserved condemnation before His glorious perfection. Jesus confirms this fallen state in John 3:18 –

“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.”

As He notes, we are “condemned already.” Fallen man needs to do nothing to go to hell; he is already on that road. What He needs is an avenue of escape from that path. This is the plan of salvation as the Bible reveals and which ultimately takes us to Jesus and the cross of Calvary. Along that path, God introduced the law. This period is one of the dispensations God gave the world. It shows us His standards and what man can do to live by them. Paul explains though that no one can meet its standards perfectly (Romans 3:19, 20). Even the law itself shows us this by offering the Day of Atonement – a needed cup of grace found each year in the midst of an ocean of works. Without the Day of Atonement, the law merely condemns those under the law.

The second half of this verse shows us this – “...as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.” This is the fair and equitable standard to which the Jew (whom Paul has been addressing) could find no place to object. They were the recipients and bearers of God’s law and they lorded their position of favor over those who didn’t possess the law. And yet, the very law they felt favored them is actually what brought about stricter judgment and greater condemnation.

In essence, and as Paul will explain in his writings, the law was given to demonstrate two great lessons to the world –

- 1) To show us how utterly sinful sin is to God –

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

Romans 7:13

- 2) To show fallen man his desperate need for something better, something apart from the law, something without which there is no hope –

“Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” Galatians 3:21-25

The law is a tutor which was meant to take us by the hand and lead us directly to our need for God’s unmerited favor, His grace, His mercy... His Son, our Lord Jesus.

Life application: Are you trusting in deeds of the flesh to obtain God’s favor? If so, turn away from this mindset and the futility it produces and come to God’s Fountain of grace – Jesus. Place your faith and trust in Him alone for your salvation and then accomplish works which will demonstrate the change that has taken place in you. And be sure to tell others about what God has done. All are under a sentence of condemnation and all need Jesus.

*Lord God, when I contemplate the grace that You have poured out on me, I stand in awe. What You have done is so far above my comprehension that my mind cannot grasp it. Thank You for Your love, Your grace, and Your mercy – all displayed in the giving of Your Son for me. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**...(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; Romans 2:13**

We are continuing on with a series of verses which need to be looked at from a broad scope of Scripture and not as individual, stand-alone, thoughts. If we take these verses and cite them without proper context, a completely wrong conclusion of what Paul is actually trying to tell us will be derived. What he says here in verse 13 ought to be obvious in the plain sense. If you only hear the law and don't do what the law says, the law is of no value at all.

To understand this, just think of a sign by the train tracks, "Stay off the tracks when a train is approaching." The people who live in the area have this law, just as Israel had the law. But then one guy in town (a real smart fellow) decides to take his family for a stroll on Sunday... on the tracks. Obviously being one who has the law posted was of no value to him and his family, and yes, the funeral is Tuesday at 10am. James writes similar words in his epistle as well –

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." James 1:22-25

The law, which is only a portion of the word, has a particular part and purpose in God's redemptive plan, but that purpose ended at the cross of Jesus. In Matthew 5:17, it notes that Jesus came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. And fulfill them He did. They are now set aside in Christ (Hebrews 10:9).

The point that needs to be more carefully evaluated is what the law itself says in Leviticus 18:5, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Paul quotes this verse twice, once in Romans 10:5 and then again in Galatians 3:11, 12. He states that "no one is justified by the law in the sight of God." So, what is he talking about in this verse? Is Paul confused? No. The

reason is that the law, just like all of God's dealings with man, is ultimately based on faith, not works.

The law itself requires works, but they are works which demonstrate to us our inability to meet the very law on which the works are based. As was noted in evaluating the previous verse, the law was given to show us the utterly sinful nature of sin and to lead us to seek out God's mercy and forgiveness. The law itself shows us this in the book of Habakkuk –

“Behold the proud,  
His soul is not upright in him;  
But the just shall live by his faith.” (vs. 2:4)

Therefore, what Paul is saying is not that the law justifies a person or can justify a person, only that the “doers of the law will be justified.” And none except Jesus are truly “doers of the law” unless they are living by faith.

So here we have the resolution: The law was given, and no one can meet its standards perfectly. Therefore, faith is required that despite not meeting it God will provide salvation to those who will trust in Him and not in themselves; self-reliance in meeting the deeds of the law is not trusting in God, but in self. Then Jesus came to fulfill the law we cannot fulfill. Now, by faith in His accomplishing the law and then becoming our sin-offering at the cross, we now stand justified before God. It is faith in God's providence at all times and in all dispensations which reconcile us to God.

Life application: Are you living by faith in what Jesus did or are you trying to please God through your own deeds? Have faith in what God has done through Jesus and then you will be able to please God with your deeds, because they are based on faith and not on the act itself. Above all, God looks for faith in His faithless creatures.

*Heavenly Father, what a precious treasure Your word is. To know that Abraham was declared righteous by mere faith gives me confidence that the same is true with me. May I live by faith, even when doing good deeds for others, knowing that what I am doing is less important than the faith behind my actions. May these deeds then bring glory and honor back to You. Amen.*

**...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, Romans 2:14**

Paul now introduces a supporting argument for what he just said in verse 13 by starting with “for when” –

...(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when...

To clarify, he has made a claim against the Jews who trust in merely being the stewards of the law while failing to meet the law. Now he will demonstrate that what he said is correct. For when Gentiles (all who are not Jews) who do not have the law (the written code entrusted to the Jewish people by God), by nature do the things in the law (they obey what the law prescribes, such as “do not murder”), although not having the law (because it was given only to the nation of Israel), are a law to themselves (they have become “doers of the law” and thus prove his claim of verse 13).

There is no culture which has ever existed that was devoid of a moral law. Although the laws are enacted in varying degrees of strictness and enforced in varying degrees of severity, there is found to be a universal standard of overall moral right and wrong which is written on our hearts and imprinted on our consciences. When these internal codes are violated, a sense of guilt is the result. In essence, the Gentiles are stewards of God’s law, even if not written and detailed in the form given to Israel.

It is important to note that the word translated “when” in no way implies that what Paul is arguing will take place. Instead, it is a conjecture which links the two thoughts. The reason this is important is because even though obedience to this internal law may exist, it doesn’t mean that it exists perfectly or that it will be executed flawlessly. Even more, the Bible consistently implies that it won’t – “all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

What this means then is that no person will be saved by the light he has received – for the Jew it was the Law of Moses, and for the gentile it is through the internal law of the heart and conscience. Instead, he will be judged by that light – greater judgment for the one with greater light. The light merely brings condemnation in varying degree. It is Christ who brings salvation in its fullness.

This concept of greater judgment for greater knowledge is hinted at in James 3:1. Although James is speaking to those who would presume to be teachers, the idea rings true with what Paul is telling us about in Romans –

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” James 3:1

All will be judged fairly based upon the light they have received, and none will be able to accuse God of unfairness. All mouths will be stopped before Him and every tongue will be silenced. In the end, all people deserve God's hand of wrath and condemnation, but because of His great love with which He has loved us, we shall receive mercy if we come to the cross and the precious shed blood of Jesus.

Life application: Are you willing to gain greater light which will potentially increase your guilt before God? It is a scary thought, but the only acceptable answer for the follower of Jesus is, "Yes." It is unthinkable that we would want to keep ourselves from knowing God in all His fullness just because we are scared of what we might learn about our own fallen state. Instead, when we learn more, we need to have our faith and actions coincide with our greater knowledge.

*Lord God, Your word states "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word." So, Lord, give me the understanding of Your word and then give me the desire and the ability to take heed to it. I know that through You I can do all things and so let me not be timid in my pursuit of You. Amen.*

**...who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)...**  
Romans 2:15

Paul states it as an axiom that when people by nature do the things which are found in the law, even though they don't have the law, they "show the work of the law written in their hearts." It's a validation that we know intuitively, although we exercise this in varying degrees of actual adherence, what God expects of us. The fact that we display these moral convictions shows that there must be an ultimate standard on which they are being compared. Though we may err in our reasoning about a moral issue, the moral standard exists.

Showing that this code is ingrained "in their hearts," their conscience then works with or against their actions; it bears witness to what they actually do. The Bible gives us insights into man's conscience in several ways –

In John 8:9 it says those who faced Jesus' pronouncement about being the first to stone the adulterous woman were convicted in their conscience. It is a tool of conviction.

In Acts 23:1, Paul claimed before the Sanhedrin that he "lived in all good conscience before God." It is a tool for right moral living.

In Romans 13:5, we are told to be subject to rulers, not only because of their wrath if we disobey, but merely for conscience's sake. It is a rule and guide within a societal framework because God ordains rulers of societies.

In 1 Corinthians 8:7-12, Paul notes that believers can have a weak conscience. This comes from a lack of knowledge about the truth of God's word. It is a part of man which must be corrected and strengthened through prayer and study.

In 1 Timothy 3:9, Paul tells Timothy to have a pure conscience. This would be living fully and completely within the ordinances of God and according to the word he has given. Right conscience is an attainable asset.

In the following chapter, 1 Timothy 4:2 tells us that those who reject God's truth can actually incur a seared conscience. It is something that can be completely twisted or even eradicated.

In Titus 1:15, Paul speaks of those who are corrupted and thus they have a defiled conscience. It is something that when misused can produce ungodliness and immorality.

These, and many other examples in Scripture, show us that the conscience is a powerful tool to be used in accordance with God's word or which will work against it. When exercised without God's word, the conscience of man, like his emotions, is one of the most uncertain faculties he possesses. If not reigned in, it will become seared as Paul describes and the person will move so far away from right morality that they become completely defiled. This is total depravity and complete enmity with God, striving against Him on every moral issue.

Life application: Are you seeking to align your moral compass with God's word? If so, then you must first know God's word and then allow your conscience to lead you to right moral actions and convict you of incorrect ones. When this is properly effected, you will be living fully and completely within the ordinances of God.

*Heavenly Father, help me to never snub my conscience when it speaks to align my actions with Your word. Keep me from willful disobedience which can only result in a weakening of my conscience, even to the point that it is seared. I do want to please You and I pray this for Your glory. Amen.*

**...in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. Romans 2:16**

This verse ties directly back to verse 12. The intervening verses fill the thought out for us to comprehend the full extent of what the two surrounding verses state. Every person will be judged according to the amount of revealed light they have received. At Paul's time, it was Jew and Gentile; the Holy Scriptures and natural law; order and conscience; deeds for self or deeds of faith; etc. These will be considered, and judgment will be rendered.

It needs to be noted again that although there are two categories flowing from Paul's pen – Jew and Gentile, there is now the church and the complete canon of Scripture. This is a sobering thought for us to consider. We now have a much fuller extent of God's revelation and are therefore more accountable for what we know. Imagine the guilt of the professor of biblical theology in a modern university who has, and teaches, both testaments of the Bible and yet discounts what he teaches as "one of many paths to God" or "just another ancient text written by man." Such an individual will be judged in the most severe way for diminishing the glory of which he was an especially important steward.

All of these things will be evaluated "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men." The Bible in numerous verses reveals that God searches the hearts and minds of man. It also states again and again that God will judge all people. Tying the two thoughts together supports what Paul states here. Judgment isn't only based on deed, but on thought and intent as well. Ecclesiastes 12:14 gives us one of many tastes of this –

For God will bring every work into judgment,  
Including every secret thing,  
Whether good or evil.

The ancient Greek writer Sophocles who lived almost 500 years before Christ, and outside of the covenant people Israel, wrote these words, confirming that there is a written code which men have in their hearts and that God is therefore just in judging these "secrets of men."

"Not now, nor yesterday, but evermore  
These laws have lived: nor know we whence they came."

We are being observed, evaluated, and our deeds – hidden and open – are being noted for the day of God's judgment. And the final portion of that process will be "by Jesus Christ." The Bible reveals with no uncertainty (such as in Act 17:31) that He is the One to whom all judgment has been granted –



“...because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:31

God has every right to judge His creatures, but how much more when He participated in His creation. And then, how much more when His creatures have rejected His participation! Jesus Christ, the God/Man will stand in judgment because He too stood in judgment. If His own creatures sentenced Him while innocent, how much more just is His judgment over their guilt? All of this is ensured to us as Paul says, “according to my gospel.”

Paul is not claiming authority to the gospel, as if he is its author. Instead, he is claiming authority to it as the herald of the Author’s message. His commission stands directly from the words of Jesus in Acts 9:15. There Jesus states, “...he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” This then places Paul in opposition to any false gospel. His word is the authoritative word of God as transmitted through him, just as was the word of the prophets of old.

Life application: It is sobering to know that every thought we have and everything we have done is known to God and that we are accountable to Him for these things. For this reason, we are told to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Let each of us both strive for this individually and also remind others of this when the need arises.

*O glorious God, You are just when You judge and thus we are deserving of the pouring out of Your wrath upon us. And yet, in Your great love You have lavished us with favor, mercy, and salvation according to the riches of Your glory. Thank You for our Lord Jesus and the promise of eternal life which proceeds from and through Him. Amen.*

**Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,**  
Romans 2:17

Paul now names the people he's been directing his thoughts to since verse 2:1, the Jews. He has laid out his argument concisely concerning the nature of judgment for those with the law and those without the law. Now he gives three points which concern the Jew's attitude.

You are called a Jew. The term Jew is applied as a general name for the people of Israel. Abraham was a Hebrew, and the name was applied to those of the line of promise even to Paul's time (Philippians 3:5). However, the people are also called "Israelites." This is

the group and nation of the people. But even this was further refined to "Jew." The term comes from the tribe of Judah, of whom Jesus descends. Judah became the prominent tribe of the people of Israel and after the Babylonian exile, the term Jew became synonymous with any person from any of the tribes of Israel. Being called a Jew was considered an honor because they were the stewards of God's oracles and his chosen people.

You "rest on the law." Just as some people "rest on Catholicism" or "rest on their good works" or "rest on their blessings as evidence of God's favor" the Jews rested on having the law. It became an end in and of itself. "Not only are we God's chosen, but we have the law and thus are in right standing with God."

You "make your boast in God." The one true God revealed Himself through the promised line which eventually became the Jews. They had His law and His name rests on them - Israel means "He struggles with God." Not only did God place the name "El" on them, but He also revealed His other names - "I AM," "Jehovah," "El Shaddai," and etc. They could boast that this God, who has revealed Himself through their oracles and to their people, was surely on their side.

However, Paul has already shown that all men, both Jew and Gentile, need more than a name to be in favor with God. They also need more than the law to be in favor with God. And they need more than knowing God's name and character to be in His favor. James explains this quite well in his epistle. Note how he brings in all three points - Abraham being a Hebrew; works of faith rather than merely having knowledge; and having a correct knowledge of who God is and yet not being right with Him -

"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" James 2:18-22

Life application: Again, and again we see in Scripture that what God desires is faith. Our family, our denomination, or our nation of birth is irrelevant to a right standing with Him. Having a Bible in our house and even being a teacher of that Bible means nothing without faith in what it states. And knowing all about God in our heads means nothing if we don't have a relationship with Him. Let us strive to put aside all externals and focus on what is inside - a heart and attitude which demonstrates our love for Him.

*Lord Jesus, please keep my heart humble and my thoughts properly focused on You. All the knowledge in the world about who You are means nothing when I am disobedient to You. So, Lord, help me to mix my knowledge with faith. And then help me to instruct others wisely based on that knowledge. All this I pray to Your glory. Amen.*

**...and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, Romans 2:18**

There are two general meanings that the word "approve" could mean in this verse. The first would be "to approve of" and the other would be to "prove" or to "discern between." Either would make sense in the context of the verse and it should be noted that the former would merely be the result of exercising the latter. In the overall context and because one eventually results in the other, it would be logical that Paul is speaking of discernment.

This type of discernment is found in the testing of metals by fire. When they are heated, they are proven pure, found to be mixed with lesser metals, or defiled by impurities. The fire reveals the purity, nature, and quality of the solid by breaking it down into liquid. Jesus uses this same term in Luke 12:56 in a manner revealing discernment -

"Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?" Luke 12:56

The people He was addressing could walk out from morning to morning and tell what the weather would be like by the color of the sky. But when the Light of the world came and revealed His glory, they were blinded and unable to make a right discernment about who He actually is.

In a like manner, Paul shows that the Jew, putting his trust in the law as an end in and of itself, boasts in God because they "know His will" from the law. This is done regardless of whether they actually have faith in God or not. They know what He expects from a mechanical sense and therefore can discern between what is good and what isn't. They obtain this because they are "being instructed out of the law."

The word "instructed" here is from the Greek word *katechoumenos*. It is where we obtain our word "catechumen" - one who is being instructed. From this comes the word catechism, or instruction.

The instruction they receive helps them to understand what is right, but he will show that it doesn't guarantee that the knowledge will be transferred to right action. As an

example, a judge may know the law like the back of his hand, but this doesn't mean that he will actually obey the law that he knows. Time and time again we read of judges who are arrested for committing the very crimes that they judge others for. These judges -

Know the law (His will)

Agree with the law because they judge others using it (approve the things that are excellent)

Because they have been schooled in law (instructed out of the law)

All of this, however, is no guarantee of right living. We will see this as we continue.

Life application: What is your level of Bible knowledge? Have you read the word many times? Have you studied the original languages? Have you been schooled in proper theology? If yes - big deal... big deal if you don't align your life with what you know. Having the law; knowing the Bible; understanding the nature of God - none of that means diddly if you have no heart for the Lord. Each day, remember to return to child-like faith in your Lord. Then go back and apply the meat of His word to Your wholesome diet.

*Lord Jesus, I confess that too often I trust in my knowledge and forget to put my faith in You. My knowledge actually causes me to stumble and act in a manner contrary to the beauty of living by faith alone in Your great work. Humble me, O Lord, and give me a heart that is soft and tender toward You alone. Amen.*

**...and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, Romans 2:19**

This is a continuation of the previous verse and will carry on through the next verse. The Jews rested in the law, made their boast in God, and knew His will. They were able to discern what was right because of their instruction out of the law. Because of this, they were confident that they were a sufficient “guide to the blind” and were “a light to those who are in darkness.” But the law is not an end in and of itself. It is only a means of understanding God’s perfection and man’s fallen state.

“Darkness” as used in the Bible often refers to a state of spiritual blindness and a life apart from God. When a person trusts that they can meet the demands of the law apart from a reliance on God’s mercy, it only leads to self-blindness. This inevitably will result in leading others astray as well. Jesus shows time and again that this is exactly what happened to the leaders of Israel, such as is seen in Matthew 15:14 –

“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”

The light which is found in Scripture is only suitable for someone who is willing to use that light for self-illumination first. As the Psalmist implored, so should each person who desires to be instructed from God’s word –

“Open my eyes, that I may see  
Wondrous things from Your law.” Psalm 119:18

The Jewish people had every assurance that they were the stewards of God’s oracles and that through them would come all the riches of God’s promises to the world, but this assurance merely led them to trust that they were somehow excused from God’s wrath and judgment. The law to them became a manipulative tool which they used to lord their supposed superiority over the gentiles. However, because of their incorrect use and instruction of it, Jesus shows the opposite was the result –

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” Matthew 23:15

The law never had the intent or purpose of making people perfect before God. As noted in a previous verse, the fact that the Day of Atonement was given as a part of the law proves this. What the law was meant to do was to lead the people to a humble walk before God in the eager expectation of the Messiah who would reveal the glory of God to the world. This was prophesied in the Old Testament and revealed in the New -

"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,  
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
Light has dawned." Matthew 4:16

Life application: When you read the Bible and see stories of people committing grievous sins, do you see yourself next to them or do you see them as more vile than you? Understand that erring in any part of the law breaks the entire law and therefore you are as guilty as they are. The judgment they received is the judgment you deserve. Take time today to thank God that your punishment was transferred to Jesus. It was a high cost paid for your sin.

*Heavenly Father, I look to the cross and wonder how You could have done this for me. May I never presume that I somehow deserve salvation and eternal life, but that it is*

*Your great grace and mercy which was poured out abundantly on me. Thank You for Jesus; thank You for His cross; thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit; and thank You for Your word. Amen.*

**...an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.** Romans 2:20

This is the final portion of the idea which began in verse 17. Those who rested in the law, the Jews, made their boast in God because they knew His will from the law. Because they were the law's stewards, they could make value judgments about what is morally right. This resulted in a confidence that they could guide the blind and illuminate the darkness of those without the law. This allowed them to become "an instructor of the foolish" and "a teacher of babes." They believed they were so qualified because they had "the form of knowledge and truth in the law."

In Scripture, the word "foolish" is normally associated with one of two types of people - the first is one who is uneducated in a matter and the second is someone who is morally deficient or wicked. In this verse, Paul is speaking of the first - someone lacking the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

The term "a teacher of babes" is the literal meaning of the words, but it symbolically means someone who is as ignorant about a matter as a baby. To the Jew, everyone else who lived without the law would fall into this category - "We know as adults; your knowledge is that of an infant." Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2 uses terminology which reflects this type of understanding -

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal."

The same concept is expanded on by the author of Hebrews -

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Hebrews 5:12-14

Having seen this in real applications, we now turn to 1 Peter 2:1, 2. There we see that although solid food, which adults eat and which represents development in wisdom, is important, it is not the entire picture. Peter shows that the Bible is actually something meant for all, but it is considered "pure milk." This is something for babes as well as adults -

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." 1 Peter 2:1, 2

What is being conveyed is that the Bible is pure spiritual milk - acceptable to all people of all ages. But increased knowledge of it moves one from being a spiritual infant to a fully developed person. The problem Paul is addressing in these verses, and which will be explained in the verses to come, is that having all of the Bible knowledge in the world doesn't necessarily lead one to maturity. Only when it is properly applied and acted on does this occur. The Jews Paul speaks of had the knowledge to impart to others, but they didn't apply it to themselves.

The Geneva Bible states the situation this way, "As though he said that the Jews under a pretense of an outward serving of God, attributed all to themselves, when in reality they did nothing less than observe the Law." Mere observation of the law accomplishes nothing without an internal change in the person. Therefore, like Peter stated, the Jews - as all of us - need to "desire the pure milk of the word." By searching the purity of the law, we will naturally be led to a close and personal relationship with the Lawgiver, our glorious Lord.

Life application: Head knowledge is great, and we need to increase our knowledge of the word every day. As we do, we become spiritually mature. However, we need to continually search out the intent behind the knowledge - a personal walk with Jesus. Let our hearts be aligned with our actions so that we will be pleasing vessels, ready for the Lord's use.

*O God, what a beautiful and perfect word You have given us. Please continually fill me with an understanding of what it says and also the desire to adhere to its precepts. But let me not merely do these things as a means of lifting myself up above others, but rather let me grow so that I may become closer to You. This I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

**You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? Romans 2:21**

Based on his statement in verses 17-20 Paul now asks a series of questions in Verses 21-23. The questions however begin with "therefore" and thus imply an answer opposite to what would normally be expected. By using a question in this manner, it makes the answer all the more forceful and undeniable.

Beginning with the concept of an instructor passing on instruction, he asks, "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?" The answer will be "no." The Jews who have the law have been shown to not live by the law which they possess.

To show this, his first indictment is concerning theft - "You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?" Obviously not every person reading his words are implicated in theft, but Paul is making a general observation based on the society in which he lived and which both rejected Christ and then nailed Him to the cross. The oral and possibly written testimony at that time by those who bore witness to Him showed this.

Jesus' accusation against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:2, 3 is one instance we can verify it. These are the very people who possessed the law and instructed out of it, and yet Jesus showed that they did not live by the standards which they taught –

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

On another occasion, Jesus explicitly called those who controlled the temple grounds thieves -

"And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" Matthew 21:13

The exact things which the law forbade are the things they practiced, not just in secret, but out in the open. Their actions became a festering wound within the society because the actions of the leaders were seen by all. When this happens, even the commoners begin to act in the same manner.

A perfect example of this is our nation today. Theft in Washington is so open and brazen - transferring money from those who earn it to those who don't - that society sees this as normal and acceptable. The open wound cannot be healed with leaders who are no more than bully thugs.



Favors are bought and sold, and exemptions are made for some but not for others. This leads to societal breakdown and "every man for himself." The same was true in Israel at Jesus' time as is evidenced by the gospel record. Again, we turn to Matthew to see open theft by the instructors of the law -

"He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" — then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." Matthew 15:3-6

The practice of corban was a way of getting around taking care of one's own parents. By devoting assets or money to God, these things could no longer be used for anything else. By making something so devoted, the gift could not be used to help the parents and yet it wasn't actually bound to the temple treasury either. It was somewhat in a state of limbo - it could only be given to the temple or used by the giver. By agreeing to this precept, the leaders in Israel were committing theft against the people who needed it most, the parents who had raised the person and now needed the same care in their old age.

The moral responsibility of those who have the law increases. It doesn't decrease, nor is there an exemption because of the knowledge they possess. Knowledge in no way negates right action. Instead, it calls for it and even demands it.

Life application: Here we are studying the Bible and looking deeply into its precepts. We are gaining knowledge and thus much more will be expected of us as we walk through life. The eyes of others are watching us and anticipate that we will set the example for right conduct. Today as you go about your business, reflect on the areas where you may need to correct your habits so that they align with the Name you bear - the Lord Jesus.

*Lord, I love Your word and I am so thankful to have the opportunity to read it and learn it. Now Lord, help me to live out what I have learned and to act in a manner which is in accord with its precepts. May those who see my life and actions have nothing bad to say about the title of "Christian." Amen.*

**You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? Romans 2:22**

This is the second of three verses asking those questions to which the Jews of his time had to answer, "Yes." The first concerns adultery - "You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery?" The answer is "yes" and it is found in the gospels as were the previous questions. And not only is the answer affirmative to literal adultery, but spiritual adultery as well. In Matthew 12:39, it says this -

"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.'"

Jesus accused those who came to Him looking for a sign of the validation of His authority of being wicked and adulterous. The Ninevites, to whom Jonah was sent, repented at the preaching of Jonah without any miraculous sign. The people of Israel had been given the sign of Jonah in Jesus' preaching that judgment was coming, just as Jonah gave. And yet they failed to repent. They, the stewards of the oracles of God and the people from whom came the prophets saw the repentance of Nineveh based on the word from the God they served, but they were unwilling to do what even the pagans had done. They were attempting to excuse themselves from their obligation based on God's supposed favoritism of them, but instead they only incurred greater guilt.

Concerning literal adultery, the account in John 8:1-11 pointedly shows that the people were willing to judge a woman caught in adultery by bringing her to be stoned and yet excused the male who she was with, though both bore the guilt. Jesus then challenged them to cast the first stone if they were without sin; none did. The premise of the law is that if one commandment is broken, the entire law is broken (James 2:10). As none were without sin, then all had broken the entire law, including adultery. In both respects in this account, they were proved to be adulterers.

Paul next makes an interesting comment, "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" The people of the law had transgressed so far in the past that the land was literally full of idols. Because of this, and many other transgressions, God's judgment came upon them and they were exiled to Babylon for 70 years. The lesson concerning idolatry was well learned, but this only took care of the outward, blatant sin of having idols set up for worship. Despite the external change, it did nothing to inwardly change the people. Their hearts remained greedy and set on idolatry, even if it wasn't demonstrated in bowing to idols. Instead, they had set up idols in their hearts. Jesus shows us this in Matthew 21:12, 13 -

"Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats

of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

As we continue to see, the very things which the Jews found fault in others were found in them as well. They were trusting in their status as Jews and not in a personal, obedient relationship with God. Each of us needs to continually evaluate our own station to ensure we don't fall into this trap.

Life application: Though we may be born into a Christian home, we are not by default Christians. Though we may be members of our church, it doesn't mean we have a right-standing with God. The only thing we can trust in for God's favor is our faith, mixed with obedience. When these are properly exercised, God will surely turn His face toward us. Take time today to evaluate your walk with the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus and all that He did for me. Help me not to trust in anything except His work and then help me to instruct others in a right relationship with You as well. It is so easy to have, and we so often miss it because of our own pride. Be with me and keep reminding me that it is by Jesus alone that I am secure in You. Amen.*

**You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?**  
Romans 2:23

This is Paul's final question of indictment against the Jews who rested in the law, but who failed to adhere to the precepts they supposedly held in such high esteem. "You who make your boast in the law" implies that they have something worthy of boasting about. Nobody would boast in something of no value. Therefore, the implication is that law is good, the law is right, and the law is holy. Holding up the law as a vital part of their status implies its great value, because their status is derived from that law.

As an example, consider a Bible preacher. He stands in the pulpit and proclaims the glory and splendor of the word. He preaches its precepts. He condemns those who don't adhere to it. His livelihood is based on the Bible, his status is based on the Bible, and the people's trust of the Bible is based on his determined mindset about the Bible. All of who he is and what he has is because of the Bible; he boasts in the Bible. But Paul goes on...

Despite all the boasting Paul asks, "Do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" The very law the Jews stand on for their livelihood and status is dishonored when they break it. In essence, they have religion, but they are not redeemed; they have appearance without reality; they profess, but they do not possess; they have orthodoxy,

but they are lacking orthopraxy; they know every precept, but they have no proper practice. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus states these words to the religious leaders of His time -

"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:  
'These people draw near to Me with their mouth,  
And honor Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far from Me.  
And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" Matthew 15:7-9

How many times have we seen Bible preachers, bishops, pastors, cardinals, evangelists, etc. stand on the Christian message in precept, but fail to adhere to it in practice. Their words and their actions don't sync. This is what Paul has been and is addressing. Albert Barnes rightly states that, "It matters little what a man's speculative opinions may be; his practice may do far more to disgrace religion than his profession does to honor it. It is the life and conduct, and not merely the profession of the lips, that does real honor to the true religion."

A Christian by name only is not a Christian. There must be a moment in the person's life when true acknowledgment of one's own depraved state is realized. After that, it is incumbent on the saved soul to demonstrate it in outward workings of the internal change. To fail in this can only bring disrepute upon the perception of the Bible and upon the Person of Jesus by those who look in their sad direction.

Life application: Are you living out the precepts that you speak to others? If not, mixed signals are being sent which can only adversely affect your testimony and their faith. Take time to evaluate your actions and align them with your professions.

*Lord Jesus, help me to have actions that align with my words in all aspects of my life, but especially in my conduct as a Christian. This is particularly important because other's perceptions of everything I do bears on who I am in You. So keep me on the straight and narrow path of right living, O Lord. Amen.*

**For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written. Romans 2:24**

We often make our mental associations of things unseen by the things which we see. If we buy a car, a Ford perhaps, and it is a lemon then our perception of Ford the company will be negative. If our friends buy Fords too and they are all lemons, the name of Ford will be found in low esteem among those looking for a car.

The term for "blasphemed" is found in Romans 3:8 and is translated as "slanderingly reported." Later, in Romans 14:16, it is translated as to "be spoken of as evil." When you buy a dud car, your inclination is to tell others not to buy one from "that crummy company." Or you may say something even worse. The people of Israel were selected by God as His special people and thus their actions reflect directly on other's perception of Him. Isaiah speaks of this perception -

Now therefore, what have I here," says the Lord,  
"That My people are taken away for nothing?  
Those who rule over them  
Make them wail," says the Lord,  
"And My name is blasphemed continually every day. Isaiah 52:5

The gentile world at large railed against Israel because of their conduct, and, by default, they railed against the God of Israel. However, Israel's disobedience actually demonstrates God's greatness and His mercy even more. In Ezekiel 32, God explains why He was willing to restore Israel, even after a second instance of disobedience and the crucifixion of His Son. This restoration occurred, exactly as the Bible predicted, in the last century - first in 1948 with the land and then in 1967 with the city of Jerusalem -

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went." Ezekiel 36:22

God demonstrated mercy to Israel while showing the nations His holiness. His word is vindicated in and through His disobedient people.

An important point to consider here is that since Israel's exile and the establishment of the church, it is we who bear the name of God - in the name of Jesus. When our actions contain inappropriate conduct, the name of God is blasphemed among the unsaved. Who in their right mind would want the title "Christian" when they see people living unholy, disrespectful lives? Our actions have consequences.

Life application: Do you have a Christian symbol on your car? If so, do people see someone who is acting properly on the road? What about those you work with? If they know you are a Christian, then are your daily actions calling them to ask more about your faith, or are they making a mockery of the name of Jesus? As you go through your day, consider how the things you do affect others' perception about the Lord.

*Lord, please be with me and guide me in my daily walk. Keep my thoughts on You and help me to never stray from right living. May my life be a testimony to Your greatness and may others seek You out because of me. This I pray to Your honor and glory. Amen.*

**For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Romans 2:25**

Paul turns to the ancient rite of circumcision to justify the comments he has previously made. "For" tells us that what was stated leads to this conclusion. "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law." The rite of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17. However, he was declared righteous by God in Genesis 15 many years earlier. The rite was a sign of the declaration, not the other way around. Therefore, if one keeps the law (which was later instituted through Moses, a member of the promised line who received the rite), then the circumcision has profit. If not, then it is entirely without merit.

In order to understand this, think of a person who was not of the covenant people. If he was circumcised, perhaps to be a spy against Israel, what good would his circumcision do in regard to the law? Nothing; it would mean nothing. The circumcision needs to be accompanied by a belief that what the law is proclaiming is also worth living out.

Paul then gives a validation of this by turning the premise around - "But if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." If the law was given and circumcision is a sign attached to those who have received it, implying that it is binding upon them, then when the law is broken, the sign means nothing. Suppose you are the citizen of a nation and you are given an oath as a sign of that citizenship - "I promise to defend the constitution of..." As a validation of that, you are given a uniform with stripes and a flag of your nation on it. If you ship off to war and become a traitor, the uniform means nothing. "Your allegiance has become non-allegiance."

An outward sign must be accompanied by an inward compass or the sign means nothing. This is true within a family, within a work environment, or in any other group or organizational context. Without this inward conviction, the outward sign has no point or purpose. Moses realized this when he spoke to the nation after their 38 years of desert wanderings in Deuteronomy 10:16 -

"Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer."

In the very next sentence, verse 10:17, Moses says that the Lord "shows no partiality nor takes a bribe." "No partiality" is tied directly to "circumcision of the heart." It is an

internal conviction, not an outward sign, which demonstrates a person is in right standing with the law. This is especially true because Paul (in fact the entire Old Testament as well) shows that none can meet the demands of the law perfectly. Therefore, all are guilty before the law and the sign of circumcision is of no value unless accompanied by faith in what the law provides when the law is broken - mercy and forgiveness through conviction and repentance (such as the Day of Atonement ritual).

The importance of "uncircumcision" is of such weight and moment to Paul that he will use the term 19 times in his letters. Only one other time is it used in the New Testament - in the book of Acts. Understanding this connection between the inward change and the rite clearly shows us that baptism is not a New Testament equivalent of circumcision. Infant baptism carries with it the same inherent flaw as what Paul speaks of. To understand the fault of tying infant baptism in with circumcision, you may wish to take time and watch this sermon where I discuss the issue in detail – [HERE](#) or [HERE](#) "Genesis 17:9-14 (Circumcision-Shadows of the Coming Messiah)."

Life application: If you are relying on an external sign, rite, or affiliation in order to please God, you have made an error in your thinking. The holiness of God demands that all who enter His promised heaven must be perfect in all ways. Nothing can be added to an imperfect being to make him perfect. Instead, there must be a complete change in the person - moving from unrighteousness to righteousness. This can only come about by faith in what God can do, not man; this can only come about through Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus today.

*Heavenly Father, may You continue to remind me that the external things of my life - my denomination, my church attendance, my giving, and my title of "Christian" can only have meaning if my heart is directed to You. And then Lord, give me the willing desire to pursue You and thus prove that the externals really reflect what is inside me. Amen.*

**Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? Romans 2:26**

Another question which is actually an affirmative statement now comes from Paul. A man who hasn't been circumcised and yet keeps the law will be considered as one who was circumcised. As previously noted, Abraham believed God and was counted as righteous in Genesis 15. His circumcision, the sign of the covenant, didn't come until many years later in Genesis 17. The sign in no way added to his state of righteousness.

Paul is teaching through his words that God's approval of man does not in any way depend on the external appearance of the individual, but rather on the condition of

one's heart and their actions which are aligned with a right heart condition. He finishes this verse with "will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision."

The term "be counted" is the Greek word *logisthesetai* (from the verb *logizomai*) which means to "consider" or to "reckon." This verb is used in Romans 4:3 where Paul quotes the account of Abraham from Genesis 15 - "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" God imputed righteousness to Abraham because of his faith. There were no deeds attached to the faith, but simply an acceptance of what God had said was true.

The word is also used in Luke 22:37 when Jesus was counted, or reckoned, as a transgressor even though He had done no wrong -

"For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.'"

The idea of imputed righteousness permeates both testaments of the Bible and is realized in the work of Jesus. He was circumcised and He also met the strict demands of the law perfectly. Now, by faith in Him and in His actions, we too can be counted righteous by mere faith, just as Abraham was. Our "uncircumcision" is counted as "circumcision" because He was circumcised as a Jew. Also, we can now meet the righteous demands of the law through Him as well. His work can be "counted as" accomplished for us.

Life application: As you read the Old Testament, particularly the 613 commandments of the law given through Moses, reflect on the precepts that you have failed to meet - there will be a lot. Then realize that meeting these perfectly is the standard God demands. But don't forget that despite your failure to meet them, Jesus prevailed. If you accept His work, it will be imputed to you. And the suffering He felt at the cross... that was your punishment being transferred to Him. Apply this to your life by demonstrating a grateful heart to the Lord.

*When I think of all that You have done for me Lord, I am just overwhelmed by it all. You accomplished what I failed to do and instead of holding that over me in laughter, you laid it upon me in love. Who am I, Lord, that You would do such a thing for me? How I love You, O Lamb of God. Amen.*

**And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? Romans 2:27**



Another question which demands a "Yes" answer is handed to the Jews of Paul's day. Those gentiles (the physically uncircumcised) who fulfill the law will judge those who have the written code and circumcision (the Jews who have the law and the sign of the law) because of their failure to meet the law, of which circumcision is a sign.

It is obvious in and of itself that having the law and having the sign of the law is pointless unless one obeys the law they have. And so, Paul has laid out the precepts to show us this. They involve the following thoughts -

- 1) Having the sign of circumcision without fulfilling the law which mandates the sign is lawlessness.
- 2) Those who fulfill the law, regardless of whether they have the sign of the law or not, will receive God's praise. On the other hand, those who have the sign but who fail to fulfill the law may receive praise from man but not from God.
- 3) Those who do not have the sign but who keep the law are more pleasing to God than those who have the sign but don't keep it.
- 4) Those who keep the law, regardless of having the sign, will judge those who do not keep the law even if they have the sign.

As before, we can simply insert the word "judge" into "those who have the sign of the law" to help us make mental images of what these points make:

- 1) Being a judge without fulfilling the law which mandates what he judges is lawlessness.
- 2) Those who obey the law, regardless of whether they are judges or not, will be secure in what the laws of the nation require. On the other hand, those who are judges but fail to fulfill the law may receive praise from men (because they are judges) but not from the nation who has given the law.
- 3) Those who aren't judges but keep the law are more pleasing to the nation who has given the law than those who are judges but don't keep it.
- 4) Those who keep the law, regardless of whether they are appointed judges, will judge those who don't keep the law even if they are appointed judges.

All this is telling us that being circumcised means nothing without obedience. What God asks for is that our heart is turned toward Him and that we are obedient to what He requires.

Life application: God has sent His Son into the world to fulfill the law which none of us can fulfill. Now, He asks us to accept what Jesus has done on our behalf thus allowing us to meet the impossible demands of the law through Him - vicariously. Let us apply this to our life by being grateful, from moment to moment, for the grace He has lavished upon us.

*Lord God, I want to give You my praise today for the wonderful blessings You have bestowed upon me - food, family, friendships, and joy in my heart. But above all, I want to give You praise for the giving of Your Son to restore me to You. Thank You Lord for this wonderful, glorious blessing. Amen.*

**For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;** Romans 2:28

The Hebrew people were given the rite of circumcision in Genesis 17. From Abraham came Isaac and from Isaac came Jacob who is Israel. From Israel came the 12 tribes of Israel, the fourth being Judah. Judah became the preeminent tribe of the Israelites and the term Jew (being derived from Judah) became synonymous with all the people of Israel. To this line of people was given the rite of circumcision which was to be an outward mark of what should be an inward trait - a separation from the world and a dedication to, and service of, the true God.

In this verse though, Paul removes the outward sign as the identifying mark of the Jewish people and thus strips them of their privileged status based on this sign alone. "For" is a conclusion resulting from the previous three verses. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly." The word for "outwardly" is *phanero* and it indicates what is visible. A beard (well normally...) identifies a man. It is an outward sign of being a male. The circumcision was supposed to be the same. The outward mark identifies what the person is. But Paul strips this notion. Just as a woman could be born with hypertrichosis and have a beard, or she could have a false beard to make herself look like a man, she is nonetheless a female. The same is true with the Jew. The outward sign does not make the person.

Paul then explains this - "Nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh." The circumcision of the foreskin on the male was to be an external display of the true

circumcision which is reflected in the inward man. Jeremiah tells us about this many generations before Paul wrote his epistle -

"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,  
And take away the foreskins of your hearts,  
You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,  
Lest My fury come forth like fire,  
And burn so that no one can quench it,  
Because of the evil of your doings." Jeremiah 4:4

The people's trust in the outward rite without the accompanying inward conviction would only result in harsh judgment. The true Jew is the one who lives in accord with the expectations of the outward sign, having the inward circumcision to accompany it.

Now that this has been discerned, one of the most vital distinctions of all must be made. Is a person a Jew if they are circumcised in the heart, but not of the line of Israel (the Jewish people?) The answer is a resounding "No." This is a fundamental error in theology which will be carefully treated in the next chapter and throughout the entire New Testament. However, there are those who claim that it is the case. RC Sproul of Ligonier Ministries stated this in his *Tabletalk Magazine* -

"We're not dispensationalists here....We believe that the church is essentially Israel. We believe that the answer to, "What about the Jews?" is, "Here we are." We deny that the church is God's "plan B." We deny that we are living in God's redemptive parenthesis."

This type of error leads to confusion of what God is doing in and through history and it inevitably results in a denial that Israel, the land and the people of today, has a plan and purpose in God's dealings with the world in which we live. In essence, they are some sort of aberration. This is not the case at all. Extreme care needs to be given to the issue.

Life application: Regardless of whether we are Jews or not, we are to have the inward circumcision of the heart. If we don't live lives as Christians, then the name "Christian" has no meaning. Let us endeavor to carefully evaluate our internal person and have it aligned with our external appellation.

*Heavenly Father, You are reminding us again that we need to live in accordance with the title we bear. If we call ourselves "Christians" and don't live the life expected of the title, then are we really Christians? Help us to have the two mesh together so that we will be pleasing in Your sight and glorifying to You. Amen.*

**...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.**

Romans 2:29

In our evaluation of verse 28, the question was asked, "Is a person a Jew if they are circumcised in the heart, but not of the line of Israel." The answer is "no." This will be explored in detail in the chapters ahead as well as in the other epistles, however, one could come to this conclusion if they were to take verses such as verse 29 out of context. Paul says that "he is a Jew who is one inwardly." Does this in any way imply that gentiles are included in this statement? No. It simply means that a person born of the line of Israel who only outwardly reflects his nature is not counted as a true Jew. He must have an inward reflection as well.

Next Paul says that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter." What this means is that having the sign of circumcision in the flesh, but not having the heart for what this means to God is of no value. Circumcision in the Spirit means that the Jew is internally convicted of his state and doesn't live only by "the letter." This term, "not in the letter," is speaking of living by the precepts of the law without caring about the intent behind those precepts. Paul speaks of the Spirit and the letter in 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 -

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

The "letter" is the law which actually condemns all people because they can never meet the demands of the law. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit who gives the inner testimony of God and which frees one from the condemnation of the law. This isn't just a New Testament concept. David, who failed to meet the demands of the law, demonstrated his understanding of the letter versus the Spirit -

"Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." Psalm 51:11

David knew that without the Spirit, there was only separation from God's presence. It's good to note that since Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, a believer cannot lose the Holy Spirit. Christ fulfilled the law and therefore its demands are met in those who call on Him.

Having discerned these things, the same question needs to be asked for the second portion of this verse. Paul says that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter." Does this in any way imply that gentiles are included in this statement? Again, the answer is "No." Just because a gentile may be circumcised in the heart and have the Spirit in no way implies that they are now Jews.

To understand this, let's use the concept of being a patriot. We could say, "Being a patriot is an inward allegiance to the nation and not merely being a citizen of the United States." There are many people who are citizens of the United States, but not all of them have an inward allegiance to the nation. In fact, many citizens have great animosity towards their country; they are not patriots. Therefore, being a patriot, like being a Jew, is not based on externals, but internals.

Now let's consider those who have a great allegiance to the United States, but they are not citizens. Are they patriots? No. Because they are not citizens, they are not considered patriots. There were many foreigners who came to the aid of the patriots during the revolutionary war, who believed in the cause of the war, and who even died in support of America, and yet they were not considered patriots. Likewise, gentiles are not Jews simply because they bear circumcision of the heart and have the Spirit.

This is an immensely important issue, because if one believes he is a Jew when he isn't, then his theology is garbled and confused. This confusion comes from misapplying verses such as this and other verses such as Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Paul says "there is neither Jew nor Greek" which leads people to say that we are all the same; the Christians are now the Jews. But this is entirely wrong and is verifiable by the same verse. Paul says also that "there is neither male nor female." However, it's obvious that there are still males and there are still females. Nothing has changed. The very fact that Paul states "Jew" and "Greek" implies that there is, in fact, a difference just as by stating "male" and "female" implies there is a difference. Paul is speaking in a spiritual context - "We are all one in Christ." Not that we are not distinctive entities in Christ.

Finally in verse 29, Paul says, "whose praise is not from men but from God." The term "Jew" comes from the name "Judah" which means "praise." Therefore, Paul is making a pun on the term. He is saying that being a Jew is not something that comes from man (meaning ancestry) but it comes from God. In other words, not all Jews are truly Jews. Only those who live by God's Spirit are the true Jews. Again, as has been noted twice already, this in no way implies that a gentile who has received God's Spirit is now a Jew. It only negates those of the line of Israel who don't qualify.

Life application: Don't claim to be something you're not. If you are in Christ, then names and titles mean far less than knowing you're a child of the King.

*Yes Lord! Thank You for accepting me as I am, a sinner saved by grace. Praise from man means nothing because I know I have received the gift of eternal life through Your shed blood. Be pleased O Lord to dwell in my praises. All glory belongs to You! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 3

### **What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?**

Romans 3:1

The obvious question which arises from Paul's words in the previous verses is, if all of this is true, then "what advantage has the Jew." If the Jew has the law and no one is able to fully meet the law thus making their circumcision as uncircumcision (2:25), then "what is the profit of circumcision?" This thinking is similar to several questions asked in Ecclesiastes, such as Ecclesiastes 6:8 -

For what more has the wise man than the fool?  
What does the poor man have,  
Who knows how to walk before the living?

If the wise man ends up in the same box six feet under the ground that the fool and the poor man go to, then what good is all the wise man's wisdom? There must be a reason for being wise beyond our temporary life or it would be better to live foolishly and carelessly. Likewise, there must be some value in being a Jew beyond the law or it would be better to not be a Jew at all.

Paul will give an immediate answer here in verse 3:2 and then he will treat the situation concerning the Jews in detail in chapters 9-11. It's important to note that it confirms the issue raised and answered in the last verses of the previous chapter – "Are those gentiles who are 'circumcised in the heart' now Jews?"

If they were, Paul wouldn't even ask the question in verse 3:1, nor would he then answer it. The Bible reveals these truths concerning the state of God's people -

- ✓ Anyone who is a faithful believer is a spiritual descendant of Abraham.
- ✓ Israel comprises those faithful Jews who are obedient sons of Jacob; they are of his physical descent.
- ✓ The church is anyone who has called on Jesus, whether from Israel or from outside of Israel.
- ✓ The church did not replace Israel, although we are grafted into their spiritual heritage.

Life application: God's wisdom is displayed in how He is working out His plan of redemption. Our unfaithfulness in no way negates God's faithfulness and so we should remember the Jewish people in our daily prayers. God selected them for His reasons and His greatness is being demonstrated through them. Therefore, our prayers for them will reflect an understanding of this and a desire for Him to receive the glory He is due.

*Lord, help me to clearly understand these often-difficult issues and then to act in a way which will bring You honor in them - through prayer, through acknowledgment of Your sovereignty, and through seeking Your glory. Amen.*

**Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.**

Romans 3:2

In response to the question of 3:1 (What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?) Paul answers with an exclamatory sentence... "Much in every way!" In every way, in all respects, and from all sides, the benefits are evident. The first being "Chiefly..." that "...to them were committed the oracles of God." Paul's word translated "chiefly" can be thought of as "in principle advantage."

Every other aspect of being a Jew or bearing the sign of circumcision is to be found within this concept - that they are the stewards of God's word. If for no other reason than this, and outside of ushering in the Messiah Himself, it is the most important and greatest honor that could be bestowed upon a group of people. These oracles, meaning the entire canon of the Old Testament which were recorded prior to Paul's time, contain God's special revelation of Himself. They show His acts in creation; they show why the world is in the state it is in; they show His plan of righting every wrong and restoring rightness to a fallen world.

In the process of accomplishing these things, these oracles show that He chose a select group of people in which to display His very heart; His intolerance at sin; His grace, mercy, and forgiveness; His longsuffering; etc. They also show His wisdom in the selection because no other group of people has been so minutely diligent in the tender care and protection of these oracles. Even if some generations lost them (2 Kings 22:8), a previous generation had secured them in a place where they could be found. And this is not only the case within the Bible, but outside of it as well.

The Dead Sea scrolls, dating to approximately 250 BC, were exactly copied and stored in an environment where they would last an extremely long period. When they were discovered, they showed that the word had been maintained in an exceedingly careful manner throughout the ages. Any error or intentional manipulation since the time of



Christ could now be compared and corrected if necessary, or if none, there would be a validation of the long-copied and carefully protected oracles.

As you can see, even the environment in which the Jew lived, the land granted to them by God, is a testimony to being a Jew. Why? Because the land has the right properties, such as humidity, temperature, isolation, etc, to protect the ancient scrolls. It also became mostly unsuitable for habitation during the exile of the people, thus preserving the archaeological record which can now substantiate the narratives found within the oracles. Being a Jew and a member of the group who has carefully kept circumcision as a right for many millennia is one of the most astonishing aspects of the wisdom of God and the validation of His word. The two are tied together and inseparable.

This leaves an important question to be answered, what about the New Testament? Although this couldn't be answered completely in 10 doctoral dissertations, what should be noted is that what occurs in New Testament times was anticipated in the Old Testament. Further, there are many Old Testament promises (as well as New) which are yet to be fulfilled for the Jewish people as they dwell in the Land of Israel. This, if no other concept, tells us that Israel was set aside, not cast away. God's plans and purposes for His covenant people will come to pass exactly as prophesied. Stand back and watch God's amazing plans unfold, quite possibly in your own lifetime and before your very eyes.

Life application: The immense wisdom of God is displayed in His word, in His people, and in His land for the protection and care of His plan for the people of the world. It is true that the Jew rejected Christ, but this was known by God before it occurred and therefore He set aside these people during the dispensation of grace; the Church Age. But this era is ending and the time of the fulfillment of God's plan in and through the people of Israel is coming. Pray for the people of Israel, support the people of Israel, and stand with the people of Israel. God's hand is upon them and ours should be as well.

*Lord, help me to be a light to the Jews who have yet to call on Jesus. Send me opportunities to speak to them, care for them, and show them the truth of what has occurred in their history and ours and how it was all a part of a greater plan to bring "many sons to glory." Thank You for Your faithfulness to Your unfaithful people. Amen.*

**For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?** Romans 3:3

This verse, following immediately after verse 2 should be looked at in conjunction with verse 2 in order to find proper context.

Paul, in verse 1, asked what the value was of being a Jew and having the sign of circumcision. After this, he stated what that value is. That "to them were committed the oracles of God."

As the stewards of God's oracles, they have a special part in God's dealings with the world and the implication is (and which is explicitly stated throughout the Bible) that God will deal with them in a way which will always preserve them as a people. If this is so, then what if "some" of them did not believe? Paul is being gracious here because the vast majority of the nation rejected Christ just as they rejected their Lord throughout their history, thus resulting in judgment and exile. What about this? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God null and void?

On the surface, this question seems clear and accuses God of being unfaithful. It is an argument which Paul had probably heard time and again. Those looking to find fault in God will propose such a thought in order to excuse their own unbelief. However, the question contains flawed human reasoning which Paul will clearly refute as he lays out his argument.

Throughout chapter 2, Paul showed that a believing gentile is in better standing with God than an unbelieving Jew. He also demonstrated that the sign of circumcision is pointless unless it is accompanied by living out what the sign is intended to convey - a relationship with God. Those who are uncircumcised and live in faith will have their uncircumcision counted as circumcision while those who are circumcised and don't live in faith will be as if they are uncircumcised. But if their circumcision, which is the sign of the covenant, doesn't save them then doesn't this nullify God's faithfulness? This is the argument and is what Paul will cover in the verses ahead.

Life application: One of the things lacking in the daily lives of people is clear thinking. It is something that requires training and must be developed through practice and study. Without clear thinking, arguments which are otherwise convoluted may seem right. It is hard to defend against such an argument unless the flaw can be pinpointed and shown as fallacious. Take time to study critical thinking, either through self-study on the internet or by enrolling in a college course which deals with the subject. You will be surprised how pertinent your studies will be to your daily life.

*Heavenly Father, You created me to be a rational being. You have given me a brain which is meant for more than rote exercises and daily rituals, but which is for seeking wisdom in the many disciplines which I come in contact with from day to day. Help me to clearly and critically think through the important issues I face. Amen.*

**Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written:  
“That You may be justified in Your words,  
And may overcome when You are judged.”** Romans 3:4

This verse is in response to 3:3 - "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" The answer rings forth clearly - "Certainly not!" Others translate this as "God forbid," "Of course not," "Not at all," "May it never be," "Absolutely not," "That would be unthinkable," "By no means," "No indeed," etc. It is an expression that translators seem to enjoy trying to find a new and exciting yet clear and acceptable translation just to be unique. The term in Greek is *me genoito*. Albert Barnes says it is telling us to "let not this by any means be supposed."

Instead of us supposing that God's faithfulness is tied to man's actions, we are to hold fast to the conviction that He is a perfect and unchanging Being and therefore that which is found in Him is absolute truth. As this is so, all that is true stems from Him and there is nothing untrue which can be attributed to Him. Because of this, even if every Israelite was unfaithful, it would have absolutely no bearing on whether He was faithful or not. In a judicial proceeding, His innocence would stand while all the others would receive a guilty verdict.

To substantiate this, Paul returns to Scripture - the law itself - and states, "As it is written." The Greek is *gegaptai* and it carries the weight of saying "this was written then and it still stands today." God's word is fixed, firm, and unchanging. What it states stands forever. What Paul cites is from the 51st Psalm -

For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done this evil in Your sight—  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge. Psalm 51:3, 4

This amazingly emotional Psalm was written by David after he was confronted by God's prophet Nathan. David had committed adultery with a married woman and subsequently murdered her husband. He acknowledged that his faithlessness in no way compromised God's righteousness. And this is true even though he was not only an Israelite, but God's anointed King of Israel. The sin that David committed was against God and only God. Because of this, God is found both just and blameless in the presence of David's unrighteousness. If this is so with David, Israel's King, then it must be so with all people.

Returning to Albert Barnes, He sums up what we should learn from this - "How happy would it be, if all people would regard this as a fixed principle, a matter not to be questioned in their hearts, or debated about, that God is true to his word! How much doubt and anxiety would it save professing Christians; and how much error would it save among sinners! Amidst all the agitations of the world, all conflicts, debates, and trials, it would be a fixed position where every man might find rest, and which would do more than all other things to allay the tempests and smooth the agitated waves of human life."

Life application: God is absolute truth and therefore, when He judges it is done in a morally perfect way. When tragedy comes our way, we have absolutely no right to place the blame on God. Let us be careful to never question His goodness, truth, or wisdom in how He conducts the affairs of the world, but let us rest in the fact that He will bring all things again to a state of goodness and perfection for those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, it is in my nature to question why bad things occur and the wisdom of the judgments I see around me - earthquakes, famines, plagues, and the like. But in the end, these are not the result of vindictiveness. Rather, they occur because You are just and right in Your judgments. Help me always to remember this and to trust that You have it all under control. Amen.*

**But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)** Romans 3:5

This verse is going to take several more verses to fully comprehend. Paul says, "But if our unrighteousness..." This is the sin of man in general, and more to the point the Jew who he has been speaking about in detail. The Jew has been given the law and yet they have been unrighteous before the law in many ways. They have neglected it; they have used it as a point of pride when comparing themselves to other "sinners;" they have willfully disobeyed it; and they have missed its spiritual meaning and application because they rejected Jesus who is the fulfillment of it.

This "unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God" though. The law is His standard, and it shows His very nature. In other words, this isn't just speaking of His righteousness toward man, but His innate righteousness. The first is the result of the latter, not the other way around. The sins we commit are a violation of His moral purity and they therefore demonstrate His perfect righteousness - He is the ultimate standard by which things are judged and His glory is seen more clearly when the sinner is compared to Him.

Imagine the purest diamond in the world. If there was nothing to compare the diamond to, then one wouldn't know how exquisite it truly was. However, when other stones of varying materials, quality, luster, etc. are placed next to it, the true majesty of this "stone of stones" is seen for what it is. The law which reflects God's righteousness is like the diamond and our transgression of the law is like the flawed stones.

So, Paul now asks, because the greatness and majesty of God are seen more clearly because of our imperfections, then isn't "God unjust who inflicts wrath?" How can God judge us when He is shown more glorious through our sin? Doesn't our sin have a good purpose, and doesn't our sin negate His right to judge us?

This is the question of the impenitent sinner. This is the question of the unreasoning animal. This is the question of the one who fails to contemplate the splendor of the Creator. Such a question reveals a lack of dignity for self and a lack of respect for God. As Paul says, "I speak as a man." His words are intended to reflect fallen Adam; the unspiritual, carnal man.

Life application: How do you perceive sin? If you believe that your sin, which demonstrates the righteousness of God, is excusable because God is shown holy through it then you have failed to take in the whole picture. Take a look today at the things you don't like in others, things that upset you. Then consider that you are comparing these things against... you. Now imagine your sin placed next to the Creator who is infinitely purer than you. How should He respond?

*Lord, though You are shown holy through my sin, may I never assume that my sin is somehow excusable because of it. Instead, let me see it for what it is, a violation of an ultimate standard and which therefore necessitates an ultimate punishment. I realize how great Your mercy is toward me when I think it through! Thank You for Jesus who took what I deserve. Amen.*

**Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?** Romans 3:6

This verse is in response to the question Paul raised, "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath?"

A resounding reply results – "Certainly not!" By no means could God be unjust. Paul doesn't even address "why" though. He takes it as an axiom that God will, in fact, judge the world. Sin doesn't determine God's righteousness. Rather how He deals with it does.

Sin is a violation of His holiness. Therefore, dealing with the sin is something that must occur.

As the Creator, everything about God simply is. Because He created time, He is outside of time and thus there is no change in Him. As this is so, God is perfectly righteous - His righteousness is. Any violation of it must be judged – or He is not perfectly righteous. But He is and therefore His righteousness cannot be compromised.

Similarly, God is perfectly just. Because He is, the penalty for a violation of His righteousness must be perfect. The law demands that every violation be punished and “the wages of sin is death.” There is no way around this. We have earned death and we have earned condemnation. If we do not receive this, then God is not perfectly just, but He is.

God is also perfectly holy. Because we are made unclean from our transgressions against His perfectly holy nature, we must be eternally separated from Him – or He is not perfectly Holy, but He is. If a person only committed one moral transgression in his entire life, it is sufficient to eternally separate him from God. God cannot accept 1% unrighteousness. He does not weigh sins on a balance. Nothing but absolute righteousness and pure holiness can be accepted by God.

Adding to the problem is that God is absolutely truthful. He has spoken from His very nature what is and what is not acceptable for man. If God overlooks the words He spoke in absolute truth, then He is not truthful – an impossibility. However, God has promised to redeem His people. Because He has spoken, then it must be so, or He is not truthful – this is impossible.

On the other side of this is God’s mercy; He is absolutely merciful. However, if in His mercy, He overlooks our transgressions, then He violates His righteousness – it would be ridiculous to even consider. Further, God is perfectly gracious and longs to participate in fellowship with His people, bestowing infinite grace upon them. However, because He is perfectly Holy, this cannot occur with sinful man or He is not perfectly Holy; this is impossible.

And finally, God is also love. God loves each person perfectly, but He cannot fellowship with His beloved creatures because of their sins. If He were to do so, He would violate His just, righteous, and holy character. This is also impossible.

This leaves a tension between these characteristics of God and man who has sinned. More terrifying is that Adam sinned, and his fallen nature is transferred to his

descendants. We cannot go back in time before the sins we've committed, nor can we go back before Adam's sin. Time is moving forward, and it is the medium in which we live and interact with God. The separation is complete; God's holiness has been violated; and there is nothing we can do - judgment must come. This is the certainty of the matter. Therefore, though our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, it in no way negates the judgment which must result.

Life Application: All sin must be judged. However, God in His wisdom and mercy has allowed the sin of man to be judged in a perfect Substitute. By judging sin in this way the tension between God's eternal attributes ends. God's perfect righteousness required a sacrifice for payment of our sins. His perfect holiness demanded that no iniquity could be found in that Substitute. His perfect justice says that no unrighteousness can come into His presence, but a perfect payment restores felicity when offered by Him and accepted by man. His perfect grace is demonstrated in the Gift which we don't deserve. His perfect mercy is revealed in not condemning us as we deserve; His wrath was instead placed on His own precious Son. His perfect truthfulness is upheld in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, by which every promise in every covenant to man is fulfilled in Him. And His perfect love is demonstrated in the giving of His own Son on our behalf. Take time today to think through the enormity of what transpired at the cross of Calvary.

*Lord God, what You have done in Jesus is simply beyond my comprehension. I fail to grasp the magnitude of the perfection of Christ. I know that for all eternity I will look to the cross of my Lord and stand in wonder at the immensity of what occurred there. Praises belong to You, O God. Amen.*

**For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? Romans 3:7**

A third line of reasoning based on man's unclear thinking is given. "For" looks back to the previous two examples. Paul is making his case by citing arguments people either had or could give to justify both their sin and why God should overlook it.

"If the truth of God has increased through my lie..." God, throughout His word as well as through the moral compass he has placed within man, lets us know that sin will be punished. In punishing sin, God is shown to be the holy Being that He is. His punishment of our sin because of His holiness demonstrates that He is truthful in His judgments; He says He will punish and then He follows through with it. This validates the truth of God to us and thus brings Him glory.

As this is true and God is proven truthful and glorified through my lying, then how can He punish me? I have only increased His glory... see the great thing I have done! This is the faulty reasoning of the one attempting to justify his perverse actions.

There are several points which have to be considered in this. The first is that the lying is actually intended to do the opposite of what is claimed here. Lying, in and of itself, is intended to protect and elevate self, not God. When one lies, it is motivated by and promotes self-serving interests, not another's glory.

Secondly, if "the truth of God is increased through my lie to His glory" because He has promised to judge sin, then if He doesn't judge my sin, the result would be that the truth of God isn't increased through my lie at all! The question, "Why am I also still judged as a sinner" is invalidated by the faulty premise of the question in the first place.

Finally, God doesn't need man to be glorified. He is glorious in and of Himself. The "glory" which is reasoned by the one proposing the argument is the glory of God in the eyes of His creation, not God's innate glory. Likewise, the truth of God isn't "increased" in God - God is truth. Rather the increase is found in our realization of it. Again, God's character isn't dependent on man and He isn't dependent on what we think about Him. Our perceptions of Him don't change His truth or His glory.

The answer to, "Why am I still judged as a sinner?" is found in the fact that I am a sinner, and I am deserving of punishment based on my sin. To attempt to justify sin by using faulty reasoning can only add to my judgment, not somehow fool God into throwing up His hands and overlooking my misdeeds.

Life application: There is no excuse for sin and all sin will be dealt with through punishment. As you go about your day, don't try to rationalize away your wrongdoings. Once you have accepted that sin necessitates a penalty, then take the time to give God praise for what He has done for you in Jesus. The cross of Calvary was a high price for the sins we so easily dismiss.

*Heavenly Father, when I realize that You have no need for me in order for you to be glorified, then it makes it all the more incredible that You were willing to send Jesus to save me. I stand in utter amazement at the price that was paid for my willful disobedience committed in Your presence. Thank You, O God, for Jesus. Amen.*

**And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just. Romans 3:8**



"And why not say" is Paul's conclusion to the previous concepts which he has laid before his readers. Is God's faithfulness nullified by the unfaithfulness of man? Does man's unrighteousness demonstrate the righteousness of God? Is the truth of God increased through my lie to His glory? Each question, and its answer, has led Paul to say that if the answers are "yes" then we might as well say "let us do evil that good may come."

This line of argumentation is known as *reductio ad absurdum* or "reduction to absurdity." If God is somehow positively affected by whatever evil man does, then let us take the most evil course of all. The idea is that when we commit temporal evil the result will be the greater good of glorifying God. If so, then no matter what we do the outcome justifies the means.

Unfortunately, this means that stealing would not only be acceptable, but a good thing. Personal property would have no value. Murder would magnify God and therefore it would be the right course of action in any circumstance. Adultery would then be a noble thing. Getting married would simply be a step towards many partners - all to bring about a better purpose. For every sin we commit, the glory of God would shine forth all the more brightly.

The absurdity of such thoughts is self-evident, but such is the confused state of the unclear thinker. They only see the results of the first half of their argument, but they have failed to think the entire scenario through. As evident as it is, this is the state which the world is rapidly heading towards. As one-line arguments fill the cyber-world of Facebook and Twitter, our ability to reason out important issues is diminishing.

As Paul saw in his own time, those around him misunderstood, either unintentionally or intentionally, his comments about the grace of God and reported that Paul had actually affirmed that this was what Christianity held. But he, noting that God's grace is magnified through the repentant sinner, never went to such extremes. For every note of how gracious God is, there is a note of warning that those who call on Jesus need to abstain from willful sin. Grace, to Paul and the other apostles, never meant a license to commit iniquity.

The Christian world of today though is turning away from the truth of the Bible and is actually following the absurd course Paul lays out. Homosexuals preach from the pulpit. Perversion of all sorts is openly condoned by the church and yet to them the grace of God is expected to cover such unrepentant actions. As Paul says, when this attitude is seen "their condemnation is just." God will judge and condemn those who hold to such flawed views. They failed to use the brains He gave them, and their actions will result in an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire. Let us heed the Proverb -

The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him. Proverbs 18:17

Life application: An argument which sounds fine on the surface, such as allowing abortion for rape or incest is found false when it is completely thought through. However, most people hear the initial argument and stop with that, agreeing that the murder of the unborn is somehow just. When you are presented with an argument, make sure to think its consequences through to the end. When you do, you may find that what originally seemed as right as rain is actually as twisted as a tornado.

*Lord God, You have created me to be a rational, moral being. Help me to think issues of importance through clearly and to understand the ramifications of those things which could separate me from You when a wrong path is taken. May my life be a testimony to Your grace, but may I never assume that it gives me license to sin. Amen.*

**What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. Romans 3:9**

"What then?" What is the result of the question posed in 3:1 & 2? "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."

Paul noted that there is both advantage and profit in being a Jew and being circumcised. However, he then laid out the case that if their actions didn't correspond with the sign they bore that God would be proven just in His judgment of them. He also showed that His faithfulness isn't negated by their unfaithfulness and that His receiving glory through their unrighteous actions gave them no excuse in acting in an unrighteous manner.

And so, he asks "Are we better than they?" In the end, are Jews better than the gentiles? The answer, "Not at all." In chapter 1, he proved that the gentiles are bound under sin and then in chapters 2 and 3 he showed that the Jew are also - "For we have previously charged..."

The charges have been made and they have been fully substantiated. "All are under sin." This is a truth not just found in Paul's philosophy, but is found in Scripture itself. As Paul notes in Galatians 3:22 - "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

Yes, Paul wrote Galatians, but he is citing "Scripture" which at that time consisted only of the Old Testament. The proof of Paul's claim comes from the earliest pages of the

Bible and continues right up until its last paragraph. Something more would be needed - Jesus. As chapter 3 unfolds, we will see this clearly.

Life application: God has shown in His word that all people are bound under sin. This doesn't merely mean that we are sinners individually, but that we are under a broad kingdom of sin. We are trapped in it and there is only one exit. Take time to read Jesus' words from John 14:1-6 and then stand fast on the truth that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God. Then, determine in your heart not to waffle on this conviction when confronted by those who challenge it.

*Heavenly Father, I can see that I am no better than any other person. But what is also true is that no other person is any better than me. All it takes is one sin for us to be separated from You. Help me to remember this as I deal with others who seem so much more "sinful" than I am. We are all in the same desperate need of Jesus. Amen.*

**As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;... Romans 3:10**

This verse is the start of a rather long set of quotations selected by Paul directly from the Scriptures in order to justify his statements and prove his case. He starts with, "As it is written..." If the Old Testament (the Scriptures of his day) are truly the word of God (and he takes this as an axiom), then what they say is absolute truth and is binding as guidance and instruction.

The verses he selects will continue through verse 18 and come from Ecclesiastes, the Psalms, and Isaiah. They will speak of God in verses 10-12 first as a judge, then in verses 13-15 as an anatomist, and finally in 16-18 as an anthropologist.

This verse is a close quote of Ecclesiastes 7:20 -

For there is not a just man on earth who does good  
And does not sin.

From the first man, Adam, there has been none who have not sinned. Adam was created as a perfect man, but he lacked the knowledge of good and evil. This was not a flaw, merely a lack. Something lacking something else is not necessarily flawed and we cannot ascribe his innocence as such. In his innocent state, he was given one command. But, exercising the free will he was given, he chose to disobey this command. This became "fault" or as we would term it "sin."

From this one man's sin, sin entered not only the world at large, but into the stream of humanity as well. Sin transfers through man to the next generation and therefore we are born in sin. David understood this when he penned these words -

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me. Psalm 51:5

The NIV clearly translates this, "Surely I was sinful at birth." All people are born into sin and therefore, "There is none righteous, no, not one."

But this isn't just a philosophical concept of Solomon which is repeated by Paul. Rather, it is a truth born out in the historical record of the Bible as well. In Genesis 4 this truth is highlighted several times. In verses 3 through 5 offerings are brought to the Lord and yet there is no record of Cain or Abel having committed any sin. The Bible therefore implies that because no demonstrable sin was committed, they had inherited their father's fallen state. This concept continues to be born out in Cain's murder of Abel and on through the rest of the Old Testament.

And yet, from the same early pages of the Bible, all the way through to Malachi, there are pictures and promises of One who would come to right the wrong of Adam and thus restore the fellowship that was lost so long ago. Yes, there is none righteous who is born of man. But Jesus wasn't born of man; He was born of the Holy Spirit and through a woman. The sin of Adam didn't transfer to Him.

Life application: Are you doing works in order to please God and get you to heaven? Guess what, it won't work. You have already inherited a problem which works can't fix. You have inherited a nature which infinitely separates you from God. But there is a remedy. By faith, put your trust in Jesus and what He did, and He can be your bridge back to a right relationship with His Father. Only then can your works be found pleasing to God.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the plan of redemption which includes me... a sinner in need of a Savior. Thank You for Jesus who would give up His perfect life in order to restore me to You. I stand in awe of the majesty of what You have accomplished on my behalf. May my lips ever sing Your praises, O God. Amen.*

**There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.** Romans 3:11

Real care needs to be taken when evaluating quotes in the New Testament which come from the Old. Anybody can quote anything to come to whatever conclusion they wish by

tearing things out of context. This is the case with this verse more often than not. Paul is citing Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 which are almost a mirror of each other in their first verse.

If taken at face value, and without considering both the context and the rest of Scripture, then one might come to the conclusion that "Man in his natural state cannot seek God" or something similar to this. This is the standard conclusion of Calvinist doctrine as well as some others, especially among those who deny the free will of man in accepting or rejecting Jesus. However, this is wrong.

Taking the verse in proper context as Paul would have expected his readers to do, we see the basis for the original statement which was made by David in the psalms -

The fool has said in his heart,  
"There is no God."  
They are corrupt,  
They have done abominable works,  
There is none who does good. Psalm 14:1

David had in mind, and was speaking of, the atheist - "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" To make an all-inclusive claim about this verse as Calvinism does is to completely tear it out of its original context. We could question, "Are Muslims seeking after God?" "Are Mormons seeking after God?" "Are Buddhists seeking after God?" The answer in each case is "Yes. They are just doing it wrong." Further, if Calvinism were true and this were an all-inclusive statement, then David couldn't have even written the psalm because "none" would include him. Such a conclusion is entirely unsupportable by the rest of Scripture.

Enoch who is recorded in Genesis 5 "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." (v. 24). Ruth, a young girl from the pagan nation of Moab refused to be separated from her mother-in-law and stated,

"...wherever you go, I will go;  
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;  
Your people shall be my people,  
And your God, my God." Ruth 1:16

Speaking of a time, yet future, Hosea prophesied that the Israelites who had long rejected God will search Him out in the latter days -

"Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days."  
Hosea 3:5

Those who seek after God, from both within the covenant people of Israel and those from without, are noted time and time again in Scripture. Therefore, that this verse is not "all inclusive" is as evident as water is wet.

Having determined this we can acknowledge that there is "none who understands" God in the fullest sense. If they did, they would be God because only God who is infinite can fully know Himself. It is also true that without His special revelation to us "there is none who seeks after God" perfectly. To perfectly seek after God would imply a perfect knowledge of how to do so. But, in His wisdom, God sent us Jesus to reveal the Father in a way which we can understand. When we look to Jesus, we see the Father (John 14:7).

By showing us who the Father is, we now have the ability to properly pursue God and to accurately understand Him as He continually, ceaselessly is revealed by the Son. It will be an eternal adventure for us if we are willing to start the trip. Jesus offers any to come unto Him and when they do the journey begins. It is not forced upon us, nor are we first "regenerated" in order to accept the offer as those who deny free will must claim. Rather, we are given the free-will to choose and the mental faculties to make the choice.

Life Application: The fact that God already knows what we will choose in no way negates our responsibility in the matter. Don't be the fool David wrote about and whom Paul analyzes in this verse. Rather, think it through and understand that God has given us all we need in order to make the right decision. Now it is up to each of us to do so. Choose life. Choose Jesus.

*Lord, Your word is sure and without contradiction. If those throughout the history recorded in it have sought You out, then so can I. And so I commit my life to Jesus and look forward to eternally learning more about You. What a great and awesome God You are! Amen.*

**They have all turned aside;**

**They have together become unprofitable;**

**There is none who does good, no, not one."** Romans 3:12

This verse, taken from Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1, is to be taken in a general sense. The gentile has turned away from the natural revelation given by God which is written in our

hearts and consciences. The Jew has turned away from the special revelation he has been given by God and toward apostasy. Paul has shown this in the chapters and verses leading up to this conclusion. Because the Jew has the natural revelation and also the special revelation and yet they still turn from God, it shows the truly depraved nature of man.

And so, both Jew and gentile have "together become unprofitable." The Greek of this word is *echreothesan*. It has been variously translated as worthless, useless, completely useless, unprofitable, rejected, rotten to the core, corrupt, etc. The word from which it stems in the Hebrew has the idea of something offensive or putrid. The corresponding word in Arabic is used to describe sour milk. In man, it is the state of moral impurity which is vile and degraded.

Because of these things, the result is that "there is none who does good, no, not one." As noted in the previous verse, care needs to be exercised here. The portion of the psalm being quoted is specifically speaking of the atheist - "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" It would be contradictory to Scripture, even Paul's writings, and yes even the book of Romans and the very thoughts which he is presenting, to apply this to all people in an absolute sense. For example, in Romans 2:14, 15 Paul shows that there are gentiles who "by nature do the things in the law." He then explains this and other notable traits throughout the rest of chapter 2. This must, by definition, be considered as "good."

So, Paul is clearly not saying, as Calvinism claims, that man is entirely incapable of doing good or seeking after God. Rather, this is the general, not absolute, tendency of man. Having said this, when Paul writes, "there is none who does good, no, not one" it isn't at all contradictory. The sin in man - both inherited from Adam and committed personally, places a barrier between God and man. It is impossible for man to please God unless the sin is dealt with first. And so truly, "there is none who does good, no, not one."

Making the leap from not being good to not being capable of doing good is a category mistake. There may be nothing good in us, but this does not mean we cannot see the good in God (or in His revelation of Himself - either natural or special) and pursue it. We see the good in Him and either choose or reject that. Is it the confused soul who says that man has free will to commit evil, but denies the free will to pursue what is good, even if erringly?

Life application: Ideas, concepts, biblical truths, evaluations of man's relationship with God, etc. all have individual categories which must be kept separate and distinct. When we take one concept from the Bible and inappropriately apply it to, or over, another our

thinking on what is biblically correct becomes skewed. Keep the boxes straight and fix your eyes on Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, You have shown us what is good, both internally in our hearts and in a specific way in the Bible. And then You have allowed us the choice of pursuing it or going our own way. Help us to choose what will be pleasing in Your sight and by following Jesus who guides the path. In His name we pray. Amen.*

**“Their throat is an open tomb;  
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;** Romans 3:13

In this verse and the next two verses come quotes from the One who created the human body. As the designer of man, God understands the intended use of the parts of the body, and He also understands both what they can represent metaphorically and also how they can be misused.

In these three verses, the throat, the tongue, the lips, and the mouth are noted in order and then the feet are mentioned. The order starts with the internal most part and works outward – throat, tongue, and lips. It then is summed up in the visible notation of the three combined – the mouth. It is as if we are visibly watching a person vomiting out wickedness.

After this will be noted the feet. Once the heart’s wickedness is expelled from the mouth, the feet are used to carry it everywhere they go. The imagery is shocking when considered as intended. Verse 13 is a quote from the 5<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and it is taken more specifically from the Greek translation of that Psalm known as the Septuagint. Noted below are the Hebrew (NKJV) and Greek (LXX) translations:

For there is no faithfulness in their mouth;  
Their inward part is destruction;  
Their throat is an open tomb;  
They flatter with their tongue. (NKJV)

For there is no truth in their mouth;  
their heart is vain;  
their throat is an open sepulchre;  
with their tongues they have used deceit. (LXX)

As with any quote from the Old Testament, the context needs to be considered. The quote is specifically speaking about "boasters" and "workers of iniquity" (v5) and "those



who speak falsehood" and "the bloodthirsty and deceitful man" (v6). Therefore, this verse, as with the previous verses, is not intended as an all-encompassing indictment, but is directed to those who practice such ways.

The throat of these people is compared to an open grave. The grave is the repository for the dead. If the grave is left open, the stench of the decaying body is left uncovered, and it affects everything around it. The words which proceed from such a person are intended to reduce anyone around to a nauseas state, even to despair.

At the same time as being a place from which stench and putridity arises, the grave is open to receive more corpses - even until it is filled. The mouth which speaks such abominations not only offends, it destroys and consumes. Because it does it will continue to put out a vile odor as those it receives begin to rot. This is the state of mind we are intended to see. Those who speak falsehood and who are bloodthirsty reek with wickedness, destroy others, and cause them to reek with their decay. It is a repetitious and increasing cycle which is never satisfied.

All of this proceeds from the heart, through the open throat, and then off the tongue. The symbolism of these body parts is so vivid and correct because God who designed them knows how easily they can be misused.

Life application: Our words have consequences. When they are used properly, they are edifying of others, honoring to ourselves, and glorifying of God. When they are used in a wrong manner, they cause harm to those who receive them, and they will be used as a tool of judgment against us (Matthew 12:36). Let us determine in our hearts to use our words carefully and in a manner which is good and right, not in evil and wickedness.

*Jesus, may You be with me and remind me that the words I speak have power to help or to harm, to glorify or demean, to build up or to tear down. May the words of my lips only be used in a positive and honoring way. I know that what they ultimately reflect is the state of my heart, so change my heart to be pure, noble, and right. This I pray to Your glory. Amen.*

**“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”** Romans 3:14

Paul's next quote is from Psalm 10:7 -

His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression;  
Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

Under divine inspiration, Paul has amended David's words while maintaining the overall intent of what he was saying. Anyone who opens his mouth in deceit and oppression is himself a person of bitterness. The cursing of man can be accomplished in several ways and in different directions. Man can curse God who created Him. This can be done directly or indirectly. An attack against the unseen God or upon Jesus who reveals God would be a direct curse. A person who speaks against God's word indirectly attacks God because the word of God issues from Him.

An act of cursing God directly is found in Leviticus 24:10-23. The penalty for the one who did this was to be stoned to death.

Cursing can be against others as well. An example of this is found in 2 Samuel 16 when a man cursed King David as he fled from his son who had revolted against him -

Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. 2 Samuel 16:5, 6

The bitterness which Paul speaks of is rooted in the heart of man and pours out in his words. Jesus, while speaking to Israel's leaders showed us this in Matthew 12. There He revealed that we cannot disassociate what we say from who we are -

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. Matthew 12:33-35

Life application: Our words are a reflection of the state of our heart. How we speak about God, His word, and the things He has created reflect our relationship with Him. How we speak to and about others shows others our concern for those He has created and for whom He sent His Son to die. Although we have every right to speak out against evil and the perverse ways of the world, we need to ensure that our words rightly reflect the truth without promoting evil. Others are watching and evaluating us as Christians. And as Christians we represent Christ.

*Lord God, if my words are unpleasing in Your sight, then come in and change my heart. Help me to be a person whose words are truthful, and which edify others, call out sin and*

*evil without becoming a part of the problem, and which ultimately bring You the glory You deserve. Amen.*

**“Their feet are swift to shed blood;... Romans 3:15**

This verse is taken first from Solomon in the book of Proverbs -

For their feet run to evil,  
And they make haste to shed blood. Proverbs 1:16

Isaiah builds upon it in his writings as well -

Their feet run to evil,  
And they make haste to shed innocent blood;  
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;  
Wasting and destruction are in their paths. Isaiah 59:7

The heart has shown its state - the words have come up from the throat, they have been shaped by the tongue and passed through the lips (v 13), from there they have issued from the mouth (v 14). Now the words are carried into action. The first recorded sin in the Bible outside of Eden was the murder of Abel by Cain. Adam's sin in Eden separated man from his Creator. Cain's sin in the fallen world separated man from man. Abel sacrificed animal life to his God for restoration; Cain sacrificed human life out of jealousy, leading to condemnation.

Within about 1600 years of Cain's crime, the world had become so wicked that God destroyed it by flood. The same pattern occurs time and again throughout the post-flood world. At the time of King Manasseh, it says that he, "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord." 2 Kings 21:16

The world is once again at a state of such violence and degradation, that human life has little value. The process of abortion is a mill of death. Euthanasia has become an acceptable method of human disposal, murder rates in cities such as Chicago are higher than war deaths in Afghanistan. TV shows and newscasts are so filled with crime scenes that one cannot determine reality from Hollywood. All of this stems from the intent of the heart. Jeremiah rightly called out the words of the Lord as he looked at the world around him -

The heart is deceitful above all things,  
And desperately wicked;  
Who can know it?  
I, the Lord, search the heart,  
I test the mind,  
Even to give every man according to his ways,  
According to the fruit of his doings. Jeremiah 17:9, 10

Life application: Yes, the Lord does search the heart and He is able to heal its desperately wicked state, but it takes moving from the fallen world to the risen Christ. Without this action, there can be no true peace. Take time to learn the following five verses which show how to make this move. Think about them and how you can rightly explain them to others. Then go and share the message –

- ✓ There is none righteous, no, not one. Romans 3:10
- ✓ ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23
- ✓ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23
- ✓ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8
- ✓ For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Romans 10:13

*Glorious God, despite our wicked hearts, You sent us Your Son to reconcile us to You. Help each of us to commit to telling others about Jesus and His beautiful deeds which can restore the bridge between us. Help us to get our priorities right and to never waste an opportunity to share this good news of peace and restoration. Amen.*

**Destruction and misery are in their ways;** Romans 3:16

This verse is a quote from the second half of Isaiah 59:7 -

Their feet run to evil,  
And they make haste to shed innocent blood;  
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity;  
Wasting and destruction are in their paths.

The ways of those who reject God lead to "destruction and misery." The Greek word translated as "destruction" is *suntrimma* and this is its only use in the New Testament. It comes from the idea of dashing something to pieces. "Misery" comes from the Greek *talaiporia*, a word found only one other time in the Bible - James 5:1. It indicates a state of wretchedness.

It is evident that these words are not applicable to all people at all times. Rather they apply to a state of corruption which exists in the hearts of people and which is brought out when a denial of God exists. This is important to remember because, as was noted in a previous quote, these words cannot be found to imply that unregenerate man is unable to seek after God as Calvinism claims. These are generalities about humanity which can lead to specific extremes in humanity - such as Khan, Hitler, Stalin, etc.

The opposite is true as well. There are those who pursue peace who haven't been called by Jesus. Perhaps they refuse to bear arms against others or spend their lives ministering to others, even though they aren't saved believers. This is important to note in order to gain a proper understanding of how one comes to saving faith. It is often true that the worst offenders will see their need for Jesus before the one who is always helping others and doing good stuff.

The truly depraved person, when confronted with the truth of the gospel, may fully understand their condemned state and seek for pardon. The kind, gentle, and humble person when given the gospel may shun it because they feel they are already good enough and that the balances tip in their favor or maybe they are at the top of the bell curve.

Neither of these understandings would lead to the choice of accepting or rejecting the gospel without free-will. Instead, they would continue down their chosen path without a second thought. If man doesn't possess free will, the evil of the person described in this verse would have to be traced back to the fall of man who didn't possess free will and thus the blame would be elevated back to the Creator; such is impossible as God is perfect and holy in all ways.

Therefore, the wicked state of those described by Paul is a personal choice acting upon the already corrupt state of man. It is a choice which is reflected in Matthew 7:13 - "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it." Jesus asks us to make the right choice because the wrong one will end in the destruction and misery noted in this same verse.

Life Application: If you're struggling with the doctrine of free-will in man because you were originally instructed that you don't possess it, then think the issue through to its logical conclusion at the fall of man - ascribing the fall to God. The question is, "Do you have free will?" The reply - "Think it through and then you decide."

*Lord, You have been so gracious to Your fallen creatures. You have given us the choice to choose You, but time and time again we choose the opposite. And yet You continuously call us back to You, giving us the chance to turn and call on You in truth. Help us to think rightly and to make the choice of life and peace... the choice of Jesus. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**And the way of peace they have not known.** Romans 3:17

Again, Paul turns to the words of Isaiah to substantiate man's general character and disposition -

The way of peace they have not known,  
And there is no justice in their ways;  
They have made themselves crooked paths;  
Whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Isaiah 59:8

There are several ways in which the "way of peace" can be demonstrated. Here are four:

In oneself. A life of peace in an individual must start with contentment in one's station. If a person is content, then a hovel and a bowl of rice soup is sufficient for peace. If a person's eyes are full of greed and want, a mansion with a table of feasting will never satisfy. One must appreciate the gifts God has given in order to have peace in oneself. If such appreciation doesn't exist it can only lead to internal toil and boil over in our actions toward others.

Toward others. Peace and contentment in oneself naturally keep one from harming others, but when it is lacking, the greed and lust of the heart spills over in our actions - be it individually or as a group or nation. Harming others then becomes a satisfactory means of obtaining what we want. We rationalize reasons why theft is acceptable and move toward the subjugation and oppression of those who have earned their way. As noted, this stems from a lack of contentment in our own station. This frustration is taken out on others, but it inevitably directs the blame toward God.

Toward God. Peace with God comes from an appreciation of His goodness and an understanding of His sovereignty. When one feels jipped by their circumstances, they

will find fault in God. The sentiment "It's not my fault I was born here..." would necessarily place the blame on God who made the choice. But Acts says, "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us..." (vs. 26, 27)

God, who is infinitely wiser than man, has selected our time, place, and position to be the very best possible moment in which we will seek Him out. In other words, a person born in Honduras in AD1630 would no more search out God than he would if born in New York city in 2013. God knows this and determines that which is the very best for His creatures, and yet we reject Him. Proof that this is true is that there is a Bible on practically every shelf and accessible from every computer on earth and yet, even with this opportunity, it is ignored. In America, there are churches on every corner and yet they are closing due to a lack of interest. "The way of peace they have not known..." This lack of contentment in self which then overflows towards others and is ultimately blamed on God results in unholy instruction within family and society.

In Instruction. When the way of peace is unknown, the venues of life instruction follow a course of wickedness. The raising of children disregards education in the Bible, in respect, in honor, and in right living. School systems turn towards a liberal agenda and "tolerance" for that which is profane. This carries from kindergarten to college. Young minds are perverted from what is normal and the developed minds are perverted from what is reasonable. Society itself rejects the truth and turns to a news media which is based on feelings rather than objective journalism. Churches no longer preach doctrinal truths, but instead provide soft messages without any real substance. As these institutions continue to turn away from soundness, the only thing which cannot be tolerated is "intolerance." But even this is self-contradictory and so vile emotions are spewed out at those who pursue peace and reason.

In the end, the pattern repeats itself and the world ends in a state which is no longer worthy of anything but destruction. At the time of the flood, a mere 1600 years after the creation of the world, Genesis 6:5 says that "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Of course, this resulted in a global flood which took the lives of all but eight people.

God's people, Israel, have been destroyed and exiled twice because they followed this same pattern, and the church is now following it as well. At the rapture of the church,

there will only be strife against God leading to the Tribulation period. All because "they have not known the way of peace."

Life application: It is unreasonable to love others into hell through tolerance. That which is against God - be it in the general society or in the church - must be identified and called out. If not, there is eventually a breakdown in right moral thinking. This is especially true with our religious leaders. If they depart from what is right or deflect attention away from Jesus, their words or actions must be shown for what they are. Judgment begins at the house of the Lord and so the house of the Lord must proclaim the way of peace - Jesus.

*Lord, please be with those who teach Your word. Give them strength and wisdom to properly proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ and to never water down the severity of the consequences of rejecting Him. Give them soundness of doctrine and clearness in their thinking. This, to Your honor and glory. Amen.*

**There is no fear of God before their eyes.** Romans 3:18

This is the final quote in this train of thought and is taken from Psalm 36:1 -

An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked:  
There is no fear of God before his eyes.

"Fear of God" is speaking of awe and reverence. When we have these, it will bring about an understanding of our own fallen nature in relation to God. Time and again in Scripture, when one is brought close to God the person finds himself overwhelmed at the majesty of His presence. Such is the case in Isaiah 6. When Isaiah had a vision of the Lord, he cried out -

"Woe is me, for I am undone!  
Because I am a man of unclean lips,  
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;  
For my eyes have seen the King,  
The Lord of hosts." Isaiah 6:5

One of Israel's holy men stood in awe at what he witnessed, but the people Paul is speaking about shun the glory of God and in their hearts, there is only contempt for Him. These past quotes from the Old Testament show us several things. First, the Jew cannot hope to be saved simply because of their heritage. Their own word testifies against them. Paul spoke about this in detail and then provided these quotes, directly



from their own sacred writings, to show this is true.

Secondly, what these verses show us is the character of human nature in general, not specifically any given man. They are a broad brushstroke of how humanity is displayed from the creation until today. There was the flood to correct it. There was the cleansing of the land of Canaan by the Israelites to correct it. There was the purging of Israel from their land (twice) to correct it. And there will be the tribulation period of the future to once again destroy wickedness. Humanity, when left to its own devices, will shun God and choose the path of destruction.

Third, the corruption of man proceeds from the innermost depths of who he is and it proceeds outward in a vile display of how he presents himself. This is symbolized by the mentioning of the parts in order - throat, tongue, lips, mouth, and then feet. The corruption spreads outward and is carried far and wide.

When man forgets God and sets his feet on an evil path, only wickedness can follow. This is so, so very important to remember because as a nation, the United States has set its feet upon this course. We have condoned that which is forbidden; we have spoken that which is vile; we have spread that which is wicked; and we have lost our fear of God. Unless the people return to the Bible as its source for instruction and guidance, we will come under God's continued hand of chastisement, eventually leading to destruction. It is the church which must lead the way in this endeavor.

Life application: When the fear of God is lost, only unrighteousness can follow. We must stand up for what is right and not allow ourselves to be caught up in the eddy of moral degradation which surrounds us. Stand firm on the tenets in the Bible and be ready to defend them above all else. There is one standard by which we will right the wrongs around us and it is found there.

*O God, please renew in me a reverent fear of who You are and the glory You possess. Forgive me for not treating Your name in a manner which will magnify You. Help me to be a light and a guide to others so that they will see You for who You truly are - the One worthy of all our praise, honor, and devotion. Amen.*

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

Romans 3:19

Paul sums up his argumentation in this verse and will draw his final conclusion in the next. "Now we know" is his way of saying - "See, the evidence is clear, it is concise, it is

fully substantiated, and it is irrefutable." And so, we know "that whatever the law says" is given to mean whichever law applies to the addressee. To the Jew, it is the Law of Moses and to the gentile it is natural law clearly revealed to us and which Paul carefully explained in Romans 1.

These laws are the facts to be presented in a judicial proceeding. Whatever the law says, "it says to those who are under the law." Whichever law applies - be it to Jew or gentile - it is spoken to that group. In the case of the Jew, it is actually both laws because despite having the Law of Moses, they also have the natural law. They are accountable in both cases, but by whichever law, the evidence is clear; the charges have been presented and so "every mouth may be stopped."

This phrase is alluded to in the Old Testament such as in Job 5:16 -

So the poor have hope,  
And injustice shuts her mouth.

Every mouth being stopped means that the evidence is so overwhelming that no valid reply can be made in response to it. At the judgment, nobody will be able to say, "but I didn't know." We have received enough of God's revelation to condemn us. For the gentile it is conscience mixed with reason - "We exist; we didn't create ourselves; and therefore, we were created by another who has shown Himself through the rest of His creative works." For the Jew the argument was drawn directly from the authority they claim as the basis for their culture - Scripture. Paul has demonstrated from the source of what establishes them as a people that they are guilty.

A clear example for us to understand this is to simply change "Jew" to "Christian" and include the New Testament. You who claim to be a Christian, have you met the requirements of being a Christian? There is one source for such a claim - the Bible which tells of Jesus. It is the basis of our faith. If it can be demonstrated from this source that we haven't met the requirements of the title, then we are found as false Christians.

Paul has shown that no gentile can be saved by natural revelation and no Jew can meet the demands of the law perfectly and therefore "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." The term "become guilty" is the Greek word *hupodikos*. This is its only use in the New Testament. It means to be "liable to the judgment of."

The sum of Paul's thoughts to this point then is that when the judgment comes - for both Jew and gentile - the verdict is to be "guilty" and there can be no appeal. God's

revelation of Himself condemns us. If this were the end of the story, it would be a sad story indeed. What value would it be to go on? What purpose would there be in doing any good at all? For what then did God create - just to destroy His creatures? The story would make no sense at all.

The next verse will conclude this line of Paul's thoughts and will show the utter futility of existence without Jesus Christ. But verse 20 will open a new page for the condemned soul.

Life application: If we somehow feel that we are pleasing to God in and of ourselves, then we have made an immense error. God has given us His law and we have broken that same law. Thank God that the story doesn't end there. Take time today to reflect on the glory of Jesus Christ. Without Him, there would be no purpose to our existence, but in Him life again has meaning.

*Heavenly Father, thank You that the story didn't end with the giving of the law. Thank You that grace and mercy have been found in Jesus Christ. I fear the law, and rightly so, because it shows my own fallen state. But yet I rejoice in the law as it was fulfilled in Jesus. And so, through Him I pour out my praises to You. Amen.*

**Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20**

"Therefore" indicates Paul's final conclusion of the issue he has been addressing. The case has been presented and the lawyer has given his closing argument. Now comes the final statement, "Therefore..."

Paul has been speaking of the law in two ways, natural law as revealed to the gentile and the Mosaic law as revealed to the people of Israel. It wouldn't logically follow that this verse suddenly drops the natural law to speak only of the law of Moses. Therefore, "by deeds of the law" is certainly speaking of man's efforts to please God under either law.

In other words, someone who isn't under the law of Moses who goes about doing good stuff cannot expect to be justified in God's sight. Nor can someone who is under the law of Moses expect to meet its requirements and thus be justified before God. In both cases, "by the law is the knowledge of sin."

For the gentile, the natural law tells us internally that there is a gap between us and God. There will always be a state of uncertainty about our eternal state because deep

inside we know that the things we've done have separated us from Him. For the Jew who has the written law, there is the same knowledge. When they objectively look at the law and then compare their deeds to what it calls for, the honest soul will acknowledge that they haven't measured up.

Of course, there are those under both the natural law and the written law who feel they are above what they see; there are those who feel these things don't apply to them individually; there are those who completely reject the premise; etc. These attitudes in no way negate what is obvious, but merely further demonstrate the righteousness of God who has so revealed Himself.

In the end, Paul says that by "deeds of the law no flesh" - no person who has ever lived - "will be justified in His sight." The law merely condemns us. It is a sad and seemingly hopeless state in which man finds himself.

"By the law is the knowledge of sin" and, after all, the wages of sin is death. If this were the end of the book of Romans, it would be better for us that we had never been born. Or for those of us who are alive, it would be a pointless existence of knowing that death was coming, and which would be followed by an eternal separation from the very Source of our existence. For all eternity our mind would contemplate, "Why did He even create me?"

But Paul's words do continue, and they will show us the magnificence of what God has done for His wayward creatures!

Life application: The divide already exists between God and you and there is no deed or deeds that you can accomplish in order to restore the bridge. But God, in His infinite goodness has provided the bridge Himself. As you contemplate your state before Him today, think on the perfection of what He has done through Christ Jesus. What a great God!

*Heavenly Father, I know that I have failed You time and time again. I know that the law You have given me only shows me this more clearly. By it, I realize that I need something more to be pleasing to You. I need a Substitute to meet the law in my place... I need Jesus. Thank You for Jesus who did what I could never do. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, Romans 3:21**

After two chapters of laying out a defense against the possibility of man somehow being justified before God on his own merits, Paul now brings in words of amazing relief to the fallen soul. The word "but" is used to show the contrast between the case he has so meticulously laid out and the introduction of new evidence which can be submitted in man's defense. However, the new evidence is actually something "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets."

This term, the "Law and the Prophets" is used to indicate the entire body of Scripture known as the Old Testament. In other words, this new evidence is not being introduced apart from Scripture, instead it has been continuously proclaimed throughout Scripture. The evidence is new to Paul's argument, not to the basis for it.

What he submits now is that "the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed." The law has done its job; it has revealed man's fallen and condemned state before God. There is no hope of being justified before Him without something "apart from" it, but there is in fact something apart from it. The necessary righteousness has been revealed and so we are taken right back to Romans 1:17 -

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

The faith is for "everyone who believes" the gospel of Christ (see verse 16). It is this act which brings the righteousness of God to fallen man. Now that this is understood, it is necessary to evaluate what this actually means. There is a sharp divergence of thought at this point between the ideologies of John Calvin and Jacob Arminius. Calvinism teaches that it is an imputed righteousness, whereas Arminius claims it is an imparted righteousness.

Imputation means to "ascribe" or "credit" something. This then would mean someone is counted as righteous, whether they actually are or not. Impartation signifies "to give" something. If righteousness is imparted, it would mean that the believer is infused with righteousness; they actually "become" righteous. To understand more clearly perhaps it is best to turn these two into statements of declaration -

Imputation: I believe the gospel and therefore I am counted as righteous.

Impartation: I believe the gospel and therefore I am righteous.

The body of evidence is that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer actually at this time, but that Christ's righteousness is imparted to the believer potentially, being

actually reserved for a future time. Man is justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ, but he is not actually righteous at this time. He continues to sin after salvation (a good example of this in Peter is found in Galatians 2:13-16 and in Paul see 2 Corinthians 11:29).

However, Paul indicates that in God's mind we are both glorified (Romans 8:30) and seated in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 2:6) even though we are actually still on earth and living out our lives. What has been accomplished in the eternal state is still future to us in our temporal reality. Hebrews 11:39, 40 is another set of verses which show us that this is so -

"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us."

These things may seem like hair-splitting, but they are of great importance when thought through. Our current relationship with God, our ability to lose our salvation, our rewards and losses are all contingent on such issues. Having incorrect ideas concerning these things can only lead us down unhappy avenues in our Christian life and so it is good to get them right.

Life Application: Are you now righteous because of Christ's work, or are you counted as righteous because of Christ's work? Others are evaluating you and making their decisions about Christianity based on your attitude, and this is reflected in what you believe to be true. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should lest you fall and bring discredit upon Jesus' name.

*O God, I know that even now, even after having called on Jesus as Lord, I am unrighteous in and of myself. My thoughts stray, my actions often belie the Name I bear, and I fail You continuously. And yet in Your rich goodness to me, You have counted me as righteous because of the work of Jesus. Help me to be conformed to His image more and more each day so that I reflect the goodness You have already lavished upon me. Amen.*

**...even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; Romans 3:22**

It will help to understand this verse better by returning to verse 21 along with it -

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference...

"The righteousness of God" noted here is not a law-based righteousness in and of itself, although the law does play a part in it. Paul says it is "apart from the law" though, so this must be carefully considered. To us the righteousness of God is a faith-based righteousness. Paul has shown that all are under a sentence of condemnation because of the law (be it natural or Mosaic); we simply cannot measure up to what God has revealed to us.

However, Jesus could and did. He was born without inherited sin and He lived perfectly without ever violating God's law. Now, by faith in His work the righteousness of God is imputed to us. This goes back to the concept of being declared righteous simply by taking God at His word. This was the case with Abraham in Genesis 15:6 -

"And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

By simple faith in what seemed otherwise impossible, God declared Abraham righteous. This is the consistent theme throughout the Bible. God knows our weakness and so He asks for us to trust Him and His promises. When we do, "the righteousness of God" is revealed in us and it is based on faith in what Jesus Christ did.

Many translations state here "through the faith of Jesus Christ" instead of "through faith in Jesus Christ." Actually, it is possible to have the faith "of" Jesus Christ by faith "in" Jesus Christ and so either is possible. The phrase "faith of Jesus Christ" is in what is known as the genitive form. Therefore, this is speaking about Jesus' faith which He imparts to those who believe.

In order to understand this, we can go to Ephesians 2:8, 9 -

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The grace and the faith combined are the gift of God and they are bestowed upon us because of the merits of Jesus Christ "to all and on all who believe." Simple faith is the key to reconciliation with God the Father and it is faith in the accomplished work of Jesus. What a great bargain!

This verse ends with "For there is no difference..." This thought continues on into the next verse, but the idea here is that there is no "distinction." Things can differ without having any real distinction. But there is more than just difference between Jew and Gentile and natural law and the Mosaic law; there is a distinction which is made - until Jesus enters the picture. When He does, all distinctions are set aside.

Life application: Today, take time to look back over your life - at the innumerable things you've done which are contrary to what is good. Little lies, secret faults of the heart, open rebellion - whatever it may be. Your sins have separated you from your God. And yet all of that is washed away, cleansed, and purified by Someone else's work, by simple faith in what He did. Think on this and give God the glory for the giving of His Son for you.

*Lord Jesus, how can it be that You would give Your perfect life in exchange for my imperfections, flaws, and open rebellion? I stand amazed at what You have done for me. And yet it is more than just me, but anyone who will simply call out to You in faith. Every soul who looks to You will stand spotless and pure because of Your work... amazing. Thank You, Lord. Amen.*

**...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,...** Romans 3:23

Guilty! Paul laid out a clear and concise argument demonstrating that all people, both Jew and Gentile, are under the same condemnation. There is no person who has attained to God's glory, either innately or through works, that can expect to be exempt from His righteous judgment.

Every person ever born was born through man who originally traces back to Adam. Thus, without even committing any misdeeds, we have already inherited his sin. As we are in a continuum of time which is ever moving forward, we cannot go back before Adam to reverse the fall. David's words from the 51st Psalm remind us that we were "sinful at birth."

And as shown, not only did we inherit sin, but we have also added sin upon sin thus further separating us from the glory of God. This verse, taken in conjunction with John 3:18, clearly lays out our hopeless state -

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already,..." John 3:18

The following truths are revealed –



- 1) All people, Jew and Gentile alike, inherited sin which separates us from God.
- 2) Our inherited state condemns us. There is nothing we need to do to be condemned, it is a fact of our birth.
- 3) There is no way for us to improve our station before God; our works cannot please Him and only further condemn us.

Were it up to us, all hope of reconciliation and restoration would be futile. But as we've seen and as we will continue to see, God has done the work for us. He has restored the bridge over the chasm. He has worked salvation by Himself. All of it has been done by Him and all of it will glorify Him. It is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! All hail the name of Jesus!

Life application: When you look at others don't forget this verse. Remember it and use it as a tool to prompt you to tell them about Jesus. Without Jesus, they will never know peace and reconciliation with God, but will instead be eternally separated from Him. Your words and your actions toward them may have eternal consequences, so don't be silent about Jesus.

*Lord God Almighty, I know that I have sinned and acted in a way which sets me against You. There is a chasm between us which I could never cross, but in Your goodness, You sent Your Son, Jesus, to restore the breach. Now I know He can put His divine hand upon You and His human hand upon me and make peace between us once again. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,...**  
Romans 3:24

This thought ties directly back to verse 22. "The righteousness of God" is bestowed upon all who believe - both Jew and Gentile who alike are under the penalty of sin. Now, because of the grace of Jesus Christ, we are "justified freely." We, in other words, are treated as if we had kept the law and were perfectly righteous even though this isn't the case at all. Such is the nature of grace - it is unmerited favor granted to those who demonstrate mere faith in the work of Jesus.

Because it is by grace, we merit no favor at all in the decision; it has come "freely." The word here is the Greek *dorean* and it carries the intent of standing in opposition to anything which was purchased or earned through work or industry. No claim of personal effort can be made to that which was granted. Rather, all the honor and all of the

gratitude is to be given to the One who bestows the grace - "To God be the glory." He has done it all for those who could do none of it. As the psalmist says, so we must say -

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth. -Psalm 115:1

We now stand justified and free from sin's penalty "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The term "through the redemption" comes from a root word which indicates the price paid to redeem a prisoner of war. It signifies liberty from captivity, bondage, or imprisonment. We are born into sin and we are prisoners of sin, held in bondage by its power and are kept by the master of sin, the devil. This is confirmed by the devil's words to Jesus in Luke 4 where he stated that "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish." Sin is a firm bond, and the devil is a cruel taskmaster. However, Jesus' mission was to destroy this power. John notes this as the principal reason for His coming -

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

Jesus prevailed where Adam failed. What the devil gained through Adam's disobedience, Jesus regained through His obedience. What God asks is that we simply believe this message, receive His gift, and place our trust in what Jesus has done for us. This is the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This is the marvel of what God has done for us. In Him there is absolute victory and complete reconciliation with God the Father.

Life application: Do you often feel defeated by sin's power? Jesus Christ has defeated the devil and broken the bonds which held us. We are now free from the power of sin, protected from the penalty of sin, and someday we shall be taken from the presence of sin - all because of Jesus. Take time to reflect on what He has done and then put your thoughts into action by standing on the freedom for which Christ has set you free!

*Dear Lord, I look to what You have done through Jesus and I am humbled by it. Through Him, You have cancelled sin's penalty; through Him, You have defeated sin's power; and through Him, someday I shall be removed from sin's presence. I have complete victory through the work of Jesus and the devil has no power or claim upon me. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**...whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, Romans 3:25**

Continuing from the previous verse, Paul says that "...the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God set forth." This term in Greek is *proetheto* and signifies a public display of some sort. In the case of Jesus, it was the cross of Calvary where He was exposed to public humiliation and death. This wasn't done in a back alley where no one could witness it, but it was done in the public setting of the people of the law, the temple of God, and in the presence of the angels who ministered to Him. God set forth His own Son for all to see and understand the action for what it was - "a propitiation by His blood."

The term "propitiation" is of immense importance here. It is the Greek word *hilasterion*. It is a sin-offering or a "covering" of sin by the blood which is shed. Its purpose is to bring together parties at odds with each other and to restore a favorable relationship; to make things propitious again. This word is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Hebrews 9:5 where it is translated as "mercy seat" -

"...and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail."

It is the same word which is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Exodus 25:17 (and elsewhere) when describing the Hebrew word *kapporeth*, or "mercy seat." The mercy seat is where the covering of blood was applied to the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement and which restored felicity between God and His people for another year. But the Day of Atonement, like all of the Bible, required something more than rote ritual. It required faith that it would accomplish what was intended. As a demonstration of that faith, the people were told to fast and confess.

Likewise, the propitiation God offers through Jesus' shed blood is "through faith." It is through faith in what God has done in this final sacrifice of which the temple sacrifices only prefigured. Jesus' life was given "to demonstrate His righteousness." This phrase is pointing directly to the voluntary giving of His life as the means of obtaining this propitiation. In this offering, the sins of the people are removed from them and they are also removed from God's presence. It is as if they never occurred. Complete and total restoration is accomplished through the cross of Jesus.

Now that the sin has been removed, the ungodliness of the sinner is remembered no more and God's wrath at the sin has been appeased in His punishment and death. The

blood of Jesus accomplishes all of this; it is a suitable offering for the sins of the world. Because of this, Paul continues on by stating that "in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed."

What this means is that the sins prior to the cross are dealt with on the cross, as well as those are that look back on it. Before Jesus' offering, God would punish sin in sinful man in various ways - at the Flood of Noah, for example. However, He didn't fully punish sin because if He had, then all humanity would have been destroyed. Instead, God "passed over the sins" and enacted a temporary system of offerings through the nation of Israel to temporarily atone for their transgressions.

This system, the rituals in it, the items used in the rituals, every detail of them actually prefigures Jesus. The entire picture of the Old Testament comes into focus when looked at through the lens of who Jesus is and what He accomplished. It cannot properly be understood apart from Him.

Life application: As you read the Old Testament, it may seem unnecessary and outdated. But every word and every detail is noted and has been selected specifically to show us the majesty of what God has done in and through the Person of Jesus. The New Testament does not stand alone, and it must be evaluated based on what previously occurred. Take time to read and absorb the Old Testament so that you can properly grasp the significance of the New.

*Lord God, what happened at the cross of Calvary was done in a public display of Your anger at our sin and how You deal with it. When I see sin's consequences so revealed, it makes me understand the magnitude of what You did through Jesus. Without Him, there would be no hope, but through Him I know there is complete restoration and that all my sins are washed away. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**...to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:26**

As a demonstration of what has occurred in and through Jesus Christ, Paul says "At the present time." This is the Greek *en to nun kairo* and it establishes a link to what was said in the previous verse - "God had passed over the sins that were previously committed." The type of time Paul is speaking of is an on-going movement of time, such the running of a watch as it clicks forward.

As time progressed, God often passed over the sins of the people without bringing judgment on them. This doesn't mean that God "overlooked" them, but that judgment

was merely withheld. All sin will be judged, but out of His mercy, and looking forward to the cross, He stayed His hand of judgment. During this time, as noted in the previous verse, God either didn't fully punish sin in men or He withheld punishment through an impermanent system of offerings. This was enacted through the nation of Israel as a temporary system of atonement.

Being temporary in nature they only looked forward to something far better. This is the propitiation mentioned in verse 25; it is the shed blood of Jesus. Christ's offering "at the present time" demonstrates God's righteousness - looking back on those of the past and forward from the time of Calvary.

This demonstration of His righteousness is that "He might be Just..." What Paul is saying here isn't speaking of His benevolence, but rather that the integrity of His nature is in no way violated. He remains Just through the sacrifice of Jesus; nothing is morally compromised. This is the very heart of the gospel. God's perfect character is maintained and yet fallen man is reconciled to Him in the process. It is the highest point of the turning of the universe and to which nothing in the continuum of time could ever compare.

The integrity of the law is maintained through Jesus because He fulfilled the law. Further, because the law already gave the precedent in the doctrine of substitution - an innocent animal in place of man's sin - the doctrine may satisfactorily continue on and be complete in the more perfect sacrifice of Jesus. All of the moral character of God is seen on display in this great act. Nothing is compromised, nothing is overlooked, and what occurred displays the absolute perfection of God's plan and the infinite wisdom He possesses.

And not only is He Just in this action, but He is also the "Justifier" in what occurs as well. The One who retains His moral integrity through the giving of Jesus, is also the One who has accomplished all things through Him. Apart from Him, there can be no justification and thus Jesus' words in John 14:6 can be more clearly understood -

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

No other avenue is available to be restored to the Father because no other avenue can maintain His integrity. Thus, what Jesus said about the narrow gate and the wide gate in Matthew 7:13 is easily seen to be true. Jesus is that gate and apart from Him there is only a wide highway to the narrow confines of hell. But through Him is the avenue to

the splendid and wide expanse of heaven's glory. All of the majestic wonder of this paradise is available in only one way - to "the one who has faith in Jesus."

The gospel is so simple that people miss it time and time again. They trip over the stumbling block. The words of Paul show the demarcation line. On one side are those who attempt to be justified on their own merits, and on the other are those who depend on faith alone in the works of Christ Jesus for their salvation. There is nothing we can add to it and there is nothing that can be subtracted from it. At one moment in the history of man, God did what was otherwise impossible and He reconciled us to Himself.

Life Application: God asks for faith in what He has done. Nothing else can satisfy our sin-debt because nothing else can meet His perfect moral standard. Take time today to reflect on the cross of Jesus. Understand that it alone is God's provision for your soul. Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord and in the glory of His cross.

*Oh God, I look at the splendor of Your creation and I marvel at its beauty. And yet the creation can never meet the splendor of the Creator. How infinitely beautiful You are. I long to gaze upon Your glory for all eternity, and I know that I can because of the work of Jesus. Thank You O God... thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.** Romans 3:27

Continuing on with his humbling line of thought, Paul shows us the greatness of God - both innate greatness and that which He bestows upon us. He asks, "Where is boasting then?" The term he uses (*he kauchesis*) indicates glorying in something or reveling in something. It is equated with "See what I have done!" Paul wants us to think it through. What will we glory in when we come before the Lord? This Greek term can be used in a negative way - achievements to glory in self, or in a positive way - gratitude for His work and thus glorying in the Lord.

So, where is our boasting? Paul says, "It is excluded." There can be no merit when something is accomplished by faith in something else or someone else's work. In fact, to make a personal boast in oneself when they haven't done anything would be the epitome of stupidity and arrogance. All boasting is excluded and to make sure we comprehend the reason we are given two more questions to ponder - "By what law? Of works?"

The idea of "law" here is one of economy. The Jew was under the economy of the Mosaic law. The gentile was under the economy of natural law. Is the Jew able to boast before God based on fulfilling the deeds of the Law of Moses? No. Paul has shown that the law only brought further condemnation. How can someone boast in salvation from something that condemned them? And the same is true with the natural law of the gentile. Can a philanthropist stand before God and say, "See what I did? You owe me big time."? No. All are bound under sin - both inherited and those committed in the body against the law.

Boasting isn't excluded by works. It is excluded by the law of faith. This law, or economy, says that in order to please God we must have faith in what God has done. If God has accomplished all the works, then how can we boast of having done anything at all? It is ludicrous to think that we somehow merit any favor in our salvation.

Jesus came from God.

Jesus was born without sin.

Jesus fulfilled the law that no one else could fulfill.

Jesus was crucified for our sins.

Jesus was raised for our justification.

Jesus will return for us and through Him we will be glorified.

Therefore -

To God be the glory.

Let our boasting not be in self but in the Lord. As Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31 -

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

Life application: When we came before the Lord, it was as poor beggars who had nothing to offer. And yet He crowns us with eternal splendor and glory - a gift fitting the highest noble or the greatest king. This is grace; this is God's unmerited favor to those who, by faith, reach out to Him. Make it your goal today to truly boast in the Lord and put aside any thought of having merited His favor.

*Heavenly Father, it is hard to fathom the depths of Your grace. The favor You lavish upon us is undeserved. From our very breath, and the food we eat, to the eternal life You have promised us through Jesus - and everything in between - all of it is from Your open hand and truly none of it is deserved. How can we boast in anything when it all came from You? Help us to remember this and to glory in You alone. Amen.*

**Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.**  
Romans 3:28

"Therefore." Based on what precedes this statement, Paul will now make an absolute and exclusive claim. It is a tenet which defines true Christianity and separates it from all other religions. It is also a point of separation between the true faith and that which is heretical. Paul couldn't be clearer in what he is saying. Our justification comes from faith in the merits of Christ Jesus alone. No deeds of the law (note that "law" has no definite article in the Greek, thus it says "deeds of law") have any part in our justification. We are justified and declared righteous by faith in Christ and by faith in Christ alone.

Martin Luther called this tenet of justification by faith the point upon which the church either stood or fell - and he was right. Any denomination or person who proclaims anything other than this tenet is not a Christian entity because it is a foundational principle of the work of Christ. Only He was born sinless and lived the law perfectly. In contrast, we have both inherited sin and have added further sins to our account before God. Therefore, to claim that we somehow participate in our justification would call into question the righteousness of God and malign His holiness.

To deny justification by faith alone would be comparable to denying that Jesus was born of a virgin or that the Bible wasn't divinely inspired. Either tenet being false would negate the truth of the Christian faith. The same is true with this one. It is this concept above all others which caused the final break from the Roman Catholic Church during the Protestant reformation.

Life application: What does your denomination teach about justification by faith alone? What does your preacher believe concerning this tenet? Go find out and if they differ from Paul's words in this verse, then you need to find another place to worship. This is serious stuff.

*Glorious Almighty God, how I thank You for sending Jesus to redeem me from the power of sin, to justify me apart from deeds of the law, and to reconcile me to You. Where I have failed and fallen short, You have forgiven me. I stand amazed at the grace and the mercy You have lavished upon me, even me. Thank You O God. Amen.*

**Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,** Romans 3:29



The case against favoritism, prejudice, and presumption has been fully substantiated. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that there is one God. The great affirmation of this fact is quoted by observant Jews around the world each and every day -

"Here O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Deuteronomy 6:4

Jesus restated the truth of Deuteronomy 6:4 when He cited it in Mark 12:29. The concept of there being but one God is reaffirmed repeatedly throughout the rest of the New Testament as well. If there is only one God, then He must be the God of all. This fact is being presented in order to establish what is already painfully obvious, but which Paul will clarify anyway in the following verse.

The Jewish nation traces its ancestry back to Abraham through Isaac, but Abraham had another son also, Ishmael. Because both of them came from Abraham and Abraham was justified by faith prior to the rite of circumcision, and then Abraham and both sons were circumcised, then it must be that God is the Justifier of all people apart from the law.

The circumcision mandated in the law cannot be a source of boasting or one which makes a claim on God because it was actually instituted prior to the law and after Abraham's declaration of righteousness. And the declaration was made based on faith; simple belief in God's promises.

Life application: It can be deduced apart from the Bible that there is only one God. When we peer into the pages of the Bible, we need to continually remind ourselves that He is the God of all people. When it seems as though He treats different people differently, it is because we are misunderstanding what He is doing and why. In the end, all must come to Him in exactly the same way - by faith alone. Don't forget this fact and be reassured that God is completely fair in how He deals with all people.

*O Lord, when I stand back and look at the Bible as a whole, I see that Your hand is equally upon all people. You are perfectly fair in how You deal with us. When You show mercy on us, it is not because we deserve it, but because of Your infinite goodness. I know that the life I have been given through Jesus is completely unmerited and so I receive it by faith and with eternal gratitude. Amen.*

**...since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Romans 3:30**

Both Testaments wholly and completely establish the truth that "there is one God." This was noted in the previous verse and accepting the notion of the Trinity in no way

implies polytheism. The Trinity is noted as "three persons in one essence," although the term "persons" is an unfortunate but necessary appellative. Time is three states in one essence - past, present, and future. All three exist equally and at the same time and yet they differ from each other. They are different reference points within the stream of time. This in no way implies "polychronism" or multitudes of time. It is one essential thing. Proclaiming a Trinity within the godhead is to affirm one God.

This God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - "will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." God's means of justification doesn't change. The law cannot save and so faith in God and His provision, even under the law, is necessary in order to be saved. A person under the law, who lives the law scrupulously and yet doesn't have faith in what the law teaches is as far from God as the most vile sinner. And the vile sinner who understands his state under the law and yet has faith in the mercy of God is closer to God than the most obedient soul who lacks faith. Jesus showed us this in the following parable -

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:9-14

This train of thought is repeated throughout the Old Testament and throughout Jesus' teachings as He cited the law, reminding those around Him of this truth. The fact is that if a person could be justified through the observance of the law, then God would be the God only of those under the law. Everyone outside of the law would, by default, be excluded. But this isn't the case at all. In all times and in all ways, it is by faith that one stands justified before God. However, it must be proper faith. Misdirected faith is, after all, wasted faith.

So where does this leave "deeds." The question is valid because as the New Testament progresses, we will be faced with the concept of "bearing fruit" such as in Romans 7 and "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" as noted in James 2. The answer cannot be that deeds further justify us in our standing before God. If this were so, then a person who accepted Jesus and then got run over by a train wouldn't be "as saved" as someone who got saved and then lived a long life helping others and doing good stuff.

The deeds after salvation - those done in faith for the sake of the gospel - must then accrue to our account, not for salvation but for rewards. This is an important point, and it is the dividing line between heresy and truth concerning justification before God. It is by faith alone with nothing added that we stand justified before God. And the properly directed faith is in Jesus and His works. This will be explained in the following verse.

Life application: What is the motive for your deeds? If it is to attain salvation and a right standing with God, then you are far from Him. You have missed the grace of God as displayed in the work of Jesus for your salvation. Rather, trust in what Jesus has done - that it is all-sufficient to save you. And then, O saved soul, go forth doing good deeds out of a grateful heart in the salvation God has lavished upon you through His Son.

*Heavenly Father, how could I add to the perfection of Your salvation through Jesus? I look to the cross and see the fulfillment of the law on my behalf. The code which condemned me has been nailed to that tree and I stand justified, free, and forgiven. May my life go forward in gratitude and in a display of appreciation for the immeasurable gift of my Lord. Amen.*

**Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.** Romans 3:31

Based on his argument that it is faith apart from deeds of the law by which we are justified, Paul now asks, "Do we then make void the law through faith?" The question is obvious and the answer, unfortunately will be misunderstood unless looked at through the work of Jesus on our behalf. Let us first consider Jesus' words from Matthew 5:17 -

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

Using Paul's response, and/or the first half of Matthew 5:17, some teach that we are bound by the precepts of the law. This is taken to varying degrees by different sects and denominations, but in the end, it is entirely contrary to the tenor of the rest of the New Testament. Time and time again, we are instructed by Paul and others that the law is over and done with in Christ Jesus. Here are a few of the many examples of this -

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John 1:17

"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,.." Rom 5:20

"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." Rom 6:14

"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Gal 2:21

"You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Gal 5:4

"For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." Heb 7:18, 19

That the law is obsolete and set aside in Christ is explicitly stated. This means the entire body of the law; no distinction is ever made between a "moral law" and a "ceremonial law." However, many attempt to find such a distinction. The "moral law" would include the Ten Commandments and the "ceremonial law" would include such things as eating pork, sacrificing at the altar in Jerusalem, etc.

By looking for such a distinction, the body of law found in the Old Testament becomes a "pick and choose" code for Christians. Some denominations still teach tithing, or they may pick "no pork" for example. And even those who say only the Ten Commandments still apply will normally worship on a Sunday instead of observing a Saturday Sabbath. Thus, they violate their own premise in retaining the Ten Commandments. It is all or none and the answer is "none." The former commandment is annulled in its entirety.

However, this sits uncomfortably with the masses. Does this mean that murder is ok? Of course not. Nine of the ten commandments are explicitly restated in the New Testament and are therefore binding; they are a part of the New Covenant. However, the Sabbath is noted as having been fulfilled. We now enter into God's rest (Hebrews 4:3) and therefore we are free from a specific Sabbath observance.

Understanding this, we must now return to Paul's question, "Do we then make void the law through faith?" Paul says, "Certainly not!" So, is there a disconnect in what Paul is saying here and the rest of the New Testament? Certainly not! Instead, it is our misunderstanding of his next comment - "On the contrary, we establish the law." The word translated here as "establish" is *histanomen*. It has been variously translated as strengthen, uphold, fulfill, establish, support, etc.

The law of faith which Paul has been speaking of is a means of validating or strengthening the law. We have failed at fulfilling it, but Jesus fulfilled it on our behalf. Return again to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 - "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." And fulfill it He did!

Now, by faith in His work we are free from the very law which He fulfilled on our behalf. His merits are credited to us when we place our faith in what He did. Thus, the law is established in us; it is upheld in us; and thus it is obsolete to us. When something is fulfilled, it is no longer necessary. As He fulfilled it in our stead, we are free from its constraints. This is the amazing work of Jesus on our behalf.

Life application: Do not reinsert the law where it does not belong. Jesus established the New Covenant at the Last Supper. The book of Hebrews tells us that the former commandment is annulled. We cannot mix that which is annulled into what is newly established without showing a lack of trust in Jesus' work. Give God the glory for what He has done through Jesus and then go forward in the power and strength of that which Jesus established for us.

*Beautiful Lord God, when I think on the marvel of what You have done by having wiped out the handwriting of the law which stood against us, having nailed it to the cross to set me free from its constraints, it is beyond my ability to grasp. Where I failed, Jesus prevailed. He has triumphed over darkness and shown forth Your marvelous light. Hallelujah and Amen.*

## CHAPTER 4

### **What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?**

Romans 4:1

Paul begins chapter 4 in a manner similar to chapter 3 (the original letter contained no chapter or verse divisions, but these are logical points of demarcation which were later added) by introducing a pertinent question. He has built an argument and defended it in a precise and exacting manner, introducing legal terms and processes in order to validate his points. Each step has been introduced to confirm the concept of justification by faith.

During the progression, he has shown the nature of sin and the nature of fallen man, both under natural law and the Mosaic law. All are bound under sin and none have an innate righteousness. Because of this, none can attain to it by their own works; something external is needed.

And so now he introduces Abraham as a living example of his argument. As Abraham is the father of the Hebrew nation and because he lived hundreds of years before the introduction of the law, he will demonstrate that what occurred between God and Abraham was apart from the law or any deeds of the law. This will confirm his statements at the end of chapter 3 which concerned boasting before God.

He now asks "What shall we say that Abraham our father has found...?" Paul is clearly indicating that Abraham is the father of the faith, a point not missed by those under the law when speaking to Jesus such as during this exchange in John 8 -

"I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." (vs. 38, 39)

Even the Lord acknowledged this to the people of Israel when He spoke to them through Isaiah -

"Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness,  
You who seek the Lord:  
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father,  
And to Sarah who bore you;  
For I called him alone,  
And blessed him and increased him." Isaiah 51:1, 2

Because this is testified to the nation, even from their own Scriptures which established them as a people, then what is deduced concerning Abraham will be all the more sure and binding if it is a demonstrable truth. Paul's next words will begin to establish what Abraham "has found according to the flesh."

The introduction of this phrase "according to the flesh" has been debated and two options are most disputed -

That Abraham is the physical father of the people; he is their ancestor, and they are his descendants.

That "according to the flesh" is tied to the words "has found." In other words, "What thing in the person of Abraham is found to be true concerning our previous argument?"

The second is the obvious and correct option. Paul has been speaking about how righteousness is found and how one stands justified before God. He will continue with this thought by giving the practical example of Abraham. The fact that he is the father of the faithful is true, but how he became that way is what is of importance to Paul and his argument. The first is dependent on the second, but the reciprocal is not the case.

Life application: Use caution when reading commentaries, particularly in biblical matters. Don't bind yourself to one interpretation until you have researched other possibilities. The Bible is a unified whole and it will always internally validate itself. Logical arguments must rest on ultimate truths and the conclusions must be in line with the overall objectives presented in Scripture.

*Oh, heavenly Father, Your word is a delight to my mind and the highest point of joy in my daily thoughts. From Your word I see light and truth and in Your word, I see the glorious plan of the ages - all of it pointing to what You alone have accomplished for us, your wayward creatures. And so to You alone be the glory. May I only boast in what You have done for us. Amen.*

**For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.** Romans 4:2

Paul's words here would be set against the thought of the Jew who says, "Abraham was justified through circumcision." And again, "Abraham was justified by the offering of his son on Mount Moriah." To argue against this, he will introduce Scripture which will stand against this thought.

It's important to note here though that James 2:21 seems to indicate contrary to this -

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"

There are important concepts which must be understood clearly before we can grab the words of James 2 and stand before God and boast in our deeds. The first is that the term *ek* or "out of" is used by both Paul and James concerning works, not the term *dia* or "through." Although the difference may seem small, Paul consistently shows that justification does not come "through" works. The second thing to note about James 2 is that the example of Abraham and the others given (such as Rahab the harlot) are fully explained in Hebrews 11. There, they are clearly described as deeds of faith. "By faith Abraham..."

In other words, the faith in God's word led to the deed, not the other way around. The deed had no part in the justification of righteousness. So where did the justification come from? Paul will explain it quite clearly in the following verse. To set it up though, he gives this verse. "If Abraham was justified by works..." The words "if Abraham was" implies that he wasn't, but the introduction is proper to show why. Therefore, "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about."

Of course, if we do something to merit favor, then we can boast in what we've done. If we are in a battle and everyone is certain to die unless an immediate source of relief is found, then the actions of the person providing the relief could lead to boasting. "Johnny charged the hill alone, took out the enemy guns, destroyed the mine field with a blasting charge, and had lunch waiting for us when we arrived at the bunker..." Well, Johnny can boast. He didn't have faith that he would make it through. In fact, he probably thought he would die trying. He simply saw no other action and took it. It was a step in the dark.

Faith is not a step in the dark. Rather it is a step into God's revealed light; it is trust that what He has said is true and will come to pass. This is why Paul finishes the verse with, "but not before God." It is the introduction into verse 3 which will explain why Abraham's faith was not a step into the dark, nor was it a point on which he could boast.



He bore no part of his justification, but rather it was an act of God based on his faith alone.

This leads to the final point. Faith... faith is not a deed. Exercising one's faith is not somehow usurping God's gift as many Calvinists would claim. Their idea is that God regenerates us to believe, we then believe, and then are saved and justified. This is nonsense of the highest order and it crosses the lines of reason. It also violates the tenor of Scripture on a multitude of levels.

When man fell, he gained the "knowledge of good and evil" and, as God said, "the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil." Something was lost, but something was gained. Using reason is a part of what we are. There may be nothing inherently good in us, but we can "see the good" in God and accept it. This reason, leading to faith, is not a work and it in no way diminishes the glory God deserves. On the contrary, it exalts Him because we use our free will, granted by Him, to choose Him. God regenerating somebody in order for them to be saved does the opposite. It would demonstrate God's need to be glorified. But God lacks nothing, including the need to be glorified.

By mixing categories of what occurs in our salvation, we come up with confusion and a loss of what has happened in creation since the beginning; it skews the plan of redemption which is laid out in Scripture. Man chose to disobey, and this is in no way laid at the feet of the Creator. Man chooses to accept His offer and it is completely and absolutely a gift for which God alone receives the glory. It is belief in what God says, not mere belief in God as we will see in verse 3.

Life application: Jesus and the apostles, throughout the New Testament, state time and time again words such as "believe," "call on," "have faith," "trust," etc. These are things that we do throughout our lives. The ability to do these things establishes us as rational, free-willed beings. This is a gift of God and therefore when we exercise them "for" God, it is still ultimately "of" God, not ourselves. Today, take time to revel in what God has given you... choice. Now go and give Him the glory for the choice of accepting what He has done for You - the giving of Jesus!

*O God, at the very beginning we chose to reject Your word and to do things our own way. We took from the tree and were separated from You. But without all the bad, we could never appreciate the good. Thank You that the way has been restored through another tree... the cross of Calvary. I stand amazed at the glory You have revealed there. Amen.*

**For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Romans 4:3**

Paul returns to Scripture - to the Old Testament - in order to prove his just-made statement. If Abraham was justified by works, then he would have something to boast about, but not before God. The verse Paul selects is Genesis 15:6 and the timing of the occurrence in Abraham's life is as important as the words used. When taken in context and analyzed properly, this verse disproves the Calvinist doctrine of regeneration and it also shows that "faith" is not a work at all.

The previous verse said, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." It is clear then that what is stated in this verse, "Abraham believed God..." is not a work. Paul began with "for" to demonstrate this. He is placing "works" and "belief (or faith)" in opposition to each other; therefore "faith" cannot be considered as "work."

Quoting the noted Bible scholar Albert Barnes, "Faith is uniformly an act of the mind. It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind. It is not a substance created independently of the soul and placed within it by almighty power. It is not a principle, for the expression a principle of faith, is as unmeaningful as a principle of joy, or a principle of sorrow, or a principle of remorse. God promises; the man believes; and this is the whole of it."

As Barnes notes, "It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind." In substantiation of this, Barnes reviewed every passage on which the corresponding Hebrew word was used in the Old Testament, and then, again, every corresponding time the Greek was used in the New Testament. His conclusion was that "there is not one in which the word is used in the sense of reckoning or imputing to a man what does not strictly belong to him; or of charging on him what ought not to be charged on him as a matter of personal right."

This completely and entirely demonstrates that the doctrine of regeneration as submitted by Calvinism is wrong. Faith, which comes from within the man, results in justification. A man is not "regenerated" first in order to believe, as if God were injecting man with something externally in order for the act to occur. Further, to demonstrate that "faith" is not a "work" we can contemplate the following argument -

Deeds of the law, or works, do not lead to justification (as noted in Romans 3:28).

"Faith" is not something required within the context of the law. The law is of works and demands perfect obedience (Romans 3:19, 20 & Galatians 3:11).

But by faith a person is justified and declared righteous (Romans 3:28, Galatians 3:24) Therefore, because the law demands works, and faith is not a requirement under the law, then faith cannot be a work; it is something entirely different.

It is completely evident, fully supportable, and biblically correct to note from this one verse that-

- ✓ belief is an act of the free will of man;
- ✓ it is not placed in man through a nebulous process of being "regenerated to believe" by which he then believes; and that
- ✓ this faith is in no way considered a work.

Therefore, the truth of Scripture indicates, from the first pages of Genesis, that man has been granted free will and that He must exercise that gift in faith. Further that this faith must be properly directed and in line with the revealed light which God has provided.

Now to address the second issue of this verse - the timing of God's declaration. Genesis 15:6, which this verse from Romans cites, occurred several chapters and many years before the sign of circumcision. Circumcision was mandated in Genesis 17 when Abraham was 99 years old and when Ishmael was 13. However, Genesis 15 was prior to the conception and birth of Ishmael. Therefore, the declaration of righteousness was at least 14 years earlier, possibly more. Further, Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22 and which is noted in James 2 came many long years after that.

Because Abraham's faith was credited to righteousness prior to either of these acts, then neither of them can have any bearing at all upon his declaration of justification.

Life application: When reading the Bible, make sure you take time to stop and think through why ideas and concepts are introduced. God is revealing His light to us and to quickly pass over what is being said will cause you to miss the point of the passage. And be careful to not rely too heavily on commentaries. Reading them is fine, but be sure to compare them with what God has laid out, when they conflict with the word, they need to be disregarded.

*Most gracious and heavenly Father. You have given me the ability to choose, but I know that the faith I exercise must be properly directed. Please be with me and open my eyes*

*to the truth of Your word and the principles it contains so that my decisions will be right and in line with Your will for me. To Your honor and glory, I pray this. Amen.*

**Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.** Romans 4:4

Paul now brings up the subject of wages. When a person goes to work in a job as an employee, it is under the premise that he will receive payment for his efforts and that the pay will be comparable to his level of output, skill, knowledge, etc. Some people may work for their food and a place to sleep, some may work for currency, some may work for a precious metal like gold, etc. The first time "wages" are mentioned in Scripture it was work in exchange for a bride -

"Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?'" ... "Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.'" Genesis 29:15 & 18

An agreement was made, and the wage was paid based on the work performed (with a little cunning on the part of Laban...)

The concept of earning something for accomplishing deeds is found throughout Scripture and it is found throughout human history. The word for "work" in this passage indicates the doing of something by which something else will result. The word for "wages" is translated exactly as noted, wages. It is dues paid for working. The word for "counted" is also well chosen. It is to reckon, impute, or account. And the word for "grace," which is found throughout the New Testament speaks of unmerited favor; it is "getting what one doesn't deserve." Finally, "debt" is something that is due - either for the sake of what is just or what is legally necessary; something is owed.

Taking all of these words and considering them from what Paul has been teaching us, there is a contrast between working to receive wages and demonstrating faith in order to obtain grace. A person who attempts to be justified by deeds of the law feels that God somehow owes him and that he has merited good standing in His presence; his salvation is earned. On the other hand, a person who understands that God's grace cannot be earned places his trust completely and entirely in the hands of God, knowing that what he deserves is condemnation, but what he seeks is God's pardon.

This is the contrast between the two –

Wages - The law looks to a trial based on merit. The trial will be perfectly fair, and it will lead to condemnation.

Grace - Faith in Jesus seeks God's favor through the work of another and the receiving of a pardon based on His accomplishments.

Life application: The choice is given to all - will we attempt to merit God's favor by our own works, or will we place our trust in the work of Jesus? The biblical record stands - Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf if we are willing to accept it. Either way we will be judged by the same standard - it will be fair, and it will either condemn us or justify us. Choose wisely. Choose Jesus.

*Oh God, You have done for me that which I could never do. You have fulfilled the law in my place through a Substitute. Now, by faith in His work I stand justified in Your presence. The work of the Messiah is hinted at throughout Your word... and then He came! He was offered once to bear the sins of many and to those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,... Romans 4:5**

This is the amazing truth of the gospel revealed in its glory. The ungodly, the sinner, is justified by faith, not by works. This takes us back to Romans 3:31. Jesus fulfilled the law for us, and therefore when we place our trust in Him and what He did, we establish the law by faith. The righteous requirements of the law are met in Him and His righteousness is imputed to us through faith in that.

This brings us to an important concept though. If we attempt to be justified through works of the law and fail at them, then of course we can never be justified. But just as important is an attempt to be justified by deeds not recorded in the law - trusting in our own law.

If we attempt to establish our own righteous standards by adding to God's word, then we are guilty of exactly that - adding to the word of God. This is what Jesus condemned when addressing the scribes and Pharisees. He repeatedly makes a distinction between the Word of God and the traditions of men -

"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:  
'This people honors Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far from Me.

And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’  
For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.”  
He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.” Mark 7:6-9

As God's word is truth, and because God is love, then the proper proclamation of God's word, no matter how painful or cutting, is a loving action. It establishes the law of God. Truth and love are not at war with each other, they complement each other. This is why properly handling the message of Christ is so important. When we attempt to be justified by our own deeds, we actually set aside the grace of God. When we teach others to do so, we bring condemnation, not salvation, to those who follow suit; it is the most unloving action imaginable.

God justifies the ungodly by faith. It is counted to them for righteousness. Let us believe this truth and not attempt establish our own righteousness before Him.

Life application: It is either the Bible or the teachings of man which brings salvation; the two are incompatible with each other. In our walk we must decide who we will follow and why. Let us never fail to stand on God's word alone lest we be found to have fallen short of His grace.

*Lord God, Your wisdom is displayed in Your word. Every story and every detail is given to show us who You are, what You expect, and our complete dependence on You. Help us to abide by its precepts, live by its statutes, and fear its judgments. Your word is precious, and it is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path as I walk in this sin-stained world. Amen.*

**...just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:** Romans 4:6

This verse precedes two verses which form a quote from the 32nd Psalm. In this quote Paul will show how "David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." In other words, in a masterful insight into the heart of the doctrine of justification by faith, Paul will go to David, a man under the law, to show how righteousness is attained. It is by imputation from God "apart from works."

Not only was David a man under the law, but he was also the King of Israel and the one through whom the promise of the Messiah would come (2 Samuel 7:12-16). If anyone

had a reason to boast before the Lord, it would certainly be David. As the author of a large portion of the Psalms and the one who received the instructions for the building of the temple directly from Lord (1 Chronicles 28:19), David had an intimate relationship with God. He had a grasp of the intent and the purpose of the law and it is apparent through his words that he knew that the righteousness of God came not from the law itself, but from the One who gave the law in the first place.

How could David know this? Because the law not only promised life to the one who lived by it (Leviticus 18:5), but it also promised punishment and death for those who failed to do so. And David, this great and noted king, failed. When he was faced with his own sin, which under the law was worthy of death, God's prophet spoke these words to him, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

The Lord's mercy was bestowed upon David apart from the law. David thus deduced that if this occurred, then God's other divine attributes were also to be realized in our relationship with Him only apart from the law. The law then must have had another purpose than to bring man into a right relationship with God. Although David didn't have a full comprehension of the work of the Messiah, he did understand the blessedness of man who received God's righteousness apart from the law.

In the book of Galatians, Paul will show that the law was a tutor to lead us to Christ "that we might be justified by faith." Somehow, in his ponderings of the work of God, David understood this, even if in a limited way. The quotes Paul uses from David's hand will clearly show this.

Life application: God authored the law which is finite in its scope and so it cannot be the full extent of our relationship with Him. However, it is eternal in its purpose; it must be fulfilled, and yet we cannot fulfill it. Therefore, the righteousness of God must come to us apart from our deeds under the law. It must come from Jesus who embodies the perfection of it. In Him alone can our righteousness be found. Be sure to give God the glory for doing through Jesus what we could never do.

*Gracious and glorious Heavenly Father, I have sinned against You - my heart has been deceitful, my lips have been impure, and my actions have not been in accord with Your word. I stand before You knowing that what I deserve is to be cast from Your presence, and yet because of the work of the Messiah I am reconciled to You and brought near to Your throne. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
And whose sins are covered; Romans 4:7**

This is the first half of Paul's quote from the 32nd Psalm. Paul, citing David, shows the state of blessedness or happiness of those who are forgiven of their misdeeds. Paul changes the quote from singular to plural. David's original words said, "Blessed is he whose..." This thought then covers all who are included - male and female, Jew and gentile.

In the forgiveness of lawlessness and the covering of sin, a person stands justified and free from guilt even though the offense(s) actually occurred. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and was responsible for the death of Uriah. Moving forward in time means that these actions cannot be undone. What has occurred is over. A finite crime thus infinitely separates man from an infinite Creator; we can never undo our deeds.

But God, the Creator of time, has the ability to do what we cannot. Thus, it is the truly blessed person who obtains access to this infinite fountain of grace and mercy. When forgiveness occurs, the sins are "covered." They can never be seen again. The Bible repeatedly confirms this -

As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12

You will cast all our sins  
Into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:19

For You have cast all my sins behind Your back. Isaiah 38:17

These and other metaphors are intended to show the complete and eternal nature of forgiveness and justification. When a transgression is covered, it is forever gone. When forgiveness is granted, it becomes a garment of righteousness. And when a person is justified by faith, it stands forever as a seal and a promise from God that a right relationship again exists.

Life application: The blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from all unrighteousness and ungodliness. What has been cleansed by Him is forever clean and holy. As proof of this, the believer in Jesus Christ has been given a deposit, the Holy Spirit of promise. When you err and fall short of God's glory, remember this. Despite your faults, you are eternally safe and secure in the hands of God.

*Lord God Almighty, in You I have found my rest and my peace. Surely a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. And yet, because of Your Son I have the*



*surety of eternal days in Your presence - free from the guilt I have stored up through a lifetime of misdeeds. How can I but praise You and glorify You for what You have done. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.** Romans 4:8

Paul again quotes David from the 32nd Psalm.

"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,  
And in whose spirit there is no deceit."

There David noted that the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin is blessed. However, the law demanded that his sin be tried and punished. He had committed adultery and murder - both capital offenses and transgressions against God. He couldn't go back in time and undo what he had done; time is ever-moving forward. And yet, God provided atonement for him and for those who put their faith in Him through sacrifice and repentance.

The question is, "Did the sacrifices - such as those on the Day of Atonement - take away the sin?" The answer is given in both Testaments and it is "No." The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. (Psalm 51:16, 17, Hebrews 10:4, etc). So, what provided the atonement? It was faith that God would withhold His wrath for the sins committed. The sacrifices merely pointed to the final sacrifice of Jesus, even if the people didn't know that this was the case. It was faith in God and His promises and a humble walk before Him. Passages such as Micah 6:6-8 show us this -

With what shall I come before the Lord,  
And bow myself before the High God?  
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,  
With calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
Ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He has shown you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justly,  
To love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

The questions Micah asked demanded a negative response. All of the sacrifices and offerings in the world were useless without a heart for God and without faith in His providence. It is through faith that the blessedness is received. When faith is exercised, the sins are pardoned and felicity between God and man is restored.

Life application: Have faith in God's promises which come through the Person and work of Jesus. This is what pleases God, not church attendance or charitable giving. After your faith is established, then these things have meaning, but without it they are just vapor which fades away.

*Lord, I know that my sins make me deserve Your wrath and judgment, but because of Jesus, You have granted me mercy and a pardon from the sentence. I trust that Your word is true and that what He has done is all-sufficient to restore me to You. I marvel at the perfection of what You have done through His wondrous work. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.** Romans 4:9

Paul has been addressing David's comments which are found in the psalms and which point to the blessedness of man to whom the Lord does not impute sin. Based on David's words, Paul showed that this blessedness translates into "righteousness apart from works."

Through Paul's observations and by citing the Scriptures, it is verifiable that this state of blessedness can be obtained because David both received it and spoke of it. David was a man under the law, the law which included circumcision as one of its signs of the covenant between God and His people. So, Paul now asks an obvious question - "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only?"

The question is important because if it is only upon the circumcised, then anyone outside of the law will never be free from the sin-guilt they bear. All sins committed will in fact be imputed to them. There would then be... no hope. But Paul asks, "Does this blessedness then come 'upon the uncircumcised also?'" If it does, then there is hope for the world at large and not just those in the nation of Israel and who had been circumcised.

In order to demonstrate that this blessed state does, in fact, come upon those outside of the law Paul will now reintroduce Abraham. Why would he do this? Abraham was the

father of circumcision! What could it be about Abraham's justification that will in turn give hope to the non-circumcised world? Stay tuned for the exciting details.

Life application: When things look hopeless and every exit is blocked, remember that God is fully capable of rescuing you from your trials. Those things that you may have overlooked are already known to Him. So, trust that His plan is greater than your time of testing. Stand in the confidence of knowing that His hand is upon you and will guide you to broad places.

*Precious Lord, how wonderful it is to live in Your presence and to know that You are always with me - a shade at my right hand. When life is difficult and the trials seem too big to bear, remind me of Your glorious presence and help me to open my mouth and speak to You about the cares and burdens I feel. I know that You will respond according to Your great mercy. Amen.*

**How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.** Romans 4:10

Paul has shown as clearly as could be done, that righteousness comes apart from the law and that it is granted by faith alone. Noting this, Paul continues to make his address to those who would still consider the law as a means to an end. His questions are meant to dispel this notion once and forever. "How was it (meaning the blessedness of being declared righteous noted in the previous verses) accounted?" In other words, where or when did this declaration originate? In follow-up he asks, "While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?"

This is an immensely important question. If it was after circumcision, then the circumcision may have had a bearing on the declaration of his righteousness. This then might mean that this same declaration could be available only to those who are circumcised. If so, then anyone outside of the law would be in the same state they were always in - alienated from God and strangers to the promise. But Paul's answer is a note of relief to those outside and it is one which comes directly from an analysis of Scripture itself... "Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised."

Abraham was declared righteous in Genesis 15:6. He simply believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. It wasn't until Genesis 17 that the sign of his righteousness was introduced. This was many long years later and it had no bearing at all on his state before God. If it had no bearing, then why was it even given? The answer is that it was an outward sign of the change in relationship and was intended for him

and his descendants afterwards to remember that relationship and live in a manner worthy of it.

This outward sign was a means of validating what occurred. It had no bearing on what happened, but it gave him the memory of, and the assurance in, the act. As an example to grasp this, let's consider a war hero. He is involved in a great act which saves many lives, and which is the epitome of braveness and heroism. Everyone knows it and calls him a hero. This is equivalent to Abraham's faith and God's recognition of it.

After the act, the hero's commander submits him for an award. The award goes through the ranks and arrives at the president's desk. The president approves it - a Congressional Medal of Honor; the highest military award one can receive. The award is then officially presented to the hero on the one-year anniversary of his act. Did the presentation of the award have any bearing on the accomplishment of the act? No. Did the presentation have any bearing on his status as a hero? No, but it does validate it. The award was given as a sign and a confirmation (or validation) of the significance of the deed, but it in no way changes what occurred. This is Paul's point. The circumcision, in which the Jew boasts, has no bearing at all on what was previously granted.

If the war hero's descendants carry around his award and boast in it and yet don't live a life worthy of the act of their father, then the award means less than nothing. In fact, it has become in them as if they weren't even a part of this noble man's family. And now, after more than a chapter of analysis and explanation, we can return to Paul's words at the end of chapter 2 and more fully understand what he meant -

"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." Romans 2:25-29

Life application: Don't let anyone steal the prize from you by insisting that you adhere to some precept found under the law. Circumcision, dietary restrictions, dress codes, etc. that are found under the law will only separate you further from God if you attempt to be justified by those things. Stand firm on the fact that Abraham was declared righteous by faith alone and this is how you will also be so declared.

*Lord God, I see in Your word that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised. The circumcision was only an outward sign of the declaration. I also see that this is how You work at all times - declaring us righteous by faith in what You alone have done. The work of Jesus frees us from the constraints of the law because He fulfilled them in our stead. Thank You, O God, for Jesus. Amen.*

**And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,**  
Romans 4:11

The previous verse reminded us of what Scripture proclaims - Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised; long before. To ensure that point couldn't be misunderstood, God waited many long years before giving him the sign of circumcision. This sign is "a seal of righteousness of the faith he had while still uncircumcised."

The sign did nothing to further justify him in God's sight. By this picture, which we derive directly from Scripture, we learn that it is God who defines the parameters and establishes the basis by which a person is declared righteous. And this is shown to be by faith; by faith alone. When this faith is properly directed toward God's promises (meaning the work of the Messiah) we are counted as righteous.

Abraham was made the type or pattern of the faithful, "that he might be the father of all those who believe." There is no distinction made in us because there was none made in him. He simply believed God and received the blessedness of God. As this is the pattern, then it is available to all "though they are uncircumcised, that the righteousness might be imputed to them also."

This wondrous relationship with God is available to all - Jew and Gentile, male and female. It is open to any person of any culture, ethnicity, or race. No person is above another and no person is excluded when mere faith is exercised. This is the very heart of the gospel and is reflected in Jesus' words of John 3:16 –

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

"Whoever" means just that. All who believe are granted the same inheritance and become Abraham's descendants; adopted into God's family.

Life application: A simple act of faith is all that is needed to change our eternal state. It doesn't matter who you are, if you have accepted Jesus as Lord, you have been declared righteous and stand justified before God. Don't let anyone steal your joy by telling you that more is needed. Your faith has healed you, O child of God.

*Heavenly Father, Abraham was declared righteous by mere faith and your word says that the same is true with me. I am freed from the bondage of the law by the work of Jesus who fulfilled it in my stead. I stand free and forgiven and now I am ready to bear fruit in this new life. Set me on the course which will bring you the honor and glory You are due. Amen.*

**...and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. Romans 4:12**

The previous verse showed that Abraham was "the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised." This verse now shows that, likewise, Abraham is "the father of circumcision." The Greek actually leaves out a definite article before "father." He is "father of circumcision." This is an abstract term for the concrete principle similar to saying someone is "father of the modern jet airplane." However, Paul includes a caveat concerning those circumcised people. It is those who are not "only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith..."

Being circumcised but lacking faith has already been addressed and then it was supported by Paul's inclusion of David's quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures. In order to further substantiate it, Paul pulls out a word for "walk" which is only used a few times in the New Testament, *stoichousin*. This word finds other uses in secular Greek writings to indicate the concept of military order. There it has the idea of keeping in rank or walking in step with a leader.

In other words, those who are of the circumcision can't claim any special participation with Abraham unless they walk in the manner of Abraham, which has been shown to be a walk of faith. Other Jewish writings designate Abraham "the head of those that are circumcised" or "the head to them that are circumcised." However, Paul calls him "father of circumcision." The difference is immense. The first indicates a relationship is contingent on circumcision, but the second indicates that true circumcision is contingent on faith.

What this means, and it is of the highest concern for those who are circumcised, is that in order to be saved the Jews must come under Abraham's covenant of faith which was

while he was still uncircumcised, not the other way around. The entire concept of circumcision had been turned upside down by those who bore the sign.

Unfortunately, this is still the case in Christianity today. Far too many sects and denominations insert the law where it doesn't belong by imposing its restrictions on those who have been freed from them. The sign of the saved Christian is an internal one; it is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Attempting to add to that can only bring in unhappy consequences and a life of walking in uncertainty.

In the same way, some believe they are saved through their denomination and that others are excluded. Or they may believe that baptism is a saving grace comparable to the Jew's belief in the effectiveness of circumcision. However, both of these ideas are dispelled when one understands that it is faith, and faith alone, which restores us to God. We too must come under the covenant of the faith of Abraham.

Life application: Was there a time when you called on Jesus Christ as Lord by simple faith? If so, then remember that move and return to it. Live in it and revel in it. If you've been adding external requirements to it and have wondered why your walk is a meandering one, then re-evaluate your walk. If someone is teaching you to follow certain dietary requirements, certain days of church attendance, etc., then you are only harming your walk of faith. Look to Jesus and what He already did and then glory in that.

*O most precious Lord, by faith Abraham was declared righteous and so he is considered the father of faith for all who walk in his steps. Help me to be a person of faith, putting aside attempts to merit my salvation by adding to what You have already done for me. What could I add to the work of Jesus? In Him my rest is found and in Him I shall take my rest. Amen.*

**For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Romans 4:13**

The words "for the promise" are being introduced to show that what was promised to Abraham, both explicitly and implicitly, are to be offset from the notion that the law had any bearing on it at all. When taken in context of the times and the circumstances, nobody with right thinking could come to any other conclusion.

Abraham was given the promise and declared righteous in Genesis 15. From that time until the giving of the law at Mount Sinai it was a period of 430 years. This is seen in Exodus 12:40, 41. The dating in these verses is speaking of 430 years from the promise

to Abraham until the exodus, not the time the amount of time the Israelites dwelt in Egypt -

"Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

Understanding this, we can now evaluate the word "promise." There are two Greek words, one *huposchesis* and the other *epangelia*, from which the English word "promise" is translated. The first one, *huposchesis*, is used when a condition is involved. The second, *epangelia*, is used when the promise is an unconditional one. It is this second word that Paul uses here. Therefore, the promise involves no act to which merit could be counted but is an act of grace alone.

Next is the thought of the promise, "that he would be heir of the world." An heir is one who inherits something, such as an estate. This is not a promise that was made specifically to Abraham. The promises to him included giving to him and his descendants the land of Canaan; making him a great nation; that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed; that his descendants would be a multitude (as of the dust of the earth and as of the stars of the sky); and that he would be the father of many nations.

The promise that he would be "heir of the world" must be inferred from these other promises and which then would point directly to the Messiah who would issue from him. To understand this, Paul says "or to his seed through the law." The word seed is translated from one of three words in the New Testament. The one used here is the word *spermati*. In almost every one of its 44 uses, it is speaking specifically of descendants. Such is the case here.

Jesus, the seed of Abraham, is the One this part of the inheritance is speaking of. This is explicitly noted in Galatians 3:16-18 -

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise."



To sum this up for us as believers in Christ Jesus, Paul finishes with, "but through the righteousness of faith." The promise to Abraham and his seed comes only through the righteousness of faith. The law has no part in it for us. It was promised prior to the law and Jesus, who was born under the law fulfilled the law on our behalf. Therefore, by faith in Him, not deeds of the law, we are justified before God.

Life application: The Bible is a complex book, but its message is simple - have faith in God and His promises; have faith in Jesus. Our continued exploration of the word should always bear this in mind. If so, then we will never get off base as we plumb the depths of its treasures.

*Heavenly Father, the more I read and study Your word, the more I understand how complex it truly is. But one thing consistently shines forth - the just shall live by faith. And so, I stand on that simple tenet. I put my faith, hope, and trust in the Person and work of Jesus alone. Amen.*

**For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, Romans 4:14**

This statement is so obvious and yet so powerful that it should be posted as a banner at the doorway to houses of worship around the world. "For" is used here as if to say "indeed" or "surely." It is stressing the truth of what is coming. "For if those who are of the law are heirs..."

The first thing to note is that there is no definite article before "law" in the Greek. "For if those who are of law are heirs..." Whatever law, natural or Mosaic, is hinted at. If someone who is living under law is an heir of Abraham, then the very thing that caused Abraham to be declared righteous, which is faith, "is made void and the promise made of no effect.

The promise would then be made inoperative; it could never be fulfilled. Grace which is sought for by work isn't grace. Anything beyond faith is a work and therefore grace could never be bestowed upon a person who is seeking righteousness by the law. So, if a person is an heir who is doing works of the law, then faith is made void.

The importance of this is immense because both Jews living under the law, and Christians who mandate any given aspect of the law (such as "no pork" or "be circumcised") are in essence saying that God's promise to Abraham is of no effect. They are basically hinting that the entire premise of the Bible is faulty.

God's word, which states that we are saved by grace through faith, is either true or it is false. If it is true, then attempting to obtain grace in any other way can only lead to not receiving the grace at all.

Life application: Stand on the biblical truth that grace is grace. It is unmerited favor bestowed upon us by simply believing that God has it all under control and has accomplished the work for us through Jesus. Don't add to this, lest you be found to have fallen short of His immeasurable gift.

*Heavenly Father, what could I add to the grace You have granted me through the cross of Jesus? I receive what You did, and I stand on the merits of the Lord and not on my own supposed righteousness. I have faith that His work will carry me through to be received into Your holy temple. Thank You for this surety. Amen.*

**...because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.** Romans 4:15

This a concept is introduced which goes back to the very creation of man and is found throughout the Bible and throughout human history - "the law brings about wrath." Man was placed in the Garden of Eden and he was, in fact, given a law. It was one command, and it was in the negative (you shall not), but it was a command none-the-less.

Man was told that he was not to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. If God had not given him this law, then there could have been no penalty for eating the fruit. It would have been no different to the man than eating any other fruit in the garden.

Secondly, the law was just. If God told the man, "You shall not drink any water" then that law would have been unjust because man needs water to exist. However, man didn't need to eat the fruit of that particular tree; there was other food to eat. The law was just and therefore enforceable. A violation of it brought about wrath.

The same is true with every other law given by God along the way. The laws were just and holy and they were reasonable. But accepting God's promise in Genesis 3:15 as well as those to Abraham could only come by faith because no law had been introduced along with them. Further, there is no law that could come along and fulfill the promises. They preceded any type of law and were thus grace. The only thing the introduction of a law could do would be to diagnose problems along the way, but they couldn't provide a cure for the state of man. In other words, the law can only condemn, but it cannot save.

Understanding these things leads to the fact that the law can only point out sin and show the need for something else. Fallen man needs to be completely detached from the principles of the law in order to be brought to a place where there will be no transgression and thus no wrath. This is the marvel of Jesus' work.

By coming in the form of a man, without the stain of original sin, Jesus fulfilled the law that only condemns us. He then offers His perfection under the law to any who will receive it. When it is so received, it brings us to that place where there is no transgression. We have overcome the law which was contrary to us and therefore we have no wrath which would result from that law!

The place of inheritance, which preceded the law by promise, is therefore the only place of freedom from wrath. The inheritance is through Jesus. If you have grasped this, then you truly stand in "the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Galatians 5:1)." Paul would then ask you to "not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." You are free from the law and eternally saved by the work of Jesus. It is the most glorious place to be.

Life application: To reintroduce the law after calling on Jesus can only bring a person into subjugation once again. The law brings about wrath, not freedom, so stand firm in the freedom of Jesus Christ and let nothing hinder you from the prize.

*O God, when all was hopeless and uncertainty prevailed in my life, you came and offered me Jesus - a Man, born under the law and who fulfilled the law which stood against me. Now I stand free because of His work. The substitution was offered, the exchange accepted, and the righteousness granted. May I never boast except in the cross of Jesus which made all this possible. Thank You and Amen.*

**Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all... Romans 4:16**

"Therefore" is Paul's note of conclusion for this particular line of thought - "Because of these things... the following is the conclusion."

"It is of faith." This returns to verse 13 - " For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." The promise was through faith and thus it stands by faith even now. And the reason?

"That it might be according to grace." If the promise isn't of faith, then there would be no grace involved. Anything other than faith involves work. When work is included, then wages are due.

As was noted in Romans 4:3 and which should be repeated,

- ✓ Deeds of the law, or works, do not lead to justification.
- ✓ "Faith" is not something required within the context of the law. The law is of works and demands perfect obedience.
- ✓ But by faith a person is justified and declared righteous.
- ✓ Therefore, because the law demands works, and faith is not a requirement under the law, then faith cannot be a work; it is something entirely different; no wages are due.

But Paul has shown clearly and concisely, using both David and Abraham, that it is of faith and therefore it might be according to grace. And the reason is clear - "So that the promise might be sure to all the seed." The term "all the seed" must be apart from the law because the promise was made prior to the law in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. The promise stands even though there was no law. If this is the pattern, and it is also the pattern through David who was under the law, then it is all-encompassing - "to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law."

Anyone of faith may receive God's grace; anyone lacking faith - regardless of whether they are of the law or not - are excluded. The promise is by grace through faith only. It is to those who "are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."

It is astonishing how many people miss this. Instead, they tear verses out of context in order to justify that we are bound to the constraints of the law. And yet, the law demands such things as going to Jerusalem to sacrifice three times a year. It demands that one not wear clothing of two types of material - wool and linen for example. It demands circumcision and Sabbath observance - and on and on. Any violation of the law breaks the entire law (James 2:10). And yet, while ignoring all of these tenets found under the law, they still claim that adherence to the law is required. This is unclear thinking, and it is a setting aside of the very grace bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ.

Life application: Verse after verse has come to the same irrefutable conclusion - we are not under law but under grace. This is so important that we need to be reminded again and again. It is the principal tenet of Paul's writings and yet... and yet we continue to miss it. Stand firm on the gospel and do not let yourselves be brought again under the yoke of bondage.

*Lord God, keep me resolute in my walk and in the light of Your truth. And help me never to be swayed from the heart of the gospel which says that I have been saved by grace through faith. I know there is nothing I can do which could ever add to the work of Jesus. His work is all-sufficient to restore me to You. Thank you for the cross. Amen.*

**...(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;... Romans 4:17**

This is a continuation of the previous verse which stated that the promise belonged "to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." To support this, Paul returns to the fountain, to Scripture - "as it is written."

When a thing can be argued over and debated against, the surest way to prove one's claim is to return to the source of the matter. When this avenue is taken, argumentation is quickly cleared up. God spoke to Abraham, "I have made you a father of many nations." The term "I have made" is *tetheika*. It is used to indicate a granting or constituting of a matter. This promise was spoken to Abraham as if it was complete; in God's mind, the promise is as if it were already accomplished.

Abraham was given the promise from God and he simply believed it, despite its otherwise incredible nature. But the promise after all was from "God, who gives life to the dead." This phrase is certainly speaking of the deadness of Sarah's womb which is referred to in verse 19. However, because it is speaking of the calling of life from a dead womb, it demonstrates that God can call anything to life and so through the dead womb of Sarah will come the One who would restore man's spiritually dead condition. This is evidenced by Abraham's declaration of righteousness in Genesis 15:6.

Each step of Abraham's life is used to show us the pattern of our own calling. It is God who restores us to life "and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." Abraham would be a father of many nations. People who appeared to be outside of God's chosen line are called into it. Those who were once far off are brought near. Those who were dead are called to life. The relationship which did not yet exist in our temporal reality is spoken of by God in a manner as if it already did, and therefore it does.

Life application: The Bible is full of promises which are still future to us now and yet they are spoken of as if they have already come about. For example, it says those who were called are glorified. It also says that when we were saved God "raised us up together,

and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." These haven't yet happened in our stream of existence, and yet to God who is outside of time, they have already occurred. When you're feeling as if everything is against you and God has forgotten you, remember this. In His mind, you are already seated in Christ Jesus in heaven. It is done and will never be taken away. Your salvation is eternal, and your hope is already realized.

*Lord God, I am reassured to know that Your promises come from the vantage point which is outside of the stream of time in which I exist. What we see as future, You see as already done. Because of Jesus, I am already seated in Him in the temple of Your heavenly city. Help me to remember this as I face my daily trials. To You, it is already done. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." Romans 4:18**

Hope is defined as a want or expectation of something, particularly when the thing seems likely or possible. Contrary to this premise, Abraham "in hope believed." In other words, Abraham placed his hope in something that wasn't likely, and which was seemingly impossible. His wife was beyond the age of bearing and yet he accepted God at His word. This is specifically referring to Genesis 15:5 -

"Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'"

The faith of Abraham wasn't misdirected faith even though the promise was otherwise unlikely. The reason is that it is "God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." If the One speaking to Abraham is truly the Creator, then the word spoken from Him, even if it seems impossible to us, is actually more than probable (Matthew 19:26).

The word from God when properly handled contains the surest guarantee of all.

Life application: When reading the Bible, you are reading the very word of God to you. Its promises are guaranteed and what it states is absolute truth. But be careful to rightly apply it and to keep its words in proper context. One cannot claim promises to which they are not entitled. Through right interpretation, we will be built up in our faith and not disappointed when misdirected hopes are dashed.

*Lord God, when I consider Your word, I realize that what it contains is no less certain and true than the principles of science or mathematics. Your word stems from who You are and therefore it must be absolute truth. Help me to accept its precepts and to never diminish them for the sake of tolerance, convenience, or to be socially acceptable. Amen.*

**And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Romans 4:19**

Abraham's faith remained strong despite the odds against him. He was given a promise that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky at a time when it seemed a bit more than improbable.

However, misunderstanding often comes into our thinking at this time concerning the wording of this verse. The NKJV here states "He did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old)..." This is misleading concerning the issue. Here is another version for comparison, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:" (KJV).

The issue isn't concerning the deadness of Abraham's body, but the "considering" of Abraham's body dead because of the deadness of Sarah's womb. There is nothing to suggest, and everything to refute, the thought of Abraham's body being dead. He was only about 100 years old, and he would father many children before his death at 175. However, at this point in his life, Sarah, his only wife, had no children. The consideration of Abraham becoming a father is tied to Sarah. This is the reason why later, in Genesis 16, Sarah gave Abraham her maidservant Hagar to bear a child.

This same consideration is to be seen in Hebrews 11:12 - "Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude— innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore." In this verse, as in Romans 4:19, the reckoning that Abraham's childbearing was "as good as dead" is tied directly to Sarah. It shows us the moral uprightness of Abraham who was faithful to his beloved wife despite her inability to bear. This is the strength of Abraham's faith - that God made a promise and that it would in fact come about.

It was Sarah who proposed that Abraham go into Hagar and thus, because of her words, he agreed. Until she made the proposal, the belief was that his faithfulness to Sarah would be rewarded. And in a way it was - both through the begetting of Ishmael through Hagar and then later begetting Isaac through Sarah. Abraham walked in faith and was rewarded for his faith by God.

To God, who called the universe into existence and who raised Lazarus from the tomb, the miracle of life through Sarah's dead womb was His way of showing us that He has all things under control.

Life application: With God, nothing is impossible. When we see difficulties, God sees opportunity for His glory to shine forth all the more brightly. Let us stand fast and firm on the surety that if God has made a promise in His word, it will certainly come about.

*O Lord, my God! My heart sings at the prospect of eternity in Your presence. Nothing can take away the surety I have in the promises of Your word. You have said that the redeemed will walk in Your light and that there will be no more death, sorrow, or crying. I know this will come about and so I wait on that glorious day! Thank You for such wondrous promises. Amen.*

**He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,...** Romans 4:20

Abraham has been given as the prime example of fortitude in faith. He remained unwavering in his convictions concerning the promise of God. Unfortunately, he is too often maligned against this very premise when it comes to the account with Hagar. The man of faith is said to have weakened at that time, but this is not at all the case. Paul states very clearly here that "he did not waiver at the promise of God through unbelief."

What occurred with Hagar was simply a man not having all the information that God has. Because of this, his actions with Hagar were done in faith, not apart from them. It was Sarah who made the proposition and Abraham acted upon it, possibly assuming this was the divine plan God spoke of. In the end, all came about exactly as God intended. Ishmael was born to meet God's plans and later Sarah conceived Isaac, thus bringing glory to God.

Abraham's walk was continuously one of undivided faith. The Greek word translated as "waver" indicates a mental struggle concerning the issue. In Abraham, there was no such turmoil. God spoke and he believed unwaveringly. Abraham learned early and held fast to the truth that if one looks at the circumstances around them, they will falter, but if they fix their eyes on the Lord, there is only surety of purpose and resoluteness in determination.

For this very reason, the Bible elsewhere implores us to "fix our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2) and again to "fix our thoughts on Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1). When we look unto Him, there will be no time for mental distractions which cause us to falter.



But there is an important caveat which must be considered concerning our faith. Misapplied promises can only lead to unsatisfactory results. It is highly fashionable to take single verses out of context and make faith-based claims on them. This is both unreasonable and harmful. When quoting Scripture to build up faith, it must be taken in context and in the manner intended by God. Otherwise, it is no promise at all. Handle the word with care, especially when looking to its promises.

Life application: Who is being addressed in a letter or book? What are the circumstances of what is being said - time, place, person. Is the verse speaking directly to you or are you merely being allowed the privilege of seeing God's promise to someone else for learning, but not self-application? Knowing and applying these and many other rules of interpretation will keep one from becoming disillusioned by promises which were never intended to be used in your own personal manner.

*Lord God, give me wisdom and discernment concerning Your word and help me to rightly divide its instruction. Help me to know when a verse is being taken out of context and instead, help me to be built up by a clear understanding of the intent of what is being presented. I know that as I learn these things, my walk with You will become more sure. Amen.*

**...and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.**

Romans 4:21

Hebrews 11:1 defines what faith is - "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It is something which one possesses, "substance" and "evidence." Roman's 4:21 takes this definition and describes it. Abraham was "fully convinced that what He [God] had promised He was also able to perform." This is the substance of Abraham's hope and it is the evidence of his faith.

Abraham's internal conviction that God was able to perform exactly what He spoke was looked upon as an act of righteousness by God. This is the foundation of the biblical pattern for such a reckoning, and it will be broken down and explained in the next verses. And the Bible will never deviate from this premise - that it is by grace through faith that one is saved. Jesus' words confirm this precept and are worth remembering yet again -

"For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

This is the model, this is the standard, and this is the truth of the word of God. We are to be fully convinced that what He promises He will also perform.

Life application: Have faith in God and His Word. It is the only thing that you can ever do which will restore you to Him. He has done the work; now accept what He has done and the promises which accompany it.

*Heavenly Father, I am fully convinced that the things You have promised You are also able to perform. You have said that through Jesus my sins are forgiven, and I accept that. You have said that through faith in Him I am declared righteous, and I believe that. You have said that I am granted eternal life through Him and I wait patiently for that day! Great is Your faithfulness O God. Amen.*

**And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Romans 4:22**

"And therefore..." Paul sums up the thoughts of verses 9-22 (which includes an interim "therefore" that must be considered in this thought). Because of everything he has noted, clearly laying out his defense of righteousness apart from works, he cites Genesis 15:6 - "It was accounted to him for righteousness." The word translated here is telling us that God was counting Abraham righteous because of his belief. The difference between "imputation" and "impartation" was previously detailed. Here is that difference -

Imputation: I believe the gospel and therefore I am counted as righteous.

Impartation: I believe the gospel and therefore I am righteous.

Abraham believed God and righteousness was credited to his account, even though he was still a fallible man. He knew that the Seed of the woman, promised at the fall of man, would come. Even more, he believed that He would come through him despite his circumstances. His unwavering faith in the promise of God was all that was necessary to justify him.

Life application: Take time to re-read verses 9-23 and then store away this valuable treasure trove of information. If you have called on Jesus as Lord, then you are saved. Don't let anyone tell you that you're lacking something necessary to please God. Let your works result from your salvation and not be an attempt to somehow merit it.

*My Lord and my God, when I look at the marvel of Your creation, I stand in awe of all that You have done. From you comes wonder, joy, and every good blessing. Help me to*

*live my life in a manner worthy of Your glory and to never bring dishonor upon Your great name. Amen.*

**Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,**

Romans 4:23

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul says, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Jude's epistle says the same basic thing in verse 1:7. The stories of the Old Testament aren't just written for us to read without careful consideration. Instead, they are written so that we have real examples of how God works in and through history and they are to be used in for our instruction and learning.

Having said this, it's important to understand that these are types and pictures and so care needs to be used when evaluating them. In the case of Abraham, Paul explicitly says that what is written about how righteousness was imputed to him wasn't "written for his sake alone."

We have the assurance that the pattern set down in Scripture concerning imputation was one that we can apply directly to ourselves and Paul will explain it in the next two verses.

Life application: When evaluating passages in the Bible for self-application, context is king. Understanding proper context takes an immense amount of study and contemplation. Be careful not to run ahead and attempt to apply verses or passages to your own life without understanding their full intent and purpose. Unless a concept, type, or shadow is explicitly explained, use great care in how you apply it.

*Heavenly Father, lead me to teachers of the Bible who will use care and right reasoning when teaching and preaching from it. Please keep me from those who would misapply verses or passages and give me right discernment in what I hear and believe. This I pray to Your honor and glory. Amen.*

**...but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,...** Romans 4:24

"But also for us" is tied to the previous verse which explained Genesis 15:6. Abraham simply believed God's promise and it was accounted to him for righteousness. This written account of that declaration, according to Paul, "was not written for his sake

alone." In other words, what the Bible records about Abraham serves another purpose which is that we too enter into the same state of righteousness.

And how will it occur? "It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." We learn that our justification before God comes to us by an act of faith, just as it did with Abraham. The record of Abraham's reckoning has been given to show us that the same thing will occur to us in the same way. The only difference between what occurred in Abraham and what will occur when we believe is the difference in what is known.

Abraham was given a promise and without wavering he believed. We have been given the account of Jesus and we are asked to believe it. This is the good news, and it is the foundation of our faith. There are two things to note about it. First, Paul calls Jesus "Lord" and secondly he notes that He has been raised from the dead. He will call these to mind again in chapter 10 -

"....that 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." (verse 9).

After this, he will explain how this process works –

"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (verse 10).

The pattern is set in the Old Testament and it continues and is confirmed in the New - there is only one way to be saved and works are excluded from the process. It is by faith, and faith alone that God bestows righteousness. We are to have faith that "Jesus is Lord." This means that He is the divine Son of God - fully God and fully Man. And we are to have faith that God raised Him from the dead; He has fulfilled the law on our behalf.

Life application: What does your denomination require of you? Do they say you can't eat pork? Do they say you must observe a Sabbath? Is there some other work that they tell you is necessary for you to prove you are saved? If so, it is time for you to find another place of worship. The Bible is clear, but we misunderstand. Call on Jesus as Lord, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved. Nothing else is required. Now, go share this good news.

*Lord God, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. Help me to never add to the message that I am saved by grace through faith and that this is a gift. Reassure me as*

*needed that a gift from You is an eternal bestowing of Your righteousness. When I fall short and sin, remind me that nothing can ever separate me from Your love again; that I am eternally saved through Jesus. Amen.*

**...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.** Romans 4:25

This final verse of chapter four explains the marvel of the finished work of Jesus. He "was delivered up because of our offenses." Sins committed by the fallen sons of Adam must be punished. God cannot arbitrarily overlook sin without violating His own righteousness. Every sin must be punished. And the punishment must be perfectly executed. Therefore, there are only two possibilities -

- 1) Punishment in the one who commits the sin. A finite sin committed against an infinite Creator requires an infinite punishment - condemnation and eternal separation.
- 2) Punishment in a perfect Substitute. An animal cannot substitute because it is in a different category. Another person born from man cannot substitute because that person bears Adam's sin. Thus, Jesus is the only acceptable sacrifice apart from option 1. He was born of God through a woman. He is the God/Man.

Jesus was delivered up for the sins of the world and, as Paul has clearly laid out, the justifying work of His sacrifice can only be received by faith. There is nothing we can do to add to what He has done for us. This is why Abraham is used as the preeminent example of this. Abraham looked forward in faith to the coming Messiah -

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."  
John 8:56

Is it really that hard to believe? The answer demands an affirmative. Very few in proportion to the total number of people in the world today have grasped the truth that an itinerant preacher in the little nation of Israel came to redeem the world. They reject the premise and rail against it. The only hope of their salvation is shunned because of an inability to perceive the marvelous workings of God.

However, Paul doesn't finish with the cross, but he completes the gospel by stating that Jesus "was raised because of our justification." God declared us "not guilty" through the cross of Christ. All of our sin was heaped upon Him and He bore the punishment for

what we have done. But Christ also carried our sins away. They were removed "as far as the east is from the west."

Therefore, where sin is removed, there is no longer punishment for sin. After bearing our punishment, He came back to life because it was impossible for death to hold Him. The wages of sin is death; He never sinned; therefore, He came back from the grave. He was "raised because of our justification."

In one fell swoop, God removed our sins and raised us to new life through the work of His Son. This is exactly how Paul portrays the cross and the resurrection - as a single, unified whole. They together are the work of Christ on our behalf. Now, as is recorded in 1 Corinthians 15, the victory has been realized -

"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (vs. 56, 57)

Life application: There is one and only one way to be reconciled to God the Father - through the work of Jesus Christ. God has shown us what is acceptable, and He alone has done the work. Now by simple faith in what Jesus did, we stand justified, holy, and righteous before God.

*Heavenly Father, I long for the day when I stand in Your presence and walk in Your light. And it has been made possible because of the precious Lamb without spot or blemish, my Lord Jesus. How great is Your love that You would place my sin and punishment upon Him and grant me His righteousness. I cannot grasp the depth of Your love. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 5

**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1**

Paul begins chapter 5 with "Therefore." What he has explained throughout chapter 4 is summed up in this verse. This includes the following three concepts which are contrary to justification by faith alone. He explains they have no bearing on our declaration of righteousness -

4:1-4:8: Works where wages are due

4:9-4:12: Circumcision in the flesh

4:13-4:25: Obedience to the law apart from faith

Based on these three topics, Paul proclaimed at the end of the chapter, "It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

Now, as a result of this, he gives his "therefore." Having been justified by faith (what has been explained) "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." He is writing to saved believers (those having been justified). Because of this, translators and commentators find themselves in a difficult situation. The word translated as "we have" is the Greek word *echomen* and is explained this way in Vincent's Word Studies -

"The true reading is *ἔχωμεν* - let us have; but it is difficult if not impossible to explain it. Godet says: 'No exegete has been able satisfactorily to account for this imperative suddenly occurring in the midst of a didactic development.' Some explain as a concessive subjunctive, we may have; but the use of this in independent sentences is doubtful."

Actually, the difficulty isn't as great as claimed here. The very premise of what Paul is writing is that our justification before God is one of faith. Paul is of course writing to believers, but he is also writing to skeptics, and unbelievers (his epistles were used as doctrine for anyone to hear). Further, the very premise of his previous words (instruction on what will and won't lead to justification) implies that there are those addressees who are confused enough to need the instruction in the first place.

Some of them are relying on works; some of them are relying on circumcision; and some of them are relying on obedience to the law apart from faith. Paul has been writing to

correct them and therefore "let us have peace with God" is instructing them that this corrective action is required. Faith is a volitional act of the free will. When one comes to the table with the presupposition that man doesn't have free will to choose Jesus, then of course "let us" would be a confusing thought in the midst of such instruction. But when we realize that God has granted us this right, it follows naturally that we must exercise the very act that has been explained to us.

“Therefore” - As a result of what has been said.

Having been justified by faith - You came to Christ by faith and were justified by that same faith.

Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ –

- 1) (To saved but confused souls) Continue in that faith and don't fall back on works, telling others that they need to be circumcised, or telling others that obedience to the law is necessary. Instruct them as you have been instructed.
- 2) (To the unsaved) You now know what will bring reconciliation with God, so have faith in this and don't attempt to be justified by works in order to obtain this state.

This is fully substantiated by the thoughts laid out in the book of Acts and Galatians. In Acts 15:5 it says –

"But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.'"

And again, we read this short account from Paul in Galatians 2:11-16 which involves the apostle Peter, a saved believer who was falling back on the law -

"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not



justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

Paul's use of "let us" here in Romans 5:1 is directed toward exactly such people. They were already saved believers, but they weren't standing on the truth of what saved them in the first place - faith in what Jesus did for them, apart from deeds of the law.

Life application: The Bible is a large book with many difficult issues, but the more we read it and the more we remember what we've read, the surer our knowledge of what it proclaims becomes. It is a book without contradiction or confusion. So, if we are confused, the problem lies in our understanding of the word, not in the word itself.

*My wonderful Lord! I look to You in awe. You created all things by Your wisdom and all things are sustained by Your great power. In You is no shadow or change and from You comes truth, light, and life. Make me a pleasing vessel for Your use and then fill me with Your wisdom and instruction - even until I overflow for the sake of others. Amen.*

**...through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:2**

Here is the entire thought as is stated in 5:1, 2. Read it slowly and think about what is occurring here -

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

We were enemies of God and outside of His favor when He did the unimaginable. He sent us Jesus. Now we are justified by mere faith in Him and His finished work. Because of this we are implored to have peace with God through Him. He is our peace and so through Him we enter into a new state and a new relationship with our Creator.

But there is more. Through Jesus we have access by this same justifying faith "into this grace in which we stand." The Greek word translated as "access" is used only 3 times in the New Testament and all three occurrences indicate a face-to-face interactive access. JB Lightfoot describes it as "having audience (direct access) with God." This is an immediate and continuing blessing of having called on Jesus by faith.

Not only is it immediate and continuing, but it is something "in which we stand." The verb "stand" is perfect, indicative, active - the action is accomplished, it is a fact, and it is

on-going. In Christ, we stand; we do not fall. What He has done in us is complete and will not pass away. What occurs here is explained in 2 Corinthians 5:21 - "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The position we find ourselves in before God is in Christ's standing, not our own. We could as much lose this standing as Christ Himself could. God has favored us, not because of our own merits, but because of the work of Jesus.

But there is yet more. Through this same faith we also "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." This is our future benefit and which we wait on as we stand on the surety of what has occurred. In God's mind, this action is already complete. Paul says in Romans 8:30 that those "whom He justified, these He also glorified." We are merely waiting for this final state and as we do, we can rejoice in this hope.

Life application: If you're feeling beaten up because you've failed Jesus, be reassured in this verse. If you have faith in Him, you are saved, you will remain saved, and you will be glorified for all eternity. What you see as a difficult walk of repeated failure and trial, God sees as already accomplished. He has done the work, have faith in that and let your hope be filled with rejoicing.

*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Until the day I stand in Your presence, I know that I am secure in Your Son. What I could never have done, He did on my behalf. In Him I stand and in Him I rejoice in the hope of Your glory. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;** Romans 5:3

This is a similar thought to what James says in his letter -

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." James 1:2, 3

Not only do we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (v.2), but we further glory in tribulations. The word used here is *thlipsis*. It carries the idea of pressure, such as being hemmed in a small tight spot. When we face trials, which would otherwise cause us to lose control, we can instead glory in them. As the world around us falls apart due to the external crises which arise, we understand that God is in control and that these types of tribulation only serve us in a positive way; they produce perseverance.

If we feel that the world is out of control, then all sense of hope is lost. When this happens, we will look to the government or some other entity to secure us and keep us

safe. However, the Christian should understand that the trials and woes of the world around us are a part of God's plan. Whether He causes them directly or merely allows them, all things are within His providence and therefore we are to look to Him as the Source of our strength.

The difference is wider than the seas. Looking to anything less than God for help in tribulation will not produce patience. Instead, it will only produce greater fear and a loss of freedom. But when we look to God during these trials, we appreciate that He is in complete control and our resolve will only be strengthened.

Life application: In the recent past, more bombers did their evil work. We need to look to the root cause of this and understand that it did not occur apart from God's sovereign knowledge. The perpetrators are no less guilty, but we need to be strengthened in the perseverance of our faith - that God alone can bring peace to this troubled land.

*Heavenly Father, as surely as the sunrise tells us a new day is coming, so does the beginning of a new prayer tell us that comfort is ahead. When we open our hearts to You, it is sure that You are attentive to our prayers. And because of Jesus, we have complete and full access to Your glorious throne. Where is fear when we stand in Your presence? Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**... and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:4**

The previous verse noted that tribulation produces perseverance. From that point the perseverance produces character. Some translations state here "experience" instead of "character." It is true that experience is gained, but that is not the sense of what's being relayed. Experience can result in admitting defeat as much as it can result in obtaining strength. Experience therefore isn't at all what is intended by this train of thought. Rather, perseverance is the experience, and it results in character. When one perseveres, they will be grounded with fortitude and strength.

Once this character is developed, it leads to hope. Hope is that great virtue which says, "What I long for will be realized." When we have hope we have internal surety. The thought from Hebrews 12:2 carries us through this entire process - "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus." When we look unto Him, we can glory in our tribulations thus producing perseverance; our eyes are fixed, and our thoughts are steadfast. When we persevere, we develop character and our convictions become evident as we continue to look to Him. Once this character is grounded, our eyes look to Him in hope of all that He has promised. Truly, there is no greater assurance than that which comes through an intent and unwavering gaze upon the Lord.

Life application: Either the Bible is true, or it isn't. There is no middle ground. If it is, then it is all-sufficient to lead you to an understanding of what is necessary to be reconciled to God. No matter what happens in your life, hold fast to the word, fix your eyes on Jesus, and have faith that your hope will be realized by the God of truth.

*O Lord my God, thank You for life's trials which have molded me and strengthened me. As they've come, I've often felt that they were more than I could bear. But as I look back on them, I realize that they were given to refine me, build me up, and shape me to be a person of faith. I can see the wisdom of every trial I've faced, and I thank You for being with me through them all. Amen.*

**Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:5**

This verse leads us back to verse 2. Paul has explained, in sequence, how we get to our hope and what causes us to rejoice in it. We are justified by our faith which allows us to actually glory in our tribulations. This in turn produces perseverance, character, and hope. It is this hope and the sequence of how it came about that Paul tells us will keep us from disappointment.

A hope which is falsely directed will only lead to shame or disappointment. If we hope to meet the prom queen at the burger stand in the evening and she doesn't show up, our hope was in vain and we feel the sting of rejection. But Paul says that the hope we have in Christ simply won't fail. We have the surety of God in that what He has promised will come about. Writing to Timothy, Paul tells of his convictions of this, even as he wrote from prison expecting execution -

"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day." 2 Timothy 1:12

The surety of our salvation and eternal blessing in the presence of God isn't a misdirected fancy or a wasted use of our faith. It is as reliable as the evidence given - "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The term "poured out" is from a word which is used to describe a liquid which is diffused as it's poured. It fills a vessel completely. This is the giving of the Holy Spirit by God. It is, according to Paul, a sealing which is a deposit guaranteeing our future redemption (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

When we are sealed with the Spirit, Paul tells us to be "filled" with the Spirit. We have received Him; now we must allow Him to have more of us. This comes through obedience, fellowship, study of His word, etc. These things lead us to our hope which is properly grounded.

Life application: Be filled with the Spirit. The moment you called on Jesus, you were sealed with Him. Now allow Him to fill you. Read and know your Bible, the word He authored for You to know God. Speak to Him through praise and prayer. Live in Him and rejoice in what He has done and what He has promised to do for you.

*Lord God, I have a sure and unwavering hope in the promises found in Your word. I know that every good thing which is spoken of there will come to pass. And so, I will wait patiently for those things as I walk in this difficult and trouble-filled world. Give me strength to endure each trial I face until that great Day when I stand in Your presence. Amen.*

**For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.**

Romans 5:6

There will be three categories of man noted in the five verses from 5:6 to 5:10, all summed up in the concept of the "ungodly." The first is in 5:6, those who are "without strength." Then "sinners" are noted in 5:8 and this is followed up by "enemies" in 5:10. Paul is showing that all categories, from the top to the bottom, need Christ.

He begins with "for." This is an affirmation of what was stated in 5:1-5:5.

- 1) We have been justified by faith;
- 2) We have peace with God;
- 3) We have access by faith into the grace in which we stand;
- 4) We hope in the glory of God. This came from the process of tribulations, perseverance, and character; and
- 5) We have God's love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The use of "for" introduces the affirming reasons why these things are so. The first is that something occurred "when we were still without strength." The word translated as "without strength" indicates one that is feeble. It was, as it were, a disease which afflicted us. It is an apt comparison because sin is a disease which affects our ability to proceed in a right relationship with God. The disease must be treated before we can proceed, and it was. When we were without strength to save ourselves, "Christ died for the ungodly."

The "ungodly" here is a comparison to those who were "without strength." The intent then is that Christ died for the very people we were, weak and unable to accomplish the task. The implication is that He is godly and is making an exchange. Paul will explain this as he continues.

Life application: It is easy to forget the state we were in after being saved for a time. We begin to develop in our walk and eventually we look at those around us as ungodly sinners who deserve God's wrath. While this is true, we need to remember that this was once us. Instead of feeling superior to the sinner, we need to remember that we were in the same boat. We were given the lifeline and now we need to pass it on, not hold it out of reach.

*Lord, I once stood as a poor beggar needing bread and You provided it to me. I know there are many around me who need what I needed. Help me to remember that I was in the same place as they are, and someone took the time to tell me about You. Now, help me to act in the same charitable manner toward others. Help me to be gracious in offering what I have received. Amen.*

**For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.** Romans 5:7

The thought now presented is given to show us a contrast between how we as humans are normally expected to act in comparison to how our Lord in fact did act. We were just presented with the truth that, "...when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." In continuation of that thought, we have a repetition of "for." It is introduced to offset what we have just seen concerning Christ.

Christ died for the ungodly, but what is the normal and expected action of fallen man? In him we see the truth that it would be an extreme exception (scarcely) "for a righteous man will one die." A righteous man is someone we see who is upright and obedient to the laws he encounters. A righteous man, if any, is the one who expects that he will "walk on the golden streets." Everyone looks to him as the model and example of what we should also obtain. What would be the point of dying for such a man? We have no intimacy with him. We merely see his act and conduct and may wish to emulate it, but the giving of our life for his would be self-defeating. If he will somehow miss the mark and not walk on that golden avenue, then how much less of a chance would we have? Rather, he will die, and I will do my best to emulate him before I do so as well.

Paul continues - "Yes perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die." We look around us at those we love, those we care for, and those we live our lives with in a

close and personal manner. Among these people are what we might term "really good guys." They are amicable, friendly, loving of others, honest, without pretense, etc. They are the people who lead as the example for others to be the best they can be. Their loss would make the world a less-better place and we would always regret it if we could have interceded for them and did not.

Perhaps from time to time someone would dare to die for one such as this. And so, we have the contrast set and which will be explained in the coming verse. Christ died for the ungodly when we would fail to die for the righteous and most probably fail to do so even for the good. What manner of beings are we? And more so, what manner of Lord do we serve? How could there be such a contrast between the two?

Life application: If you are a saved believer in Jesus Christ, would you "jump on a grenade" for a group of criminals who were intent on killing you? Each of them bears God's image and without another chance to hear the good news they will be eternally condemned. You, on the other hand, are on the highway to heaven already. Which death actually makes more sense from God's perspective?

*Lord God, I look around at the immense wickedness of the world in which I live, and I loathe what I see. But I cannot hide the fact that I was once Your enemy too. Apart from Your great love and the mercy which You bestowed upon me, I was on the same path to eternal separation from You. Help me to pity those who so desperately need You and to be a light of Your truth to them. Amen.*

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8**

The wonderful word "but" is introduced now. But -

In contrast to those who are without strength.

In contrast those who are ungodly.

In contrast to those who would scarcely die for a righteous man.

In contrast to those who might dare to die for a good man.

But God... The action is taken by the Creator. He is the One above those low and base souls represented in categories 1 through 4.

He is the Source of all strength.

He is God and therefore the wellspring of all godliness.

He is the Standard of all righteousness.

"Goodness" is defined by how closely it reflects His infinite goodness.

He is our great God who spoke the universe into existence and who could speak it out of existence with the same authority - this infinitely wise and splendid God! He "demonstrates His own love toward us..." While we rebel, reject, mock, and curse Him, He imparts an eternal stream of love in our direction. The verb "demonstrates" is written in the present/indicative/active. It is right now, it is a fact, and it is on-going. The explanation of the word is as relative today as it was the moment the ink flowed from the scribe's pen.

He demonstrates this action "toward us." What is coming is available to whoever the statement applies. In Paul's mind, it applies to all human beings descended from Adam. It is the get-well card from a loving Creator to His sick children. And it tells us the remedy which will cure our ills - "In that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Scarcely will one die for a righteous man and for a good man someone might consider dying. O but God sent His own beloved Son to die for a world full of sinners. Christ Jesus - the only human being born without sin and the only person ever to meet the righteous requirements of God's holy law, this Christ Jesus - died for us while we were still sinners. The remedy is given, and the choice is now ours.

Life application: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The deed is complete when we accept it and its effects are final and eternal. But the memory shouldn't be final - forgiven yes, but forgotten no. We need to remember that we were lost so that we can empathize with those who still are. Let us not think so highly of ourselves that we forget that One - much, much higher than us - died not just for us, but for those who come after us as well.

*Lord God, when I was lost in a sea of sin, You reached out and brought me to the safe and pleasant shore. Help me to remember that I couldn't save myself, but You alone did the work. I have no right to boast over what You have done, and I dare not turn away from others who are in the same spot I was in. Help me to continue to proclaim the good news to them as well. Amen.*

**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. Romans 5:9**

"Much more...." This phrase will be given by Paul five times throughout chapter five. It will demonstrate that what was lost is insignificant to what is gained through Christ for



those who are redeemed. What Adam had cannot compare to what we have; what Adam lost is regained and added to because of Jesus.

The "much more" of verse nine directly explains the previous statement of verse eight - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." When this happened, we were "justified by His blood." We were declared not guilty because of His substitutionary death. In essence, a pardon is offered and by faith the pardon is granted. Because of this wonderful act which occurred while we were still sinners, how much more then shall we "be saved from wrath through Him."

If God reconciled us to Himself while we were sinners, then what happens after that time must be based on a sinless relationship. In other words, justification isn't something that happens and then can be lost. It is something that happens once forever. It is simply impossible to consider the writings of Arminius and Wesley who taught that one can "lose" their salvation. What kind of "much more" is that? It demonstrates a flawed theology and a lack of understanding the efficacy of the work of Christ.

As Albert Barnes notes: [He] "bestows a value on us proportionate to the worth of the price of our redemption; and is a pledge that he will keep what has been so dearly bought." The price of our redemption is the life of Christ - the God/Man. No higher price could be paid and therefore no higher value could ever be placed upon our redemption. The work of Christ doesn't just potentially justify us. Rather His work actually justifies us.

Because we are pardoned, we are also justified, and so we shall be spared from His wrath. There can be no punishment for crimes which have been pardoned; the payment has been made. The only thing our deeds after salvation will bring is rewards and loss of rewards, not a retrial for condemnation or salvation.

Life application: In Christ, we can truly say - "No fear here!"

*When we were still sinners, You sent the Messiah to take the punishment we deserve. Justice has been served and You made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become Your righteousness in Him. How could You love Your rebellious creatures so much? I will spend my days searching out the mysteries of Christ and the glory of His work. Amen.*

**For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Romans 5:10**

"For" again begins Paul's thought. He is reasserting and building on what was just noted. There was a time when we were enemies of God, but Christ came and reconciled us to Him. Reconciliation isn't something that God needs from us. Rather, it is something that we need from God. We were reconciled "to" God through the death of His son. The enmity ended, and the hostility ceased.

Imagine a battleline where there is an overwhelming attacking power facing a weak and defenseless one. There is only the expectation of complete annihilation of the weak forces; their doom is assured, and they will be utterly swept away. But when the crisis is at the moment of completion, the hostilities cease and the commander of the attacking forces steps forward and lays his weapons of destruction down in the presence of the astonished defenders. He calls out, "We are offering you peace."

This is the state we were in. There was absolutely no hope. We were on a one-way avenue to destruction when God stepped in and offered us terms of peace; He offered Jesus. Now think it through... if we were enemies in this situation and He did this because of His own goodness and benevolence by offering His Son, then how "much more, having been reconciled" shall we be saved by His life.

In other words, and without muddying the waters with any other issue or verse - we are eternally saved. Why would God allow Christ to go through all of the torture of the cross, thus offering us peace and reconciliation, just to turn and condemn us after we accepted the terms? It is inconceivable and such a notion diminishes the glory, the majesty, and the reliability of the work of Christ. In Christ, there is the sure hope of eternal salvation, not eternal insecurity.

Life application: Take time today to read the theology of the church or denomination that you attend. If they teach that you can lose your salvation, you need to make new arrangements for your worship. The efficacy of the cross of Christ is complete and eternal. Why would you attend where such a glorious hope is traded for bondage and insecurity?

*Heavenly Father, the battle lines were set, and I was on the wrong side, ready to be crushed. But You sent terms of peace and reconciliation. Jesus stepped forward and offered Himself to end the hostilities. The greater Force took the initiative. How could I turn from such wonder and goodness? I accept the offer; I receive the peace, and I thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. Romans 5:11**

Paul, adding on to the previous verse says, "And not only that..." In addition to the amazing fact that we were reconciled to God through Jesus' death and saved by His life, we have the wondrous prospect of rejoicing in God through Him. In 5:2 we were told that we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but in Christ we can also actually rejoice in God Himself. The reason why this can happen is because Jesus is the full expression of God. We see this in several verses in the New Testament. Two of them are cited below. The first is from Jesus' words and the second is from Paul's letter to the Colossians -

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" John 14:9

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."  
Colossians 1:15

If we rejoice in Christ Jesus, then we are rejoicing in God through Him as well. He is the point of reconciliation between God and man and therefore the focus of our rejoicing. In this particular verse, the older King James Version uses the word "atonement" instead of "reconciliation." This may lead the modern reader to a misunderstanding of what is meant.

The word atonement as used in the Old Testament is the means of reconciliation - the sacrifice which brings it about. This isn't what's intended here. Instead, it is speaking about the reconciliation itself. The old English use of the word implied "at-one-ment." It is the state in which we find ourselves. We are fully and completely reconciled to God because of Jesus. Great stuff.

Life application: The fact that we are reconciled to God is something that we should attempt to remember at all times. When we fall short and stumble in our walk, we should keep in mind that we are His and that we are united to Him. Therefore, it is good and proper to return our heart to Him with humility and acknowledge His presence. We are reconciled, it is a done deal, therefore let us not act in a manner which is unworthy of that state.

*O God, I know that through Jesus I have full and complete restoration to You. Help me to remember this, even when I fall short and stray from Your precepts. If I can just remember this fact, then I will be more strengthened in my ability to turn back to You and press on in Your good graces. What a point of rejoicing! Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— Romans 5:12**

The discourse of Romans 5:12-5:21 is extremely complicated, exceedingly delicate, and highly debated. It is given among other reasons to show the contrast between Adam and Christ and the nature of sin versus the nature of righteousness.

There are several prevalent views on the nature of man and His state before God. These go from the concept of man being totally depraved and incapable of choosing any good at all at one end, to man being born without inheriting Adam's sin but having the consequences of sin imputed to him when he first sins during his lifetime.

Great care needs to be taken here to understand our nature and our state before God. If our view of this is faulty, then pretty much everything else that we believe about our relationship with God will be affected as well.

The Bible, from its very first pages is clear, Adam fell and through him "sin entered the world." Adam, who was created outside of the Garden of Eden and then placed in the garden, sinned. When he did, he was cast back out of the Garden. However, before he sinned, God told him that "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Adam did in fact eat of the fruit and was cast out, but he continued to live to the age of 930. This tells us that the death God was speaking of was not physical death, but spiritual - although our physical death is also a part of our fallen state. Paul notes that through Adam's disobedience, sin entered the world, "and death through sin." Adam's spiritual death was immediate, and it was a consequence of his sin.

The moment that Adam spiritually died, there was a chasm placed between God and man which could not be traversed by man. In His spiritually dead state, there was nothing in his power that would allow him to become spiritually revived. Further, because Adam was in the stream of time, he couldn't go back and undo what he had done. Time moved on and the consequences of his sin continued.

Paul now moves to the thought which is so highly displeasing to the fallen sons of Adam and which is so divisive within theological circles. He notes that Adam's death (which was spiritual death) was a result of sin and "thus spread to all men, because all sinned." What the Genesis account clearly shows, and which follows throughout the rest of the Old Testament, and also which necessitated the coming of Christ, is that all humans have inherited Adam's sin. All humans are in Adam in three ways - legally, potentially, and seminally.

Legally - Adam is our federal head. He is the first man from whom all other men come. Just as the president of the United States represents its citizens, so Adam represents all who come from Adam. Paul deals with this in 1 Corinthians 15.

Potentially - It says in Genesis 5:3, 4, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters." We have no idea how many children Adam had. It could have been 10 or it could have been 150. All were potentially in him and all that were actually born actually came from him. In the same way, any normally functioning person could have any number of children or no children. Every person who comes after them is potentially in them and a jillion other possible people could come from that same stream.

Seminally - Acts 17:26 says, "...and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth." Again, in Hebrews 7 Levi is said to be in the loins of Abraham and thus he paid tithes to Melchizedek even though he wasn't yet born and wouldn't come for three more generations. He was seminally in his father before he ever existed.

All of us are in Adam in these three ways and thus we all bear his sin in these ways. We are born spiritually dead. This is demonstrated by the account of Cain and Abel and what occurred during their lives. There is a sentence of condemnation hanging over our heads from the moment of our conception and it is merely waiting to be executed. Something external needs to be introduced in order for the sentence to move us from condemnation to restoration.

What this is will be analyzed in the coming verses.

Life application: We are all in Adam from the moment we are conceived. We bear Adam's guilt. But God has sent a remedy to cure this fallen state. Are you going to trust in your own righteousness before God when you are already fallen? Or will you trust in God's provision to bring about restoration? Choose wisely.

*Glorious Almighty God! When I rise in the morning, You are there. As I wander through my day, You are at my side. When I lay down again in the stillness of my thoughts, help me to contemplate all that You have done for me once again in another day of life. You faithfully carry me through each day; how much more will You carry me through to Your loving arms? Thank You for Your continued presence in my life. Amen.*

**For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

Romans 5:13

This verse is speaking about the Law of Moses. Prior to that law, there was sin in the world. This sin, as was previously noted, was introduced by Adam's rebellion. From that moment, all born into humanity inherited Adam's sin. Sin was at work and yet because there was no law given, sin wasn't imputed. Does this mean that the people were guiltless? No. The reason is that they inherited Adam's sin. Therefore, they were guilty through Adam.

In addition to this, there is the law of conscience which was explained in Romans 2. As he said there, people "show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them." We stand guilty before God when we violate the natural laws which are instilled in our hearts.

What Paul is speaking of in 5:13 is the specific revelation of the Law of Moses. Violations of this law are not imputed to people who have not been given this law. How can someone be held guilty for a law that doesn't exist? As Paul says, "For until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

If a policeman came up to you and said, "You are under arrest for having a black car," you might wonder what he's talking about. There is no law against having a black car. However, if the legislators at the state capital passed a law which outlawed black cars, then you could be arrested for having a black car. The Law of Moses set down particular rules for a particular set of people. When they broke those laws, they were guilty before the law. Those outside of that law cannot be held guilty for such a law though.

Later in chapter 5, we will see a reason why the law was introduced. Paul elsewhere (such as in Galatians) explains other reasons for the giving of the law. In the end, the law is an important aspect of what God is doing in the stream of human existence, but it is not an end in and of itself. It only points us to something else; something which we desperately need.

Life application: There are different programs going on in the pages of the Bible which are introduced for different reasons and they may apply at certain times, but not at others. It's important to understand when something applies and when it doesn't. If we mix these programs inappropriately, then our understanding of God's work becomes convoluted. The Law of Moses, which was given to Israel, is such a program. It applied at

a certain time to a specific group of people. Christ Jesus fulfilled that law on our behalf. Don't reinsert that law now that it has been fulfilled.

*Thank You Lord for the beauty of Your word. It's a big and complicated book that I can come to again and again to find new treasures, and yet its overall message is so simple that a child can understand it - we have turned from You and yet You have reached out to us in love through Your Son to call us back to You. I accept His work; I receive Jesus. Amen.*

**Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.** Romans 5:14

This verse clarifies a concept which is implicitly stated in the very first chapters of the Bible. That man sinned and death came as a result of sin. The death being spoken of here, and which will become evident by the time 5:21 is reached, is spiritual death. Adam was given a single commandment. He was told that if he broke that law, death would result, "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:17

Adam did in fact violate the commandment and yet he continued to live physically for a full 930 years. This implies that what God spoke of was spiritual death and this is the premise that Paul writes from. The physical death that man experiences is a result of the spiritual death that occurred. God, in His wisdom, removed access to the Tree of Life. This is recorded in Genesis 3 - "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever...'"

An eternally alive, but spiritually dead being would be a cosmic calamity. The wickedness of such a being would continue to grow throughout the ages. If man can wreak as much havoc as Hitler or Stalin did in such a few years, imagine the depths of depravity of an eternal, but fallen being!

Paul's comment based on the previous verse is "Nevertheless" - Notwithstanding the fact that sin is not imputed where there is no law, "death reigned from Adam to Moses." Why? Because all people are sons of Adam and have inherited his fallen state. This is true "even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam." In other words, death reigns in all of Adam's race even if they didn't commit the same type of transgression as he did; the fallen state is inherited.

However, and despite this sad news, we are given an introduction to Another. Paul says that Adam is "a type of Him who was to come." The Bible is given to us to show the contrast between the two and the remedy which is found in this "second Adam."

Life application: When Jesus said, "No one is good but One, that is, God" He was making an absolute claim. Only God is good. In order to be reconciled to Him, we must share in His goodness. The only way that this is possible is to have that state imputed to us by the merits of another perfectly good being. What is implied then is that if we are reconciled to God through Jesus, then Jesus must be God. Stand firm on the truth of the Bible, even if it is difficult to comprehend.

*Lord God, despite our error and our turning away, You have restored us to You, just as You promised at the very beginning. You said that You would send One to right the wrong of Adam and He came and pitched His tent among us. What an amazing and glorious work You have wrought for Adam's fallen sons. Great are Your ways, O God. Amen.*

**But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.** Romans 5:15

Paul is showing the parallel between Adam and Christ. But, although the lines are parallel in direction, they are vastly different in altitude. Where Adam's line runs in a downward motion, Christ's soars to the heavens. We see the contrast with the word "but." Death entered the world and death reigned over man... but. "But the free gift is not like the offense." The gift referred to is the work of Jesus. What He did is not at all like what Adam did.

"For if by one man's offense" is speaking of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam had one rule to follow, and he failed to do so. By this one transgression "many died." This is the state of the world as explained by Paul. Every person born from the time of Adam died the moment Adam died. Because we were "in" Adam though not yet born, we inherited the spiritually dead state that he earned.

However, in Christ there is a difference. Adam's line plummeted to the depths of the grave, but Christ's line will take a different path. "Much more" shows us the divergence of the lines. What Adam did brought death to man, but "much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many."



Adam was created sinless; Jesus was born sinless. Adam sinned; Jesus never sinned. Adam's disobedience brought about immediate spiritual death to all people and eventual physical death to all; Christ's obedience - being far superior to Adam's disobedience - brought about the possibility of immediate eternal spiritual life to any and all who will receive it and eventual eternal physical life to all of the same. Adam's failure resulted in the wages of death; Christ's triumph brought about the gift of God's grace which is eternal life.

The gift is superior in all ways, but it is a gift. A gift is not forced, just as wages are not a gift. Wages are earned, but gifts are received. The truth that must be understood is that just as Adam freely chose to disobey (it was not an act which can be ascribed to God in any way) the lost son of Adam must freely choose to receive the gift offered by God.

*Note:* The term "free gift" is a redundancy. The original Greek simply uses the term *charisma*, meaning "grace." If something has a price attached to it, it is neither "free" nor a "gift." If it is free, it is a gift and if it is a gift, it is free.

Life application: Life itself is a gift. It is unmerited, and therefore we cannot complain about how ours turns out. Some people live long, healthy lives; some people live short, pain-filled lives. Some are rich; some are poor. Some are born in Japan; some are born in Canada. These things in no way imply that God is unfair. The same is true with our salvation. God offered His Son in payment for our sins. We cannot call God unfair if we reject this offer, nor can we claim He is unfair if we never heard the good news. Time and place are His decision, but if the gift is available, it is up to us to receive it. Don't refuse the grace of God found in Jesus... it is a blessing of eternal value.

*Lord God Almighty - how can I complain about my place of birth, the year in which I was born, or the family I came through? These decisions belong to You and Your wisdom. My life is a product of Your placement, but into this life came an offer - a new family and a new direction. Into my life came Jesus. Thank You for giving me the gift of eternal life and adoption as Your son through His work. What a glorious God You are! Amen.*

**And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. Romans 5:16**

There are different views on our state as human beings before God. Some say that we don't bear Adam's guilt at all. Some say we bear it after our first committed sin. And then there is the premise that we are "in" Adam and bear his guilt. The final option is the only biblically acceptable answer. The other two options come from an emotional

response to the state of those who have died - maybe based on age or on whether they have or have not been given the gospel. In other words, for many theologians, the thought of death and its consequences is something that moves them emotionally in the direction of a stand which is unbiblical.

However, proper theology cannot be based on emotions. We are to be impassionate in our evaluation, acceptance, and instruction concerning the truths the Bible contains. Passion is to be a result of our understanding of God's word, not the basis for it. When we set aside our emotions, we allow God to be God. He is the ultimate authority of our relationship with Him.

It is immensely hard to look at someone who is in emotional distress over the death of a loved one who was probably not saved and tell them that there is one way to be reconciled to God and that it is through the work of Jesus. And not only is it through Jesus' work, but that His work came as a response to the misdeed of Adam, thus implying that all human beings are "in" Adam and must move "to" Christ. But this is what the Bible teaches - both implicitly and explicitly.

Paul tells us that "the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned." The gift is Jesus; the one who sinned is Adam. He is making a contrast between the two. Adam's deeds went in one direction, but Christ's head in another. Next Paul states, "for" in order to show where the contrast leads.

He initiates the thought with "the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation." This is Adam's sin, and it is universal in its scope. There are no exemptions for age, level of intelligence, living in a land where the gospel hasn't been preached, etc. All are in Adam and the judgment was pronounced on the human race because of his transgression. When he sinned, judgment resulted in condemnation. However, in the same verse we are given the good news - "the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification."

The gift as noted is Jesus. His work stands in opposition to Adam's offense and provides the release needed from Adam's authority to that of Christ. It also results in our justification in opposition to Adam's condemnation. This is the greatness of the work of Christ. Where man failed, Jesus prevailed. Where God was rejected, through Christ we are accepted. Where man stood condemned because of our earthly father, he can now stand justified because of the gift of our heavenly Father.

Is it fair that man who hasn't heard the gospel stands condemned? The answer is yes. Adam was given both the gift of sinless life and the gift of free will. Adam willingly

rejected the authority of his Creator when he exercised his free will. Along with this came his free will to procreate in his fallen state. Because he did, every person's life after him has been a decision of man to continue in the state we are in. But from the beginning there was the promise that this state wouldn't last forever. For those who have put their faith in this promise, there is a better hope.

When Christ came, He was the fulfillment of that hope and now a new direction is possible for the human race. But it must come by the same free will. This is why Jesus gave the great commission. If a person who had never heard the gospel could be saved, then it would be better to never tell anyone what Jesus did. But this would be completely contrary to the biblical message.

Life application: When evaluating the Bible's message, be sure to keep your emotions from dictating your theology. Rather, let your theology dictate your emotions. When you see the glory of what God has done for you, rejoice in the message with all of your heart. And then let your heart be broken for those who haven't yet heard it and determine in yourself to get the word out so that they too can know the glory of God in the Person of Jesus!

*Heavenly Father, I know that I am here for a reason and that my life can bring You great glory if I live according to Your will. So, Lord, please continue leading me to the truth of who You are and what You have done. When I know Your will, then help me to align my life and actions in a way which will bring You the most glory. Use me for Your good purposes O God. Amen.*

**For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Romans 5:17**

This verse is taking what was previously explained and re-explaining it in a condensed way - "For if..."

"For if by the one man's offense death reigned..." This one man is Adam. Only one offense occurred because there was only one command given. This is to show us the magnitude of sin. One man, the only man on earth, was given one command, "You shall not...", and he violated that command. Because he disobeyed, the Bible teaches that "death reigned through the one."

This one offense by the one man caused death to enter the world and it spread to all people from him. Remember, this is a "spiritual death." When he sinned, he continued

to live physically for 930 years even though he was told he would "die" on the day he ate of the fruit. The death was spiritual, and it resulted in a chasm between the man and his Creator. Physical death was merely a consequence of the spiritual death. This death reigns in all humans and it came about by an act of the volitional will.

However, next comes the introduction of the Good News; the fulfillment of the promise which was given moments after the fall. Christ came to undo Adam's misdeed. We are told that if this one offense committed by this one man caused death to reign, "much more those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." This is stated to show the contrast between the magnitude of even one sin and the overwhelming majesty of the work of Christ.

It is almost beyond comprehension to consider! Those who will simply "receive" what Christ has done will "reign in life." The contrast is absolute - where death reigned through offense, we can now reign in life through the gift. The "much more" comes in a variety of ways. Adam was created, but Christ is the Creator. Adam sinned in innocence, but Christ prevailed with knowledge. Adam had only one command to obey, but Christ was born under the law. Adam was never exposed to other sin (before the fall); Jesus walked throughout His life in a world of sin. Adam died for his own sin, but Christ died for our sins.

As has happened numerous times so far in the New Testament, and which will continue to occur throughout its pages, a word which requires action on the part of the lost soul is used. One must "receive" what is offered. Just as Adam's fall was because of sin, which was willful, our restoration must come about by faith which is willful. The concept of God, "regenerating" a person to believe is unbiblical. We are dead spiritually, but we are not dead beings. We have a free-will and we must exercise it.

The importance of this cannot be understated because if man is "regenerated" in order to believe as Calvinism teaches, then there is truly no point in evangelizing anyone. If God chooses those who will believe apart from the free will of the individual, then the work is already done; the Great Commission isn't really so great. But when we understand the magnitude of our sitting by idly and not telling others about the Lord, we will be impelled to act and to tell of the greatness of the work of Christ as is revealed in this verse.

For reasons such as were noted concerning His act, "much more!" Because of Jesus' work, those who receive Him are granted not just grace, but an abundance of it. Those who receive him move from death to life. Those who receive Him move from abasement to supremacy. The thought of this verse is one of superabundance in that

what was wrecked is now restored, plus. It is the grandeur of a plan conceived in the halls of eternity and instituted in the stream of time. It is the surest guarantee of eternal life and absolute security. It is the gift of God. It is Jesus.

Life application: Much more is much more. We are completely fallen in Adam; we are completely rescued in Christ. Adam failed and you came from him; Christ prevailed, and you moved to Him. Stand fast in the truth that Christ is completely capable of saving.

*If the sunrise is beautiful, how much more the One who painted it? If the body is intricate, resilient, and magnificently woven, how much more glorious is the One who fashioned it? If Adam brought death, how much more will Christ restore to life? In all ways, You are exalted O God. I am humbled at the splendor of Your majesty. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. Romans 5:18**

"Therefore" - because of what has been presented we can now make the following conclusions. "As through one man's offense" is speaking of Adam and his disobeying the Lord. Because of this offense, "judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation." This is universal in scope. No human being born of a man is exempt from this statement. It's important to keep reminding ourselves that the death which occurred because of Adam's offense was initially spiritual in nature. Physical death was a result of the spiritual death.

If this point is overlooked or ignored, then the fallen state of man is suddenly presented as something not inherited by conception, but is inherited by circumstance. What is proposed then is that we aren't truly "in Adam" in the fullest sense; physical death is inherited, but spiritual death isn't. This is contrary to the entire premise of Scripture, but it is a tenet which theologians cling to because of emotional responses to the world as they perceive it.

Paul says it is otherwise. All men are condemned through Adam, without exception. However, the good news is given in this same verse. "Even so" indicates "in the same manner." Just as happened through Adam will now happen through Christ. "Through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men." This Man is Jesus. His righteous act, His death on our behalf, is now available to all men, "resulting in justification of life." This is also universal in scope; however, it is universal potentially, not actually. In

other words, Jesus' work is available to all, but it will not be realized in all. One must choose Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul says -

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

One must move from Adam to Christ (be "in" Christ) for the change to be realized. All are in Adam and all die; all are offered Christ and shall be made alive if they are in Christ. This understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:22 is accurate because elsewhere the Bible makes it clear that condemnation remains for those who are apart from Christ.

Understanding this, we can see that there are three types of imputation being spoken of in this one verse -

- 1) The imputation of Adam's sin to all humanity (with the caveat that sin transfers through the male, thus Christ did not inherit Adam's sin).
- 2) The imputation of man's sin to Christ, which occurs by faith in Him. This includes all sin, both that imputed from Adam and that which is committed by the individual.
- 3) The imputation of Christ's righteousness to man who has demonstrated faith in God's provision through Christ.

Life application: One sin resulted in condemnation for man. If this could be repeated after coming to Christ, it would be repeated continuously until our death. The good news is that receiving Christ is a one-time event. The efficacy of Christ's work is absolute, complete, and eternal. Stand fast in this. You are saved despite yourself.

*Heavenly Father, You alone know the dark thoughts which arise in my mind and the black recesses of my heart. Search me, O God, and purify me from my secret faults. Cleanse me and make me a vessel worthy of the precious contents I possess - the Gift of Your Spirit. May my life and my actions be pleasing to You and edifying to others. Amen.*

**For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.** Romans 5:19

Building on what he said in 5:18, Paul shows the result of Adam's offense and Jesus' righteous act - the contrast is clear. Adam's disobedience is contrasted with Jesus' obedience. The outcome is that through Adam humanity became sinners; through Jesus' humanity will be made righteous.

As the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), humanity dies, but through Jesus, eternal life can be restored (John 3:16).

For those who remain in Adam, there will be "outer darkness" (Matthew 25:30), but for those who move to Christ there will be eternal light (Revelation 21:23).

The words here are meant to inspire us to reach out for the cross and to receive the work of Jesus. It is hard to imagine the decision to reject Him, but He indicated that it is in our nature to desire our spiritually blinded state –

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19

Everything around Jesus' words in John 3:19 indicates that if we are willing to open our eyes, we can see the light and step into it. When that choice is made, its effects are glorious. Adam's misdeed is overturned by the work of Christ.

Life application: How long did you walk in darkness before you came to the light? Don't give up on those who have turned down Jesus, but keep praying for them and being a witness to them of the path which will restore them to God. Keep sharing Jesus with them.

*Heavenly Father, I can't claim to know it all - Your word is filled with wisdom that I will search throughout my life. But I know this, I know that my Redeemer lives and that through Him, You have restored me to You. All the enmity of the past is gone and now I stand forgiven, free, and on the path to eternal glory. Thank You for my Lord. Amen.*

**Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, Romans 5:20**

The previous verses concerned Adam's trespass in contrast to Christ's obedience. Paul demonstrated the superiority of Christ's work in all ways concerning the two and the glory of what He accomplished. Now Paul returns to the thought in verse 5:13,

"For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

Sin was in the world and death reigned even though the law had not yet been introduced. However, or as Paul says it, "Moreover..." The "moreover" is intended to highlight the incomprehensible nature of God's grace. The contrast between Adam and

Christ is striking - "All hail the work of Christ!"... And yet there is more. "Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound."

One sin committed by Adam in innocence (meaning prior to the knowledge of good and evil). Brought about death to all people. How much more will a body of law comprised of 10 major commandments and 613 total commandments bring in offense! The law was introduced as a tool to show to us "that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful." Romans 7:13

We can look at death in the world and we can rely on our conscience, even apart from the law, to know our fallen state. How much more do we see it when our actions are compared to God's standard as outlined in the Law of Moses. And the law didn't come without warning. There are promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. When Israel failed to be obedient, they could only expect punishment and exile. The law was such an immense demonstration of our inability to meet its standards that the people in Jeremiah's time cried out -

"That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart." Jeremiah 18:12

What they had failed to see is that the law wasn't an end in and of itself, but that it was a tool to get them to rely on God's grace and mercy. Even under the Old Covenant this was shown to be true. But the people normally took one of two avenues –

Living out the law as a means to an end which brought about feelings of self-righteousness and contempt for others and even God or,

Simply disregarding the law because it could never be met anyway.

They failed to see that even under the law, God's grace was available and evident, such as in the Day of Atonement feast. If they could, like David, understand this precept, then they would have seen that "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." This is what Paul is saying. The immensity of the guilt because of the introduction of the law allowed an even greater demonstration of God's grace. This could not have been evident without the law. Unfortunately, too few realized the scope of God's grace until the introduction of the ultimate example of it, Jesus.

With the coming of Christ Jesus came One who could fulfill the law; and He did. After accomplishing this glorious deed, He gave His life as a Substitute for those who could



never meet it. As Paul says in Galatians 3:24, "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

The law was our tutor to grab us by the spiritual hand and walk us directly to the cross where the eternal fount of God's grace pours forth. It is the place where grace abounds in all its fullness.

Life application: Nothing changes. Those under the law rejected the premise that only faith could save them, and they looked to law as a means to an end. In the church today are those with the same mentality, "I will prevail by my deeds." Neither satisfies because both are based on a faulty premise. We can't do anything to please God in and of ourselves. We can only look to Him for the righteousness which comes by grace through faith. Put away your deeds of self and cling to the cross and all its glory.

*Lord God, when I read the many requirements laid out in the law, the beauty of the cross shines all the more brightly. Where the weight of the law crushes me, the majesty of the cross lifts me up and restores my weary soul. Thank You for doing what was impossible for me... but such is the nature of grace. And I receive it in Jesus' name. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**...so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:21**

The amazing words of chapter 5 conclude with this verse. This chapter has been an astonishing array of theological truths centered on the work of Jesus Christ and His glory. The chapter finishes with the continuation of the thought seen in verse 5:20.

"So that as sin reigned in death" tells us that the consequences of Adam's sin found their throne in the death of humanity. When he sinned, death reigned over all of Adam's fallen kingdom. But "even so" - despite this being true, a truth which is undeniable, Paul will complete the contrast and show the glory of God's grace.

Every baby born has one guarantee in its new life - that is to die. And this death is a result of its spiritually dead state. Even so "grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life." When all seemed lost for the human race, God revealed His promise; a promise which came 4000 years after Adam's fall. In stepped Jesus. John tells us the marvel of what he personally witnessed -

"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace." John 1:16

The law was introduced to show us the utterly sinful nature of sin; transgression heaped upon transgression. But through this demonstration of our fallen nature came the superabundance of God's grace in the coming of Christ. Because of His work, grace reigns in righteousness, even unto eternal life. The kingdom of Christ is one of righteousness and life, a complete contrast to Adam's kingdom of sin and death. Just as the newborn baby has the guarantee of death, the born-again believer in Christ has the guarantee of eternal life. What a marvelous trade! What a glorious Savior!

Life application: The Bible is God's word in a physical, tangible form which has been given to us to search out His will and intent for us. Pick it up, read it, and be built up in your faith and in your security. A security found in Jesus Christ the Lord!

*The sun rises and the sun sets. Each day is a gift of Your grace and I have been kept here for Your purposes. Lord God, help me to use my time properly and not to squander it on that which is vain or useless. Instead, give me the wisdom to pursue You and Your glory with each new day and to live, filled with Your Spirit in every unfolding moment. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 6

**What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?** Romans 6:1

We now enter into chapter 6, a chapter divided by two questions Paul asks in order to set the tone for his explanations. Both questions are answered with "Certainly not!" In other words, Paul is asking the most outlandish possible question in order to give the most logical refutation of the thought. He is standing as a debater in an argument and entering into the debate by giving a false premise and then arguing against it.

The first question is Romans 6:1. Based on his comments at the end of chapter 5, he asks "What shall we say then?" This is Paul's - "How far can we go with God's grace?" And then he floats the question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"

This question is given in response to 5:20 - "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more..." The thought is, "Ok, if grace abounds through the committing of sin, then can we continue to commit sin so that God's grace shines all the more brightly?"

The answer should be obvious and evaluating it against the perfectly holy standard which necessitated Jesus' cross in the first place makes the question all the more preposterous. One man's sin brought about judgment and condemnation to all humanity. Were it not for Jesus, there would be no hope. If the cross was necessary to rectify this one act, then how could we presume to add to our guilt under a misdirected notion? All the more so, how could we even consider this after we have been cleared of the guilt we once bore?

Despite the obviously outlandish nature of the question, Paul submits it because he knows the wickedness of the human heart, even of the soul saved from past sins. In our moments of weakness, we will go through steps in our mind to justify why the wrong thing we are doing is really ok. In essence we are attempting to excuse the sin we wish to continue in. Paul knows this is the logical pattern of those weak in faith and weaker in deed. His argumentation will reflect this.

Life application: The Bible is as much an instruction manual as it is a love letter. God demonstrates and displays His love for us in its pages, and in the process, He instructs us in the honoring of Him, how to keep safe, healthy, etc. The love directs the instruction and so when you read a passage which seems confining or restrictive, don't forget to

evaluate it from that perspective. The restrictions are given because God loves you. Don't we treat the children we love in the same manner?

*Heavenly Father, the taste of honey is a delight and yet salt enhances the bland. The sun allows me to enjoy my daily activities and yet when it sets, I am relieved because the time of rest is ahead. A new baby's laughter reminds me of Your goodness and yet attending a funeral reminds me of my short time to enjoy this life. Thank You for the many contrasts which show us Your wisdom and love. Yes, thank You, O God. Amen.*

### **Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Romans 6:2**

This verse is given in response to 6:1 - "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Paul's answer is translated variously as "God forbid!", "By no means!", "Of course not!", "May it never be!", "Absolutely not!", "That's unthinkable!", "Far be the thought!", "No indeed!", "Let it not be!", etc. As you can see, it is a thought which translators revel in being unique about because of its superlative nature. The Greek term is *me genoito*, "not (or never) may it come into being (or be)."

Paul's answer is one which completely disregards even the possibility of the thought being entertained. And why? His answer is clear and concise, "How shall we who died to sin live in it any longer?" The soul saved by Christ has moved from the death of sin to death to sin. The Bible presents death in three specific contexts - all of which involve a separation:

The first is spiritual death. This is what Adam and Eve experienced the moment they disobeyed God. Spiritual death is separation from the life found in God. There is no longer the eternal source of life available to the person. This has been transmitted from Adam to every human since creation with the exception of Jesus who was born of God and a woman.

The second is a result of the first; it is physical death. Man is a soul/body unity. This is technically known as anthropological hylomorphism - the duality of man. Physical death is a result of spiritual death and it occurs when the soul departs (is separated from) the body. The Bible shows us that the soul without a body is naked (2 Corinthians 5:3) and therefore this is an unnatural state. The natural state of man is to be a soul/body unity. But this doesn't necessarily mean man is complete. Because of spiritual death, a soul/body unity is in a state of fault. This fault is corrected when one comes to Christ.

The third is explained by Paul and noted in Romans 6:2; it is death to sin. This is the separation of a person who has moved to Christ from the power of sin; they are born

again to new life. The fault is removed, and man has been regenerated to his complete and originally intended state. He is a soul/body unity with the surety of eternal life - both spiritual and physical. This is the state which Paul argues for here.

We have "died to sin." Because this is so, how can we continue to live in it. Sin is something which is contrary to our very nature and therefore it is something we are to live without. A good comparison to consider would be taking a dead body and putting it on a ventilator. What is the point? It would serve no purpose at all. Likewise, being dead to sin has removed from us the very sin nature we possessed. Therefore, to live in sin is contrary to the state we are now in.

Life application: Christ died for us. When we receive Him, we move from death to life. As this is spiritual renewal, then we should live out our new spiritual lives in a manner worthy of the change which has taken place. Let us move from sin to holiness.

*Oh Lord, my Lord! The prospect of eternal life in Your presence apart from sin and death is so glorious. I long for that day, knowing that it has been guaranteed by the work of Christ. Because this is so, give me the resoluteness of mind to live in a manner now which is holy and acceptable to You. May You be pleased with the life I live in Your presence. Amen.*

**Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?** Romans 6:3

The subject of baptism is long, complicated, and more often than not misunderstood. Some denominations claim that water baptism is required in order to be saved, some denominations perform infant baptism, etc. What is being spoken of here is not concerning water baptism. Paul begins this verse with "Or do you not know..."

In using this term, he is expanding on the previous idea which is that we have "died to sin." Therefore, what Paul is speaking of has nothing to do with an external rite. When we receive Jesus by faith, we die to sin. At this moment, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13,14) and a change takes place; we die to sin and we are thus "baptized into Christ Jesus." We were, as Paul notes, "baptized into His death."

This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is a once for all-time occurrence. Being filled with the Spirit is a repeatable event, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the regeneration of the spiritually dead soul to eternal life, and it happens only once. Paul indicates this elsewhere, such as in Galatians 3:26, 27 –

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Putting on Christ is to be imputed His righteousness. We are now covered, or clothed, in Christ. When God looks at us, He no longer sees our sins, but instead Christ's righteousness. In Galatians, Paul ties this "faith in Christ Jesus" directly with being "baptized into Christ." They are one single act. Paul further defines this new relationship in 1 Corinthians 12:13 -

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

This is the glory of the death and resurrection of Jesus for us. What was dead is made alive by a mere act of faith. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 we are shown this was actually pictured in Israel's exodus through the Red Sea. It is quite evident that water baptism is not at all involved in the process. The faith is exercised, the righteousness is granted, the Spirit is given, and then - only then - is the sign received; that of water baptism. This is the exact same pattern as what occurred with Abraham.

Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. The relationship was restored, and only then did he receive the sign of circumcision. This process is clear and concise, and it negates the validity of "infant baptism." It is an unscriptural rite which in no way replaces circumcision as is claimed by those who practice it. Coming to Christ is an individual act of faith. Only after this act is demonstrated does water baptism serve any purpose. It is an outward demonstration of the inward change.

Water baptism has nothing to do with salvation. Instead, it has to do with obedience. When a person is saved, they then make a public demonstration of their new life. They go to the water just as Jesus went to the cross. They are fully submerged (the Greek word for baptism indicates full submersion and therefore the word was transliterated, not translated, in an attempt to avoid confusion) as a picture of going into the grave, just as Jesus' body was laid in the tomb. And finally, the person is raised out of the water as a picture of being raised to newness of life through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the intent and purpose of water baptism.

Life application: If you have received Jesus, you are saved. Water baptism has nothing to do with your salvation. However, Jesus gave two ordinances to His followers. The first is water baptism and the second is the Lord's Supper. In obedience to His directives, don't you think it's time to be properly baptized as an open profession of your inward change?

*Heavenly Father, give me a proper understanding of Your word and also the willingness to be obedient to it. Keep me from the stubbornness of heart which would cause me to turn away from bringing You the honor that You are due. Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even to death on the cross. Give me the heart to demonstrate that kind of obedience if called upon to do so. Amen.*

**Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4**

"Therefore..." Because of what was stated in 6:1-3, we come to the following conclusion: Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord "were buried with Him through baptism into death." Again, and as previously noted, this is referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit - the total immersion of the old man into Christ's death, being completely covered by His righteousness and thus resulting in us being "in" Christ. The sealing of the Spirit is the baptism of the Spirit; it is a one-time act which moves us from Adam to Christ.

In acknowledgement of this act, we are expected to follow this inward change with an outward demonstration of that change - full immersion baptism in water. How can we be certain that water baptism isn't specifically being spoken of here and that it is therefore some type of a requirement for salvation? Verses such as Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16 seem to indicate that water baptism is a requirement for salvation. Although lengthy in explanation, a short summary of those two verses can't hurt.

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38

The first thing to note is that this is Peter speaking to the people of Israel who had previously rejected Christ. Therefore, Peter instructs them to "repent" of this mindset. Because of their rejection of Him, Peter expected them to be baptized before they would receive the Holy Spirit. The gentiles were not even a consideration at this point. Comparing the order of the event in Acts 2 with the events involving the Samaritans in Acts 8 and the gentiles in Acts 10, it becomes apparent that Acts 2 was a unique requirement and a one-time event for the people of Israel. It describes what occurred at Pentecost and what was expected of the Israelites, it doesn't prescribe what is the norm.

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:16

On the surface and taken without careful consideration, this verse may appear to indicate one must be water baptized in order to be saved. But this isn't at all the case. Jesus is tying belief to baptism; "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." However, baptism is not mentioned in connection with condemnation. "...he who does not believe will be condemned." Therefore, belief and baptism occur simultaneously; it is speaking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not water baptism. This simply confirms what John the Baptist spoke prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry –

"I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."  
(Luke 3:16)

The baptism which comes by faith in Christ is this baptism referred to by John and which is spoken of in Mark 16:16.

This then, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is where we are "buried with Him through baptism into death." We have died to sin and been born again by the Spirit of God. Paul then continues by stating "that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Just as we died to sin through Christ, we are also raised from the dead in Christ. This is being born again.

Christ's coming out of the grave was "by the glory of the Father." Because we are united with Him in this marvelous new way, "we also should walk in newness of life." The ultimate goal of our salvation isn't the prospect of walking on streets of gold for all eternity. The ultimate goal is to bring glory to God. God's glory is the reason why Christ came, why He died, and why He was raised again. These actions were done for us so that we could bring His Father glory.

Life application: We have died to sin and been raised to newness of life through Jesus. Because this is a fact, let us also walk in that newness of life, mortifying the flesh and living in holiness in the presence of our glorious God.

*Lord, give me wisdom to walk in the newness of life that came through accepting the work of Your Son. As a son of Adam, I was dead in sin, but as Your son through faith in Jesus I have been born again to new life. Grant me the ability to walk in a manner worthy of this glorious and exalted position and never to bring reproach upon Your precious name. Amen.*



**For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, Romans 6:5**

This verse details the glory of the resurrection for the believer in Christ.

"For" - As a result of what will be mentioned.

"...if we have been united together in the likeness of His death," This is referring to our state as noted in 6:3 & 4, we were baptized into Christ Jesus and into His death. The word Paul selects for "united" is the Greek word *sumphutoi*. This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament. It means "planted." We have been planted as a seed in the same manner as Christ. The word designates a congenital, innate, and implanted characteristic by birth or nature. A good comparison of this is the vine and its branches. Christ is the main portion of the vine and we, through faith in Him, are grafted into His very nature.

Because of this uniting in His death, the explanation of "for" is given - "certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."

The word "united" as explained above signifies that we now bear His same nature in our spiritual self, even if not yet in our physical self. It is the absolute assurance of eternal salvation for everyone who believes. We are alive spiritually right now through Christ and our physical bodies will become eternal bodies in the future as well. John 14:19 clues us into this -

"Because I live, you will live also." John 14:19

The spiritual death which reigned from Adam's fall in all humans is now overcome through Christ. Jesus, being spiritually alive because He didn't inherit Adam's fallen nature, confirmed that through Him those who follow Him will be like Him. This is what Paul is telling us in Romans 6:5. Having been united, or planted, with Him in His death we will have the same likeness of His resurrection.

Jesus was born spiritually alive and yet His physical body died, but He came out of the tomb with an eternal physical body. Paul says we shall bear the same likeness. This is the majestic and glorious promise of eternal life for all who believe. We shall be as was intended at the beginning, a soul/body unity which is spiritually alive and ready to face eternity without the fear of ever dying again.

Life application: Family and friends get sick and die and we shall too unless the Lord comes for us at the rapture. There is a difference between the believer and the non-believer. We shall be, 100% guaranteed, raised to life and we shall dwell in the presence of God for all eternity - ever searching out His wisdom and glory. Stand fast in this truth and give God the glory for what He has done and what He shall do.

*Because I have been united with Christ in His death, I know that I shall be united with Him in His resurrection. This is the hope of Job, Isaiah, David and so many other prophets and saints of old. We shall stand in our flesh again and in the presence of our Redeemer and hail His greatness for all eternity. All hail the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Amen.*

**...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Romans 6:6**

This verse has to be taken in conjunction with the preceding verse to clearly grasp what Paul is saying - "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

"Knowing this" is a statement of surety. Every person who has called on Christ should in fact bear this in mind with full understanding. "That our old man was crucified with Him." Jesus went to the cross and died for sins He didn't commit, thus becoming our Substitute for God's wrath. He didn't die of a heart attack nor some other quick and normal way. Rather, He was crucified for us. Paul here compares the death of our old man to this. He doesn't say, "that our old man died with Him." Instead, he is making a one-to-one comparison of the death of our "old man" with the cross of Christ.

Stated another way, our death to sin is a long, horrifying trial which we all have gone through (and some continue to go through.) It can't be said that we called on Christ and suddenly stopped sinning. No, we carried into our death addictions, perversions, disorders, and unhealthy lives. Calling on Christ sent that wretched state to its crucifixion where the old, corrupt man was slain. Our sin-debt was dealt with immediately, but the sinful life in the old man is treated in an on-going process. When the agony of leaving this old man is behind, the sin nature is dead, and a new direction comes in all its splendor. This is why the term "with Him" is used. The verb is tied directly to "crucified." We are crucified just as He was.

This happened so "that the body of sin might be done away with." If we understand our guilt before God which was removed because of Jesus' work, then our hearts should be broken at the sin we have committed and continue to commit. This entire body of sin, the life which is contrary to Christ's work is to be completely removed from our lives.

Christ's passion was one of physical distress, having first been beaten in a horrifying way. After this, He was nailed to the cross. Although not yet dead, the certainty of death came at that moment; the body ceased to freely move. Because it was bound, He had to struggle for each breath. His body became weaker and weaker and eventually the life left it. This is the picture that we are to get for our own body of sin, doing away with it for Christ's sake just as He went to the cross for our sake.

The process of doing away with the body of sin is "that we should no longer be slaves of sin." In the coming verses, Paul is going to show us that as people we are either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. The magnitude of what Christ did for us demands that we place the highest priority on becoming slaves of righteousness and not living as slaves to sin.

Life application: Whether you've been a Christian for a week or for 20 years, you may be struggling with a sin of the past. The struggle is one which may be agonizing, and which weighs your soul down, but remember that Jesus went to a literal cross to pay your sin-debt. The agony which is refining you is not unknown to God, nor does He not empathize with you. He knows your trial and He is with you through it.

*My Lord, I struggle with my old self and the life I left. Give me the power to leave my past sins at the cross and to not take them up anymore. Instead, let that part of me be completely defeated, never to arise again. I know that through the power of Christ and the putting on of my new self this is possible. So, Lord, make this change in me that You will be glorified through it. Amen.*

**For he who has died has been freed from sin.** Romans 6:7

Care must be taken when evaluating Romans 6:7. We are told that he who has died has been freed from sin. What was it that died? We are still physically alive and in our fallen bodies. We have not yet received the glorified bodies promised to us. One must return to 5:18-5:21 to remember the context. In Adam, man died spiritually - because of one misdeed. In Christ, we are born again spiritually - because of His work. We are also told that the law was introduced that sin might abound "so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This is further explained in Colossians 2:13, 14 –

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

Sin came about by the introduction of law (one law for Adam, but still the law). Paul has already explained that through the law is the knowledge of sin and where there is no law there is no transgression. Christ has taken away the power of sin by taking away "the handwriting of the commandments that was against us." The law is what was nailed to the cross; Jesus is the embodiment of the law. When He was crucified, the power of the law was removed. We have died to this same law through our uniting with Christ. Thus, we are free from the law's constraints. This however doesn't mean we have been freed from sin's presence, only its penalty. The law has no jurisdiction over someone who has died.

This is what Paul is explaining. He is not saying that we cannot sin, he is saying that sin and its consequences have no judicial power over us. The teaching which from time-to-time creeps in that states that we can be sinless in this life is in error. John Gill rightly speaks of our state in Christ -

"...such are "freed from sin"; not from the being of it; nor from the burden of it; nor from a continual war with it; nor from slips and falls into it; no, not even freed from it, in the most solemn services and acts of religion; but they are freed from the dominion of it, from servitude to it, and also from the guilt of it, and from obligation to punishment on account of it."

Those denominations and teachers who lead their flock down the path of assuming they can become perfect in this life have a fundamentally flawed view of the natural man with whom we are, and will continue to be, at war with. The physical body didn't die, and our physical body remains fallen until the day when a new one is given. Therefore, to claim that a sinless state can be obtained in this fallen body can only lead to disappointment, disillusionment, and neuroses of the soul who continues to struggle with sin, wondering why they alone have such trials, when in fact all do.

The three "P's" are good to remember when evaluating sin -

When we die to sin, being reborn through Jesus, we die to sin's Penalty. This is immediate and eternal in nature.

As we grow in holiness and sanctification, we die to sin's Power. This is on-going until we die.

When we are glorified, we will be completely removed from sin's Presence. This will be our eternal state. Only when our fallen bodies are transformed to His likeness will this state be realized in us in its fullness.

Life application: Where there is no law, there is no transgression. Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf and then He died in fulfillment of that law. It was nailed to the cross. When we receive the work of Christ, we die to that same law, once for all time. Sin no longer has the ability to accuse us because we are dead to the law which gives sin its power. Thanks be to God for the work of Jesus.

*Lord, as I read and study Your word, be with me, guide me, and help me to understand it in the way in which You intend. There are contrasting views on many of the important issues in it and surely only one is correct. Lead me to sound instruction and those who properly handle it so that my life will be lived in the way which is acceptable. To Your glory I pray this. Amen.*

**Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, Romans 6:8**

This verse, taken in context with 6:5 - 6:11 is speaking not so much of the physical resurrection of our bodies, which is yet future, but the right now life which has been granted. It is the spiritual life which was lost at Adam's time. This is certain because sin is what caused the spiritual death (physical death resulted from the spiritual death) and Paul speaks of our death to sin during these seven verses.

"Now" or as a result of what has been said.

"If we died with Christ" is speaking about our death to sin; it being crucified with Him.

"We believe" - it is faith in God's word and actions through Christ that we stand certain of what has been accomplished.

"That we shall also live with Him." - We are positionally in the new state already and our hope and faith stand in the fact that it will be realized in us actually at some future point.

So how can we know that this is "in position" at this time but not yet actually obtained? The answer is that our physical, mortal bodies still die. We all go to funerals of saved

loved ones and each of us is heading there too, unless the Lord comes first. If we were actually glorified and sinless, then this wouldn't be the case. The fact that our spiritual life is regenerated the moment we come to Christ is where our hope lies; not in a certainty that we are now sinless. We are clothed in Christ, covered by Him, and awaiting our final state. The surety of the sealing of the Holy Spirit is the surety that we, like Christ, will come forth from our graves to eternal physical life as well as the spiritual life we now possess.

This is the great hope of every believer. We shall not only live forever, but we will do it in a physical body and in a sinless state. Coming some glorious day to a resurrection near you!

Life application: The surety of Christ is the promise of eternal life. Though we will miss our departed loved ones, we know that those who have received Christ are only gone from the body, but not gone forever. They are with Christ awaiting the moment when we shall all be raised together at the sound of the glorious trumpet.

*Jesus is alive! And I know that through the power of the resurrection, I too shall join Him in the promise of ever-lasting life. There is no fear as I contemplate my days ahead - whether they are filled with ease or the trials of a body worn out by hard years or debilitating disease. These things are temporary, but some beautiful day, they will be behind me forever. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**...knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.** Romans 6:9

"Knowing that" is used here as an indication of absolute surety based on the words of 6:8 -

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him..."

Christ, in fact, did die in His human body. Our faith in this causes us to die with Him to sin. When we die in this way, the power of sin dies with us. But the event doesn't stop there. "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more." Yes, He died, but He died for sins not in sin. Because He was sinless, death could not hold Him. In fact, Peter explained to the people of Israel that it was impossible for the grave to hold Him -

"...whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." Acts 2:24

Our faith in His work causes us to die with Him. Because He is sinless, He resurrected. Because we died to sin with Him, we have become sinless in Him. In other words, sin no longer has power over us because the power of sin has been nullified. Christ dies no more and "death no longer has dominion over Him." Because we are "in Christ" this is our state as well. Death no longer has dominion over us. When Christ returns, we shall be resurrected. This is as sure as the resurrection of Christ Himself. It is a 100% guarantee, and it is the hope of all the faithful.

Life application: Because we have died to sin in Christ, let us endeavor to live apart from sin in Christ.

*Lord God, to know You and to think on Your majesty is my highest joy. Your hands which set the galaxies in place also fashioned man. Your power which ignites the stars with heat also breathed the spark of life into us. And Your wisdom which brings about the seasons of life also endowed us with the ability to contemplate You. Help me to use this life of mine for Your glory. Amen.*

**For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.** Romans 6:10

Paul has been speaking throughout this chapter of our uniting with Christ and thus sin no longer has mastery over us. In 6:9, he stated, "...knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him." This then is the reason for his use of "for." Because of this, "the death that He died, He died to sin once for all."

If Christ died to sin, meaning for our sins (Paul is speaking of His death as a substitution for our sins because it is evident He was sinless) He died once for all. The clear intent of this is that sin is dead in us because of His work and therefore death is dead for us because "the wages of sin is death." The power of death is vanquished.

Christ died "to sin once for all." This is the state that we are now in when we receive His work, "but the life that He lives, He lives to God." The use of "but" is intended now to show a contrast. "Yes, Jesus died to sin once for all, but..." Now that this has happened will He die for sin again? No, it is once for all. Therefore, He lives in a state where death can never enter again. And in this state, "He lives to God." The obvious connection Paul is making is that as He died to sin for us, and He is now living "to God" that we should likewise be living "to God."

Paul's thoughts are not random and disconnected. They are all being tied together to show us our state in Christ and therefore how we should conduct ourselves in Christ. The next verse will explicitly state this. Each step of Paul's thoughts progresses toward an ultimate goal which is to teach us of the work of Christ and how it then relates to the believer in Christ.

Life application: Christ died to sin for all, therefore we are dead to sin. Why would we want to reenter the life of sin that we have died to? And now Christ lives to God; let us endeavor to emulate our Lord and live to God as well. Let our lives be holy, honorable, and acceptable to God through our Lord Jesus.

*Lord, grant me calm in the storms which blow around me, contentment in the times of lack, sharing in the times of abundance, joy in Your presence, and wisdom from Your word. Give me patience through life's trials, wonderment at Your creation, and acceptance of Your sovereign decisions. O Lord, allow my life to be one which brings You glory and in whom You delight. Amen.*

**Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:11**

Paul's use of "likewise" is to show that what has been presented is now what is expected. Let's take a moment to go back and read 6:8 through 6:10 to understand our "likewise" and thus what is now anticipated for us -

"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God."

Because of this beautiful train of thought which reveals what occurred in Christ, and because it occurred in us when we received Him, then the instruction is to "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin."

Here it is in a simple-to-follow format:

- 1) We died with Christ; (6:8)
- 2) Death no longer has dominion over Him; (6:9)
- 3) His death that He died was "to sin once for all"; (6:10)
- 4) Therefore, we died to sin; now let us reckon that it is so. (6:11)



This is the logical progression that Paul is showing us. The law, by which sin is known to be sin, is fulfilled in Christ. It was nailed to the tree in His body. Therefore, because the law has no power over us, we are free from the law and can now "live to God" just as Christ lives to God.

But more specifically, we are alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We have moved from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ." The move is complete and therefore we are no longer bound to the sin-nature.

The amazing beauty of what God has done in Christ is not to be underestimated. This plan which was conceived in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, is revealed in the Person of Jesus. Nothing is missed, nothing has been forgotten or overlooked. It is perfect in how it deals with our sin, both inherited and committed, and it is complete in and of itself. There is nothing we can add to it and there is nothing that can cause us to lose what transpires.

Life application: God has sent His Son into the world to accomplish for us the victory over sin that we need to be reconciled to Him. How could we add to what He has done? How could we presume that His work is somehow deficient or insufficient to either save us or keep us saved? Have faith that God is fully capable of accomplishing your salvation, from beginning to end.

*Heavenly Father, Your word shows that You have done all that is necessary to bring about salvation for Your people through Your Son. I know that I can add nothing to this and so I receive His work, by faith. Strengthen me in my times of weakness and remind me that I stand justified, free, and forgiven of all my failings. Thank You for the full and unmerited pardon which came at such a high cost. Amen.*

**Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.**  
Romans 6:12

"Therefore" is given to sum up everything Paul has said from 6:1 - 6:11. Because of everything which has been evaluated, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body." If sin weren't possible, this statement couldn't even be made, thus it was noted in 6:7 that Paul has been speaking about sin's, penalty, power, and presence. The penalty of sin has been completely dealt with. The power of sin is an on-going process which requires action on our part (as is noted now). And the presence of sin will be completely removed when we are glorified.

We can only go in one direction at a time, north or south for example. The same is true concerning our sinful nature. We can either please it and head towards the direction of having sin reign in us, or we can crucify it and have it die in us. When admonishing us to not let it reign in us, Paul uses the term "mortal body." The reason for this should be obvious - we are not glorified yet and we are not free from either sin's ability to work in us, nor from sin to completely reign in us once again. Our physical, mortal bodies are weak and must be kept in constant readiness to engage in this battle or we will succumb.

And the way this occurs? It happens when we "obey its lusts." The weakness of our flesh is prone to temptation. At times it is more so than at others. When we are tired, we are weak in one way. When we are given too much commendation from those around us, it weakens us in another. When we are hungry, we are weakened in another. This is the reason that we need to always be on guard and always prepared to engage in this struggle which wars in our members.

Life application: Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce him. That's still a good idea today. When sin entices, remember that its consequences can be immense. Don't let sin reign in your body, but glorify the Lord through holiness and right living.

*Lord Jesus, You know the war which goes on inside me. There are things that I shouldn't do and yet I'm tempted to do them. There are things which can only bring me sadness and regret, and yet these are the things which tempt me the most. Give me the wisdom and the fortitude to overcome these desires and to keep my eyes, my thoughts, and my heart on You alone. Amen.*

**And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Romans 6:13**

Through the law is the knowledge of sin. We have been freed from the power of the law, thus from the penalty that it contains. We have moved from the death of Adam, to life in Christ. Because this is already realized in us, Paul introduces a contrast of what to not do and what we are to do -

- 1) "Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin." Our members are the parts of our body. Let our hands be free from theft; let our tongues be free from profanity; let our hearts be free from evil intent; etc. Jesus' work was that of righteousness and holiness. Because we have moved to Him,

how can we think to commit wickedness when it is completely contrary to our new nature?

- 2) "But" - on the other hand, "present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead." Sin brings about death. Because we have moved from death to life, we are asked to present ourselves in a manner comparable to our new state - "as being alive from the dead."

A good example of this would be the state of marriage. When we are single, we are free to date others. But when we get married, we are to move from a single mindset to that of a married person. We can choose to ignore this, but it would be contrary to the state we are now in. This would lead to confusion in how we act and conduct ourselves. Likewise, now that we are in Christ, we are to act as if we are in Christ and use our "members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Ephesians 4:25-32 gives us clear insight into the things we can do to fulfill this new state in which we live -

"Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another. 'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

These are things that we willingly chose to do or to disobey. As Adam Clarke rightly states, "Satan cannot force the will, and God will not."

Life application: Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

*Lord God, I am so thankful to You for the life You have given. I have family, friends, and food to build me up and sustain me. You've blessed me in ways that I don't even know. Were I to search out all the good You've done for me, I know that the ages would come and go and I wouldn't exhaust the list. Thank You Lord, thank You for Your care of me in this life. Amen.*

**For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**  
Romans 6:14

The Bible teaches that man was granted dominion over the beasts of the earth. This is implicit in the naming of the animals in Genesis 2. When one names something, it is because they have the rule and authority over it. Despite this rule, man is himself a being which is ruled. The original intent of man is that God would rule over him and that the two would walk in fellowship. However, the devil swayed man from the friendly rule of God to his personal, destructive rule. God's rule is one of grace and abundance; the devil's rule is one of sin and corruption. John tells us that the main reason for Jesus' coming was to correct our state to its original intent -

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

We are either under God's rule or under the rule of the devil. There are no other options. If we are under the devil, then sin has dominion over us; we are slaves to it. However, when we accept Jesus' work by faith, we move to the proper and originally intended rule of God. We are to become slaves to righteousness and live under His grace.

The dominion of the devil, which is one of sin, is realized because of law. Where there is no law, there is no transgression. But there was a law and man broke the law, thus receiving his just condemnation. However, Jesus never broke the law, thus fulfilling it. When we move to Him, the law is fulfilled, and we can never be judged by it again. We are free from the law and thus free from sin's penalty and power; we are under grace.

Because this is true, we should endeavor to live as if it is true. This is what we are instructed. We can now live to God, free from the constraints of the law and the penalty of sin. The condemnation that loomed over us is removed. This is the marvel of Christ; this is the glory of what God has done for His creatures. Let us live lives which are holy and appropriate to the exalted position to which we have been raised by the goodness of God.

Life application: Our state in Christ is unmerited and therefore we should receive it as such - with praise, honor, and right-living. Let us stand fast in the freedom with which Christ has set us free - to the glory of God the Father.

*Heavenly Father, it is beyond my comprehension all that You have done for us. You have broken the chains which bound us and have cut through the bars which have imprisoned us; You have set us free to worship You in Spirit and in truth. Thank You for the cross which reconciles us to You and restores to us access to Your glorious presence. Amen.*

**What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!**  
Romans 6:15

This verse introduces the second major section of chapter 6. Just as 6:1 entertained an outlandish question which was responded to with "Certainly not!" so does 6:15. Paul's second question is now given.

There is a difference between coming to Christ in order to be saved and being in Christ after being saved. When a sinner comes to Christ, there is absolutely nothing they can add to His work. The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith is set and fixed in the New Testament. Adding something to grace equates to "no grace." Expecting something more than faith means that faith alone isn't sufficient. When a person calls on Jesus, it is because they realize they cannot save themselves and that they are at His mercy.

If salvation is granted based on complete dependency, then it must be a once-for-all-time deal because Paul is quite clear that after salvation there are things expected of us. If we can become "unsaved" by the things we do or don't do after salvation, then the act of salvation wasn't really "by grace through faith." But it is.

Once the pardon is granted and once the person stands justified, then we are to live as if it is so. And so, Paul asks his question starting with "What then?" This is an introduction based on the previous argument which began in 6:1 and followed through to 6:14. In essence, "Because of everything that has been reviewed, what is the conclusion?" To demonstrate the obvious nature of what is concluded, he proposes another outlandish question, "Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace?" Paul's answer is an emphatic "Certainly not!"

He has already said that we are not under the law, but under grace. The law allows no sin at all; grace pardons sin. Because this is so, isn't this license to sin? Can't we do what we wish and expect an abundance of the grace which comes from the very fountain of grace? This is Paul's "Certainly not!" Believe it or not though, this is the view of many, and it is not at all what is intended by God for His people. Such a notion is contrary to His very nature which is one of holiness. It should be noted though that there are actually two extremes which could be introduced.

The first is that there is license to sin because we are not under the law, but under grace. The second is that because Paul says, "Certainly not!" that we are now somehow bound again to the very law which led us to the grace of Christ. Both extremes come about by taking individual thoughts or verses out of context and without consideration to the entire scope of what he is saying.

Christians are not under the law: the law is set aside in Christ (Hebrews 7:18), it is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), and it is fulfilled and nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). However, what is also noted is that we are not free to sin. So where then does our instruction come from? If by the law sin is known and the law no longer applies to the Christian, then how can we sin? The answer is that the New Testament writings set the standards for the Christian. This is the point of the epistles - to show us what is right and what is expected as followers of the Lord. And this is why the entire scope of the New Testament must be taken in proper context.

Life application: We are not given license to sin. Our salvation is a one-time event, and it is eternal. Therefore, what we do after that moment falls under another category - rewards and losses. The imprudent soul would squander Christ's rewards for earth's temporary, fleeting vanities. Don't be imprudent with your few moments of this life... eternity awaits.

*Glorious and wonderful Lord! How good it is to know that You have me securely in the palm of Your hand. Were it up to me, I know that I would never be able to stand in Your presence and enjoy Your eternal blessings. But the good news is that it's not up to me at all. I received Your pardon at the cross and so I know that You have everything else taken care of. Thank You O Lord. Amen.*

**Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? Romans 6:16**

The word translated as "slaves" is appropriate. It comes from the word *doulos*. The King James Version translates this word as "servants." Both should possibly be used though. In the matter of sin, "servant" doesn't carry either the force, nor the intent of the matter. However, in the matter of righteousness it is acceptable. This verse's objective is to show the state we were in and the state we should be in. Humans are born into slavery; slavery to sin. It is inherited and it is a bondage which we cannot free ourselves from. Jesus Himself shows us this in John 8:34 -

"Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.'"

Because we were born into Adam who sinned, we are thus a slave to sin; it is our station as humans. Having said that, there were different types of slaves in the ancient world, those who were the property of the house with no rights at all and those who had, in one way or another, become "bond" servants. A bondservant is a person who works without pay for various reasons. One of these reasons would be a person wholly devoted to another to the disregard of their own interests. This is the concept that a "bondservant" of Christ would carry.

As this is so, it should be clear that the change Christ has made in us is one which requires obedience. "Do you not know" is a way of saying, "Of course you know." It is a rhetorical question which is being asked to simply help us think clearly on the matter. And the follow up is given in the same thought - "To whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey." Again, Jesus gives clear insight into this concept in Matthew 6:24 –

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Mastership or ownership doesn't have divided loyalties. If you are bound to one master, then that is where your work is to be directed. If you are bound to another master, then that is where your work should be directed. When we were freed from the slavery to sin and the ownership of the devil, we moved to the headship and authority of Jesus. Are we now "slaves" of Christ in the sense that we take our directions without thought, or are we "bondservants" of Christ where we have (or should have) ourselves wholly dedicated to His headship? The answer, based on the surrounding text, is that we are "bondservants" who can choose to ignore His headship, but that leads to Paul's conclusion.

We are slaves "of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness." As you can see, the word "obedience" is crucial, and it shows that we can be disobedient; the will is involved in our actions. We were slaves to sin and death and the devil had ownership over us. We have moved to the authority of Christ and now have choices to make. Will we be obedient, or will we hold on to the past? If we continue in the sins of the past, even after having been freed from sin's power, then we will suffer the death which that sin produces. Alcohol, for example, will destroy our liver.

We now have the ability, through the process of sanctification, to depart from these things and live in the freedom for which Christ has set us free. Here is the continuation of Jesus' words in John 8:35, 36 –

"And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Life application: If you have called on Jesus, then who is your Lord? It is Jesus. Do you want to be entangled again in a yoke of slavery? Of course not. Therefore, live as a bondservant of Christ, wholly committing yourself to His glorious headship. He has set you free. Now live in Him as if you believe it!

*Lord God, You have offered me freedom from my bonds and You have granted me the ability to put the things of the past behind. You know my weakness in my struggles, and You know the temptations I face. Give me the resolute courage, strength, and conviction to press on in the power of Your Spirit, ever striving to emulate my glorious Lord Jesus. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.** Romans 6:17

In his customary excitement over the greatness of what God has done through Christ, Paul interjects a note of gratitude for what has occurred in the believer. "But God be thanked..." He has just previously shown the contrast between being a slave of sin to that of being a slave to righteousness and now his thanks go forth because, "though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered."

Yes, before hearing the gospel we were all slaves to sin. This includes all people and was what necessitated the cross. But through allowing the truth of the Christian message (that form of doctrine) to enter our heart, we have been delivered from this bondage. The word for "form" is the Greek word *typon*. This is a pattern or a mold. In Hebrews 8:5, it is used in this way -

"...as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'"

As you can see, Moses was instructed to use the exact pattern he was shown. There was to be no deviation from the instruction. The reason why is because they were "a copy



and shadow of the heavenly things." We should have the exact same idea in our heads about our New Testament instruction. We are delivered and we are sanctified through the pattern which is set. The question is, what is that pattern? The answer is simple, the teachings found in our instruction manual - the New Testament epistles.

The gospels show us who Jesus is, what He did, and what transpired based on His work. The book of Acts shows how these things became established among the various people groups and some of the "why" of what Jesus did, but they contain little instruction on the "how to apply" what has been revealed. It is the epistles which show us how to do so. They give shape to the "form."

One could think of the epistles as a portion of the mold into which was poured a substance. This would then conform to the shape of the mold. The substance is the believer; the word is the mold. Our doctrine for conversion, and our doctrine for continued growth, must come from the mold or it isn't at all the pattern set down by God!

For this reason, it is imperative to read, ponder, and conform to these letters. That which fails to conform to the mold must be chiseled away, sanded, and smoothed out. And that which is poured into the wrong mold is an unacceptable vessel; it will be rejected entirely. This was seen in the Old Testament temple worship and it is no different in the church. Conformity to the doctrine of Christ must be realized in order for us to conform to Christ as individuals. It is conforming to this form which delivers us, directs us in sanctification, and which will lead to glorification.

Life application: If you want to be conformed to the image of Christ, read and apply your Bible to your life.

*Yes Lord! What a beautiful day You have laid out before me. Help me to use my time wisely and to be a blessing, not a discouragement to others. Allow me the honor of being a beacon of Your light to those whose paths I cross as well as a vessel that overflows with Your goodness. These are the things I pray for my day ahead... to Your glory! Amen.*

**And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.** Romans 6:18

If you peek ahead, you will see that the rest of the chapter continues to discuss the issue of slavery. The personification of sin and righteousness allows us to understand our state more clearly.

Sin was our master, but we were brought out from under it and have moved to a new master; that of righteousness. But sin has a source, just as righteousness has a source. Sin came about through obeying the lies of the devil and rejecting the truth of God. Taking this in its logical form then, we were once slaves to the devil but have now become slaves of God through the work of Christ. Sin no longer has power over us because the power of the devil is defeated through the cross.

Life application: The wages of sin is death. As believers in Christ, we have been set free from sin and thus we have been set free from the power of death. Eternal life, because of the work of Christ, is an absolute guarantee. Don't let anyone tell you that Christ's work isn't fully sufficient to save you. There is one gospel, and it is found in the work of Christ alone.

*Heavenly Father, Your word tells me that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to You except through Him. I accepted His work and I received Jesus as my Lord. I know that what You have done through Him is fully sufficient to reconcile me to You and that apart from Him there is no hope. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

**I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.**

Romans 6:19

Paul begins with an idiom of the time, "I speak in human terms..." This was a way of saying that what he is telling them, and the way he is saying it, is done in order to make the argument easy to grasp. It would be like us today saying, "Let me say this so even a child could understand."

As noted in the previous verse, Paul has used the personification of sin and of righteousness to help us more clearly comprehend the state and circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The people of Rome would clearly understand the symbolism of slaves and masters. If a person is a slave to Stevius Romanus, then he would present himself to Stevius in a distinct way, as to his rightful master. Stevius likes foot rubs at noon each day and so the slave does this. However, the slave is bought by Sergious Maximus who finds foot rubs vulgar (and a bit too tickly) for his liking. The last thing that the slave would do would be to grab Sergious by the foot at noon and start rubbing. It would be contrary to his new ownership. Sergious would be displeased and there would be consequences - especially if the disobedient foot rubs continued.

This is the thought process which Paul is using. We were slaves to Sin. Sin liked uncleanness - dishonesty, sexual perversion, gluttony, etc. Because Sin was our master, we presented ourselves in this "state of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness." However, a new master has taken over - Righteousness. Now that we have this new master, we would be completely unwise to present ourselves to Righteousness in this way. Rather, he demands that we present ourselves as his slaves "for holiness."

The owner of a slave has the power of rule and authority over their slave. Disobedience may result in punishment, imprisonment, or death. And it is so with us now. As a saved believer, if we turn from Righteousness to Sin, through sexual immorality for example, we may catch a disease resulting in pain, confinement from others in society, or even death. Righteousness was abandoned and Sin did its evil work in us.

Having said this, it is important to understand that Righteousness is still our master. Just as the slave remains the property of Sergious regardless of his conduct after being purchased from Stevius, so we remain the property of our new master. We have moved from the rightful ownership of the devil to that of Christ. For this reason, we are expected to present ourselves to Christ in the manner which is pleasing to Him. He is a gentle, caring Master and as our Creator, He knows what is best for us.

Life application: In Christ, you have a new Master. He has certain expectations of you which you are expected to fulfill. He asks us to be obedient because He knows what is best for us. Endeavor to live in righteousness and not as if you were still a slave to sin.

*Lord God, I was in a state of slavery to sin and wretchedness. Even in this condition, You bought me back and gave me the garments of righteousness. As Your servant, give me the wisdom to do that which pleases You, shunning my old master and living under the tender care and right living of my Redeemer. Guide me for Your name's sake. Amen.*

**For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.**

Romans 6:20

This is a simple truth which was looked at in 6:19 and which continues in 6:20. A slave has one master and therefore the ruling authority of that master is absolute. Before we received Christ as Lord, we were slaves to sin, and we were free from the master-ship of righteousness. But when we moved to Him, we were freed from sin. Error in the mind of man is easily introduced during an evaluation of these verses though. There are people who are not Christians who do really great stuff for others, for their community, for the sake of animals or the environment, etc.

And, of course, there are Christians who fail at any or all of these things. Their lives actually changed little after coming to Christ. This sets up a false belief in people that Christ doesn't really make anyone holy. The problem with this is that it is dealing with the slave in regard to the master, not the master's authority over the slave. The example from 6:19 was that a slave went from his previous owner, Stevius Romanus, to a new owner, Sergious Maximus. Regardless of how the slave acts, he has become the legal property of Sergious Maximus.

This is what Paul is speaking about here. Slavery to Stevius Romanus is synonymous with freedom from Sergious Maximus; slavery to Sergious Maximus is synonymous with freedom from Stevius Romanus. Now simply change the ownership titles and say the sentence again –

"Slavery to the devil is synonymous with freedom from Christ; slavery to Christ is synonymous with freedom from the devil."

It is the ownership which has changed. The slave now has a responsibility to change his life and habits to the new owner. If he fails to do so, it in no way changes the ownership. The title to deed to our slave has transferred.

Life application: Who are we going to please, our Master who loved us so much that He gave His life to have authority over us, or our old master who cares so little about us that he desired our destruction? Think it through - everything the devil had to offer was pleasing on the outside and yet rotten on the inside. Why would we want such fruit when the life Christ offers is pure and good, from the inside out?

*Lord, as I sit with my thoughts, I realize that everything around me is so perfectly placed and organized. I get thirsty and there is water, I get hungry and there is food, I get tired and there is sleep. New things come out of the ground to replace that which was pulled up. It rains and everything turns vibrant green. It's all so perfectly arranged. You are great, O God. Amen.*

**What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. Romans 6:21**

Paul's question is asking about having fruit, not so much the quality of it. The quality naturally goes along with what the source of the fruit is. This can be seen in Jesus' words found in Matthew 7:16-19 -

"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Elsewhere in the Bible, it's noted that thorns and thistles end up in the fire, just as those who bear bad fruit will end up in the Lake of Fire. These agricultural concepts are given because anyone can figure them out. No one would pick up a thorn bush and start chewing on it and expect to get delightful nourishment from it. And so, Paul asks his reader to think things through. If you were a slave to sin, of course only bad fruit would result. It isn't possible that a tree which is by nature bad could somehow produce fruit contrary to its nature.

Adam Clark states it this way: "God designs that every man shall reap benefit by his service. What benefit have ye derived from the service of sin?"

The answer is that the bad tree will, of course, bear that which is bad. The reaping then is one which is intended for death and destruction. We will see this concept reintroduced in chapter 7 as well -

"For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death." Romans 7:5

If we are a slave to sin, then our passions will work in our members to death. Think of whatever sin you wish. In the end, it always leads to death because it is destructive to the body and the soul. But more importantly than the physical death is the spiritual, eternal death which is a result of being a slave to sin. The life of sin is ultimately a life of death.

If we have become a slave of righteousness (meaning having been saved by Jesus), then why would we continue to entertain the life of sin? It is contrary to our new nature. Those things we were ashamed of when we called on Christ are no less shameful now, so don't allow your life and your actions to be returned to the very bondage from which you were purchased.

Life application: A spiritually alive being living in a spiritually dead way is a self-contradiction. If you have been born again by the Spirit of God, then you should endeavor to live in newness of life. You will bear fruit from your labors. What type will they be?

*Heavenly Father, in Your wisdom You made each tree to bear its own fruit. Some bear good and some bear bad. Before, I bore fruit which showed the type of tree I was, and it wasn't pleasant. But then came Jesus and then came a change. What could once only be bad can now be pleasant and sweet. Help me to bear that which honors You in Your garden of delight. Amen.*

**But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.** Romans 6:22

As so often occurs in the apostle's writings, "but" is introduced. It is given as a stark contrast from the previous thought in 6:20, 21. Reflecting on all three verses will allow for a fuller comprehension of this contrast -

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."

What was once true is no more: The bonds which confined us have been removed. The sin that infected us with corruption is replaced with holiness. The master who assured only rewards of punishment has been exchanged for God who rewards with grace and love. What once condemned us is swallowed up in salvation. Everlasting life has replaced eternal death. All of this is tied up in "but." It is the glory of calling on Jesus Christ as Lord.

We have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God. Because of this, one could ask, "Isn't this then exchanging one type of bondage for another?" No. The answer is because God is infinite. In Him, there is no true confinement. Being a slave to God means sharing in His infinite stream of love, grace, mercy, truth, and holiness. There is no bondage where there are no bounds which limit our movement. Becoming a slave of God is to become the freest being of all.

Jesus told us this in John 8:34-36 - "Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'"

Life application: Because we have believed and stand justified, we should behave and become sanctified. Of what use is the old self? Of what use is sin? It is bondage and

confinement, but in Christ is freedom and expanse. Live now as if eternity has been realized in you, because it has.

*Lord, if sin is bondage and confinement, then holiness must be freedom and movement in broad places. If sin brought in death, then righteousness must surely restore life. If the devil is our master of condemnation, then You, O Lord, are our Master for salvation. The work is done, and I receive it by faith. I look to the cross for my freedom and restoration. Amen.*

**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Romans 6:23

The term "gospel" which equates to "good news" implies that there is bad news. The concept of being "saved" implies that there is something to be saved from. These are truths that are clearly and carefully laid out in the Bible. The creation and fall of man are recorded to show us that there is a problem which needs to be fixed. The Bible then shows the on-going process of working toward that fix. Here in the last verse of Romans 6, we see as clearly as can be presented, the contrast between the bad news and the good news, the state of loss and the salvation from it, and also the way that these things are realized.

"For" treats the following words as an axiom - "the wages of sin is death." The Bible proclaimed it right at the beginning and this rule has never changed; it is as if it is set in stone. There is nothing unfair or arbitrary about this. It is simply the way it is. In Ezekiel 18:4, it says, "The soul who sins shall die." This is what Adam was told and it is what every person who takes God at His word confesses. Nothing more than what is promised comes about - sin equals death. It is the exact and just punishment for the offense.

"Wages" are what is earned. We go to work and we expect to be paid. They are not grace, but are rather the just payment for a given work.

"Sin" is a missing of the mark. It is not meeting a set standard, but rather violating that standard. Sin can be inherited, such as when Adam sinned. His sin has been transferred to every person who was born of man; his unrighteousness is imputed to each of us. Sin can also be committed. Any violation of God's standard is sin, and any infraction of God's law breaks the entire law (James 2:10).

"Death" is what results from sin. It stands in opposition to life. This is the bad news. We have earned our wages and the sentence has been executed. We have received death

because of our sin. The death noted here is "spiritual" in nature. Physical death is merely a result of spiritual death. This is certain because when one is "born again" it is spiritual in nature. We are already physically alive and, unless Jesus comes first, we will physically die. Therefore, the death is spiritual, and the "born again" life is also spiritual.

Despite this bleak situation, there is a resounding note of hope as the word "but" is introduced. "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This little word "but" brings in a contrast to what was just noted.

"The gift." Wages are earned; a gift cannot be earned. If one attempts to pay for a gift, it is an offense to the giver and it negates the nature of the gift. Therefore, this is something which cannot be earned by our merits or labors. It is an act of grace. Adam Clarke states it this way, "A man may Merit hell, but he cannot Merit heaven."

"Of God" indicates the Source of the gift. An individual's personal effort is the source of his wages. Man believed the lie of the devil and then took action by his own will. He ate (his work); he died (his wages). In our "but" God has done the work and has offered it to us. It is His work and His gift.

"Is eternal life" this contrasts death and it shows very precisely that one (death) is just as enduring as the other (eternal life). If one doesn't receive the gift, then the death is eternal. This is the only obvious conclusion to the matter. If the life which is granted is eternal, then the death which is earned, if not reversed through the gift, will likewise last for eternity.

This superlative gift which God offers is found "in Christ Jesus." One is either "in" Christ or they are "not in" Christ. The Bible offers no other path to God and it excludes any other path to God. There is no such thing as "Christianity plus." It is either/or. If God were to allow any other path to reconciliation apart from the cross-death of His Son, then it was the most pointless gesture ever made. To be "in" Jesus then can be explained by His own words in John 14:6 - "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Jesus' statement is exclusive of any other remedy. There is nothing arbitrary about it, nor is it unfair. Fair is getting what one deserves and therefore "fair" is death. This is our just desserts. Grace bestowed upon one and not another isn't unfair; it is grace. Jesus explains this in His parable of Matthew 20:1-16. To be "in Christ" is to have received God's gift. To not be in Christ means to receive the earned wages.



Concerning those who are "saved" prior to the cross, such as Abraham. Their salvation looked forward to the work of Messiah; ours looks back on it. But all who are saved come through Christ Jesus and none come apart from Him.

A point about gifts must be made. A gift is something that is offered, and which must be accepted. If, as Calvinists teach, one is "regenerated" in order to believe, then they are saved before they are saved; it is no gift at all. The Bible never teaches this doctrine. Instead, it teaches that man is fallen and dead spiritually. We can do nothing to revive ourselves from this dead state. But it is a category mistake to say that we can't "see the gift" and receive it. We may be spiritually dead, but we are not mentally dead. We see the good, we receive the good, and are then regenerated to spiritual life. A forced gift is no gift; forced faith is not faith; and imposed grace is not grace.

The final portion of Romans 6:23 states "our Lord." Christ Jesus isn't "a" Lord, as if there were others. Christ Jesus isn't a created being to whom we fall in praise and adoration, thus committing another sin by denying God the glory that He alone is due. Christ Jesus is God. He is the Incarnate Word of God. He is the full expression of God in a form that we can understand. He is "Lord."

Romans 6:23 is a verse which will never be fully exhausted in how it can be discussed and contemplated. It demonstrates the immense wisdom of God, the glory of Christ, and the beauty of reconciliation through the gift of His life, death, and resurrection.

Life application: Take time to memorize this verse and to think on it from day to day. Always be ready to cite and explain it so that others can grasp the wonder of the gospel message; our Good News.

*Heavenly Father, as sure as I know anything else, Your word contains truths which are eternal in nature. Adam sinned and immediately after that a promise was made - that the Seed of the woman would undo what we had fouled up. Every page after that continues to work towards that Promised One. I may not know it all, but I know who He is. Thank You for the coming of Messiah. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 7

**Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? Romans 7:1**

It has been made abundantly clear in Chapter 6 that we are no longer slaves to sin, but to righteousness; we have died with Christ and shall also live with Him; death has no dominion over Him and therefore it no longer has dominion over us. Can I get an amen?

Now in chapter 7, we will be shown our relationship to the law. If we get this chapter wrong, we will have a confused idea about what we can and cannot do. Churches all over the world levy requirements from the Law of Moses onto their congregants because they fail to grasp and adhere to the precepts found in this chapter (and which are explained elsewhere in Paul's writings).

Chapter 6 explicitly said that in Christ we "are not under law but under grace." (v14) Chapter 7 will show us how this happened and will demonstrate that the law has no authority over or claim on us. Pay heed to Paul's words because the law is "all or nothing." If we are under the law, we are obligated to the whole law, every precept of it (James 2:10). If we are not under the law, then no part of it has a claim on us. We cannot "pick and choose" which part of the law is still required and which isn't as so many within the church attempt to do.

And so, to set the tone for his argument, he begins with "Or do you not know?" This is a rhetorical question to be taken as a statement of fact - "Surely you realize this truth." After this he explains his position to his "brethren." Although he is writing to all within the church and his words are doctrine for all, he is directing his comments to those who "know the law." This would be the Jewish brethren who have an understanding of what the law is clear about.

"Surely you realize this truth from within the law itself..." And then he brings up a precept from the law which is as obvious as it could be, "that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives." A person born under the law is obligated to that law; the law has dominion over you.

The term "has dominion" is the Greek *kyrieuei*. The word is one of ruling. Paul has personified the Law to show a comparison to what he already demonstrated in chapter 6 when he personified Sin and Righteousness. The term "as long as he lives" can also rightly be translated "as long as it lives." The ambiguity is certainly to show the truth

from either direction. As long as a man is alive, the law has ruling authority over him. Or, as long as the law is in effect, it has ruling authority over the man, but if it is abrogated, it no longer applies. However, based on the comparison he will make in the coming verses, the translation "as long as he lives" is the intent of the passage.

Life application: If you are under the law, it has dominion over you. If you die, you are free from the constraint of the law. Likewise, if the law is abrogated, you are free from its constraint. Think on this and apply it to your Christian walk. Either a law applies, or it doesn't. If it does, it does so entirely. If it doesn't then it is of no effect.

*Heavenly Father, let me not be one to "pick and choose" what I will comply with from Your word. Rather, let me be obedient to Your precepts as they apply to me. If they are set aside, then I am free from them. If they are enacted and in force, then let me be obedient to them. Lord, what You determine, so help me to do, in order that I may be pleasing in Your sight. Amen.*

**For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.** Romans 7:2

In his ever-consistent writings, Paul confirms his words in this verse in another verse found in 1 Corinthians 7:39 -

"A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."

This is an obvious truth. The marriage of a woman to a man binds her to that husband. He is the head of the family, both under the law and also within the New Testament context (Ephesians 5:23 for example). Being bound to that husband means that she has vowed to perform her duties as a wife and be faithful to him. However, the death of the husband releases her from his headship; she is no longer bound to him.

This simple example of the husband/wife relationship will be used in order to demonstrate a truth concerning our relationship to the law. The Bible uses such simple examples to keep us from mistaking deeper theological truths. Unfortunately, even such simplicity is often overlooked or ignored in an attempt to continue on down improper paths of our relationship with Christ. Endeavor to not be swayed by those who would follow such avenues of disobedience.

Life application: When an object lesson is given in the Bible, it is done so that we can see easy-to-understand concepts of issues that are often complex, or which could otherwise

lead to heresy if ignored. Pay close attention to such simplicity because it will guide you as you wade into deeper theological waters.

*Lord God, I cherish Your word and I truly want to be obedient to it. When there are things I don't understand contained there, please direct me to proper instruction on those matters and keep me away from those analyses which are incorrect. I trust that You will lead me on the right path of instruction so that my doctrine will be pure, and You will be glorified through my walk. Amen.*

**So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Romans 7:3**

"So then if" takes into consideration the previous verse. That a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. However, should he die before she does, then she is no longer bound to him, but if he is alive, she remains bound to him.... So then if, while in this state, she marries somebody else, she "will be called" an adulteress.

The Geneva Bible says, "That is, she will be an adulteress, by the consent and judgment of all men." She not only is "called an adulterous" as if she were somehow being improperly maligned, but she is called it as a matter of fact. She has betrayed her vow to her husband and before God.

However, Paul continues - if her husband dies before she does, then the law which bound her to him dies with him; she is free from the obligation and the vow which made them one. Even though she has a new husband, nobody can mark her as an adulteress. She is free to commit herself to him, wholly and entirely. This example is given to show us a theological truth which will be explained in the verse to come.

Life application: As you are bound to your spouse while they live, live as if they live. Be faithful in your marriage and in your promise which you spoke before your Creator.

*Heavenly Father, You have blessed me with my spouse, knowing in advance everything that I would face along this path of my marriage. There are joys, but there are struggles - Oh how there are struggles! But through both joy and trial, You have commanded that I abide as I vowed to do. Because I have vowed with my lips in Your presence, I will perform my vow to the one I wed. Amen.*

**Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. Romans 7:4**

"Therefore..." Because of the contents of verses 1-3, we can now make the necessary connection. He addresses "my brethren." This is the same as was noted in verse 1. Although this applies to all within the church, he is speaking to those "who know the law." To clear up any confusion among Jewish believers, and to instruct the gentiles in the church who might otherwise be inclined to listen to wrong assumptions which those Jewish believers might come to and then teach, he gives his concluding analysis of this thought, "you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ."

He has been speaking about a woman's connection to a man through the bonds of marriage. When the husband is alive, she is bound to the husband through law. If the husband dies, then her obligation to the husband dies with him. Likewise, when Christ died, who is the embodiment and fulfillment of the law, those under the law "became dead to the law" through His body. How this can be misunderstood is almost beyond imagination. It is as clear as the ink on the paper. And yet, throughout history, people have attempted to "reinsert" the law, or selected portions of it as they pick and choose. Thus, they reject Paul's clear and obvious analogy.

Christ has released us from the law, completely and entirely. It is done. It is over. It is finished. It is set aside. It is obsolete. It is replaced. Can we not comprehend this? Rejecting this premise is a rejection of the work of Christ. He has freed us by justifying us. He has freed us from the law's penalty. He has removed the curse of the law from touching us again.

The death of the law is clearly noted in Colossians 2:14 - "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

Everything that stood against us is nailed to the tree. Why should we somehow desire to remove the nail and reject His cross when He has triumphed over it for us? Instead, we are now "married to another." If we were "married to" or obligated to the law, which is God's standard, and the law is dead to us, then let us now be "married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead." Of course, this is Jesus. Only He fulfilled the law. The wages of sin is death; He never sinned; therefore, death couldn't hold Him. Our

marriage to Him is to the One who embodies the law. Our fulfillment of the law is in Him, not in our futile attempts to meet its demands.

Because we are married to Him, let us "bear fruit to God." How do we do this? By honoring the Son. God is glorified when we call on Him, live for Him, and fulfill His will for our lives. Attempting to be justified by the law that He has fulfilled for us is to reject His work. In essence, it is saying to God, "I don't need Jesus, I have this one covered on my own." This isn't bearing fruit to God; it is dishonoring to Him.

If you see the logical progression of what Paul is writing, he went from speaking of our justification in chapter 5, to our slave-master relationship in chapter 6, and now to our marital status to Christ in chapter 7. All of this is directing us to how we are to interact with God through Christ. We are justified in Christ, we are slaves to Christ, not the law; and we are married to Christ because the law is dead to us.

Life application: Stand firm! Anytime someone tries to reinsert the law - any precept of it, then reject their words. If they say you can't eat a baloney sandwich or you must tithe, then correct them. If they ask why you don't have a Saturday Sabbath, then instruct them. In the end, it is all the law or none. Find a precept they don't adhere to (such as offering animal sacrifices, or wearing clothes sewn with two types of material) and show them the illogical nature of their partial adherence to the law. It is all Christ, or it is no-Christ.

*Oh God, how I cherish Your word. In it I find comfort and peace. In its pages I see Your heart for us and Your love for us. But I also see Your righteous and just nature. You demand perfection and then You provide a way for us to obtain it. All of this is revealed in the pages of Your glorious word. Surely it is sweeter to my taste than honey. Thank You for Your word! Amen.*

**For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.** Romans 7:5

The term "for when" introduces a continuing explanation of the previous verses, particularly verse 4. We have become dead to the law through the body of Christ. This is so that we may be "married to another" - because death nullifies the previous marriage. Now that we are in this state, we are to "bear fruit to God." This is the thought of verse 4 and now, "For when" is given to show us the contrast in the type of fruit from then and now.

"For when we were in the flesh" must mean when we were under law and prior to our spiritual rebirth. It can mean nothing else based on the context of what has been given. Therefore, "the flesh" is life under the law and its attempts to merit God's favor apart from Christ. And what was the result? "The sinful passions which were aroused by the law..." How does the law arouse passions? To answer, we head right back to Romans 3:20 -

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

There is no sin where no law has been given. However, with the giving of the law comes the knowledge of sin. And in violating the law, our members are working in a way which will "bear fruit to death." As was noted in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death."

- The law is introduced
- The knowledge of sin comes through the introduction of the law
- A violation of the law is an act of the individual which then deserves payment
- The wages of sin is death
- Therefore, the fruit of death has been borne through the law

Paul has been consistent in his thoughts as he has progressed through his letter. Each step is working towards a fuller understanding of what it means to be "in Christ" and free from the constraints of the law. Pay heed to what is given and apply it to your life and doctrine. Romans is a foundational letter of what it means to be a Christian.

Life application: Do you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ who is pleasing to God? Then properly apply New Testament doctrine to your walk. In particular, Paul's epistles show us proper doctrine for the church age. Read them often, think on them always.

*Lord God, music is a treat to my ears, but Your word is more wonderful. Honey is a delight to my taste, but Your word is far sweeter. The love of my family is warmth to my heart, but Your word is even more comforting. And Lord, this world is a joy and a blessing to experience, but the anticipation of what Your word promises is even more glorious. How I love Your word! Amen.*

**But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.** Romans 7:6

"But now"... We are introduced to a contrast from the preceding verse which said - "For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death."

The law, which aroused in us sinful passions, is behind us. We "have been delivered from" it. The law should no longer arouse these things because we are dead to it. As it says, "having died." There is a dispute as to the meaning of "having died." Is it the law that died to us, or we who died to the law? Some manuscripts imply one and some the other. The answer is that the law is in full effect for those who have not come to Christ. Therefore, those who have received Christ have died to it. We have died with Christ and are raised with Him - free from the law.

The law held us captive, and we were slaves to it, but when we died with Christ - as Paul has so precisely detailed in the previous chapters - we were released from its bonds "so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

This theme will be reintroduced by Paul on several occasions in his epistles. The "oldness of the letter" is speaking of that which was written down, meaning the law. It was received on tablets of stone and it bound the people of Israel to sin by showing them their utterly sinful nature. Now that we have died to the law through Jesus (because Jesus fulfilled the law, including His death which was in fulfillment of it) we should serve in newness of the Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 3:1-18, a detail of the difference between the "letter" and the "Spirit" is given. Paul says there that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." As a real, tangible example of this, it was noted in Exodus at the giving of the law that 3000 who disobeyed received the wages of their sin and died (Exodus 32:28). However, at the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost, 3000 received the gift and were saved (Acts 2:41). This wasn't an arbitrary pattern, but one set in the pages of the Bible specifically to show the difference - death from the law, or death to the law and life through the Spirit.

We who have called on Jesus now have the Spirit and we may walk in that new state. There is an eternal hope which cannot be taken away and the evidence is our placement in Christ; free from the bondage of the law, and thus free to serve our new Master.

Life application: We have died to the law, so heed the words of Paul from Colossians -

"Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 'Do not



touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?"

Colossians 2:20-22

What the law bound you to is gone. Live for Christ, and do not reintroduce the law to which you have died.

*Oh, most glorious Heavenly Father! You have given us freedom through Christ. He fulfilled the law which was contrary to us and then He gave His life as our Substitute. Now, we are set free from its bonds. We have died to it through His death and so we can now walk in newness of the Spirit. Because this is so, help our walk to be one which is pleasing to You. Lead us and guide us all our days. Amen.*

**What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." Romans 7:7**

Again, as he has done several times already, Paul asks a rhetorical question to help us think an issue through. This is possibly asked in response to someone who was trying to defend the law as still being in force, even after Christ's work was accomplished. His question begins with, "What shall we say then?" It is certainly asked as a result of his statement in verse 5 - "For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death."

"Ok Paul, if what you said is true and the law arouses these sinful pleasures in us, then 'is the law sin?' Is the law insufficient to justify us or allow us to grow in sanctification? Is its design to make those under it worse people than before it was introduced?"

And his answer is the same as it has been five times already to such similar questions, "Certainly not!" If the law is sin, then God, who authored the law, authored sin! The issue is one of misunderstanding where the evil lies. It is in man, not in the law. To show that this is true, he states, "On the contrary..." This demonstrates that the thought which is presented is actually the opposite of what is correct. "The law isn't sin; the opposite is true. And in support of this, I present that 'I would not have known sin except through the law.'"

Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. There were, let's say, 100 types of trees around them. If God has said nothing about the trees, then what they did with the trees wouldn't matter. If He said, "You can climb any tree you want, but you cannot cut any down," then that would have been the law. They would sin only if they cut a tree down.

But this wasn't a law that was given and so no sin could result if they did. The law was that they couldn't eat of a particular tree's fruit. If he hadn't given that law, then there would be no sin for eating the fruit. Introducing a just law isn't sinful. It simply demonstrates what sin is (or will be if the law is broken).

However, an unjust law could be the cause of sin. God created Adam and Eve as beings needing food and water. If He told them they were not allowed to eat or drink, then the law would be unjust. How could sin be imputed in this instance? The law would, in fact, cause sin. But this isn't the case. The law is good, reasonable, and correct. The same is true with the Law of Moses as Paul will now demonstrate when he says, "I would not have known sin except through the law." This is exactly what was demonstrated concerning Adam and Eve. The law given to them wasn't sin, but the sin was in them, waiting to be aroused. Paul continues, "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Although the principle applies to any part of the law, whether of the Ten Commandments, or some other precept found throughout it, Paul chooses the last of the big ten. And he only cites the basic premise of the commandment, not the entire commandment as was given in Exodus 20. The rest of it mentions things that can be coveted, such as "your neighbor's house." His citing of the opening portion is intended to include all coveting, something that wouldn't be a sin unless we were told that to covet was sinful. Only when coveting is identified as coveting, and that it is wrong, can we know that coveting is sin.

Life application: When God gives a law, it is always just, righteous, and attainable. Nothing that we are asked to do by Him is sinful. Instead, sin is brought about by our knowledge of and failure to obey His law. Therefore, it is imperative to know what God expects and then to adhere to that.

*How grateful I am to You, O God, for the work of Jesus who fulfilled the law on my behalf. I know that if I strayed in one part of Your law, that the whole law was broken. The weight of it all was so heavy, but then came Jesus. He did what I could never do and now I am free through Him. Truly His yoke is easy, and His burden is light upon me. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.** Romans 7:8

The words in this verse hit at the heart of the depravity of man and at the immense glory of what must surely be realized in the work of Christ. In the previous verse we

were shown that we would not have known sin except through the law. Using coveting as an example, it was demonstrated that we wouldn't even know what it meant to covet unless we were told to not do it.

"But sin" - the excitation of this act; the wicked principle in the heart - takes its "opportunity by the commandment." Once the commandment was given, the heart was stirred into an act of rebellion by presuming it could do the very thing it was instructed to not do. In the Garden of Eden there was no sin; all was holy. There existed a state which never was before, and which could never be again. There was free will, but there was no commandment which could excite sin into being.

However, the commandment was given, " Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16, 17

Once the words were spoken, it produced in man an evil desire, to do the very thing he was instructed to not do. Edgar Allen Poe would call it "the imp of the perverse." The very thing that shouldn't be done suddenly springs to life and wants to do that thing. When a new law is introduced in a land, the first thing that happens is for people to think about breaking that law or devising ways to get around it. But before the law was introduced, there was no impetus for doing the very thing which they are now intent on doing. In other words, "apart from the law sin was dead."

To now look at this from the other side of the cross, we can see the immense glory of our state in Christ. A corporate body of law was given to Israel, a law based on God's standards of righteousness and holiness. With the introduction of this law, sin took the opportunity and produced all manner of evil desire. The only way to be relieved from this was by grace through faith that God's provisions for the sins committed would remove the sin. These included sacrifices and a Day of Atonement.

Even the sacrifices became sinful though when they were made without the faith which necessitated them in the first place. However, in a beautiful demonstration of God's righteousness, mercy, love, justice, truth, holiness, and grace, a promise was made throughout the time of this law that God would provide a final Sacrifice which would, once and for all, handle the sin-debt which was excited into being through the law. Jesus came and lived His life under this body of law without sinning and then He gave His life as an offering and an exchange for those of us who cannot do so.

As He fulfilled the law, when He died, the law died with Him for those who trust in Him (through faith in His work). Because we are dead to the law, we are dead to sin. This is

what Paul was speaking about in Romans 6:14, 15. The law has no power over us. Therefore, let us not sin because we are not under law, but under grace.

Life application: There is a struggle going on in each of us. The laws which exist around us are given and when they are introduced, we now have a standard by which we will be judged and a premise by which we are to conduct ourselves. But the law, when given, can also incite us to wrongdoing by the giving of the law. Does this make the law the cause of sin? No, it only shows us that we are prone to sin. In our weak and fallen state, we need a release from life's temptations, and it is found in Jesus. Let each of us look to Him for strength against this war which wages in our lives.

*I am dependent on You, O God, completely and entirely, for strength against the war which wages in my life. Those things I know I shouldn't do, these are the things which tempt me. Grant me Your wisdom to decide on the right course to take and grant me Your strength to endure that course. In myself I am weak, but through You I am strong. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.** Romans 7:9

This verse has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some insist that Paul is speaking of himself in the first person - at a time when he felt secure in himself concerning his spiritual nature. However, when he realized the true weight and purpose of the law, "sin revived and I died." It was at this moment that he realized his fallen state, when before this he felt assured in his own righteousness. This is not likely because he wasn't saved until he was saved. He wasn't spiritually alive as a Pharisee persecuting God's people and then suddenly spiritually dead when he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Both testaments show that it is faith in God and His promises by which one lives, not adherence to the law. As Paul lived under the law, he should have known that "the just shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:4).

Others look at him speaking of an "age of innocence" or "accountability." Paul was spiritually alive until he came to a point in life where he mentally grasped the law and thus went from "spiritual life" to "spiritual death." This is incorrect and is based on an emotional interpretation of biblical doctrine. This concept requires inserting incorrect preconceived notions about the nature of man into the text, rather than drawing out what the Bible teaches. The Bible is abundantly clear that we are spiritually dead even from birth. We inherit Adam's sin and thus there is nothing which causes us to spiritually die; it is a part of our nature from birth.

Some scholars believe that he is speaking of the people who received the law, meaning Israel. They were alive apart from the law, but when the law came, sin revived, and they died. In essence, Paul is speaking in the first person, but relating it to his heritage - Israel. This is also unlikely for the same reason as the previous two cases. The people were already born spiritually dead, and each needed to be made alive individually, just as their father Abraham was. The introduction of the law merely magnified the truth of this.

A fourth option, which will be substantiated in the coming verses, is that he is writing about the introduction of any law, the knowledge of which revives sin and through that sin we die. In essence, it would take us all the way back to Adam and his original sin. Thus, Paul is speaking in the first person of his humanity. This is certainly the case. He has been speaking about one commandment, coveting, as the basis for his analysis. However, coveting doesn't cover the entire Law of Moses, it is merely one aspect of it. Further, he speaks of "law" not "the law." There is no definite article in the original Greek. Therefore, it is whatever law is given. In other words, he is using coveting as an example of any law. All will have the same effect.

This fourth option is certainly what he is speaking about and this will be seen in what he states as he progresses. He will speak in plural terms, "we," and then in the singular, "I." By merely looking at his statements and comparing them to Adam's transgression, we can see what occurred in humanity. The use of coveting is simply demonstrating that whatever law is given will have the same effect. Through law is the knowledge of sin and apart from law, sin is dead.

Life application: Faith... this is what God looks for in each of us. When we trust in our own righteousness, it is saying that we can do it all without God. The introduction of law is intended to show us this isn't so. It is faith in Jesus and His work which delivers us from death to life. Thank God for Jesus!

*Heavenly Father, how great You are. The gold in the riverbeds, the silver in the hills, the money in the bank... none of it compares to the treasures found in Your word. And of all the treasures I find there, the greatest is seen in Jesus. There is nothing which compares to what You have done for us through Your Son, our Lord Jesus. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

**And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.**

Romans 7:10

When God gave Adam his one and only commandment in the Garden of Eden, it was intended as a means of life. Returning to the Genesis account again, we can see this –

“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:16, 17

Although a promise of death came with disobedience, it is thus inferred that the commandment was meant to bring life if obeyed. This is the nature of obedience. When a law is adhered to, one is fulfilling the intent of the law. However, as is noted, "the commandment which was to bring life, I found to bring death." This wasn't the commandment's fault, nor the fault of the One who gave it. Instead, it was the fault of the person who didn't follow suit in obedience. The same is found true under the Mosaic law -

"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Leviticus 18:5

Although stated in the positive, rather than in the negative as in Eden, the result is the same - "If you do these things, you shall live." It wasn't the fault of the law that one disobeyed. The law was good. It was also suited to produce good, not evil. However, evil ensued through disobedience of it, resulting in death.

Life application: When we look at the evil around us, or when we see calamity occur, we want to lash out at God. But this attitude fails to consider that He gave us free will and we have exercised it to our own detriment. The fact that evil exists isn't God's fault, nor does it mean He isn't competent to end it. That evil isn't ended yet has no bearing on what will someday be. His plan is greater than our temporary perceptions of the world around us. Have faith that He will bring all things to a satisfactory conclusion.

*Glorious Lord God, forgive me when I lash out at You and blame You for the evil I see around me. I know that what You created is good and that it was through our own disobedience that evil entered the world. Remind me again of the promises in Your word that all evil will be dealt with and help me to wait patiently for that day, resting in Your sure promises! Amen.*

**For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.**  
Romans 7:11

This is a similar sentiment to what was stated in 7:8. What Paul is doing is showing how sin takes root in us. Even though it is derived from something good, such as the law, things get cunningly turned around through deception.

The Greek word for "deceived" is *exēpatēsen*. It indicates being thoroughly deceived or "hoodwinked." A form of this same word was used to translate Eve's words in the Greek copy of the Old Testament in Genesis 3:13 - "The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" This shows that Paul is probably referring to Genesis and is thus using the personal pronouns "I" and "me" in this chapter to refer to his humanity and is thus applying the principle to all people.

Sin is being personified to show us how the devil worked in the Garden of Eden and how he continues to work through various things and people. The deception he is speaking of, which takes occasion through the commandment, ends in death. Solomon shows us how this works when describing the flattering words of an adulterous woman -

“With her enticing speech she caused him to yield,  
With her flattering lips she seduced him.  
Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter,  
Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,  
Till an arrow struck his liver.  
As a bird hastens to the snare,  
He did not know it would cost his life.” Proverbs 7:21-23

Sin's deception is so powerful that we simply follow its lead like dumb animals to the slaughter. This is exactly how it works in us time and time again. In the coming verses, Paul will show us how the conflict rages and the confusion which results. But he will also show us the remedy for it. There is victory over the power of sin, and it is to be found in Jesus.

Life application: Sometimes something seems so right and yet it is deadly to our soul. We need to be on constant guard against the deceitfulness of sin, but the only way to do so is to know what in fact is sinful. Reading and meditating on God's word is the surest way to be grounded in our faith. Be like the psalmist of old and "meditate day and night" on the precepts found in the Bible.

*Lord, the thing I desire to do is the thing I often fail at. And the thing I know is wrong and that I don't want to do, well, this is the thing I often end up doing. Where is the remedy? Where is my cure? I know it is found in You - knowing You, fixing my eyes on You, and*

*meditating on Your word. Be with me in this struggle and may my life be one which is pleasing to You. Amen.*

**Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.**

Romans 7:12

Five verses ago, the question was asked, "Is the law sin?" The answer was, "Certainly not!" Since that question and response, a defense of the law and an exposure of our troubled nature has been given. The result of these comments is our "therefore" in this verse.

The law is holy. If the law came from God, then it must be holy because He is holy. "The commandment" is speaking of whatever part of the law is being referred to. In this case, "You shall not covet." The commandment, which is a portion of the law, is holy. In other words, if the law is holy, then all of the law is holy. This is why James could say in his epistle that whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one aspect of it, he is guilty of all. If a holy precept found in the law is violated, the entire law is broken.

And not only is the commandment holy, but it is also "just." What God determines is just because it stems from His righteous nature. Therefore, the penalty which comes from violating the standard is holy and just.

And equally true is that the law is "good." What it expects is good, and when it is adhered to then good will result. There is no failing in the law. All that it entails is right, but when we don't obey what has been given, then fault results. The goodness and beauty of God's law is described in detail by David in the 19th Psalm -

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,  
And in keeping them there is great reward." Psalm 19:8-11



Life application: Like Psalm 19, the 119th Psalm gives a beautiful and lengthy discourse on the nature of God's law. It is 176 verses which are subdivided into 22 octaves. Take time each day before your Bible reading to read one octave of this Psalm. By doing so, you will set a proper tone for the rest of your Bible reading. Make this be your daily habit for all the days of your life.

*O Lord, my Lord! Thank You for the beautiful word You have given to us. Everything it details is perfect and pure. Each word is given to lead us to a fuller and more perfect walk with You. Give me the heart and desire to read from it all the days of my life. And Lord, may my thoughts and meditations of it be properly directed to a deeper understanding of Your work in my life. Amen.*

**Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. Romans 7:13**

In response to the previous verses, particularly the logic which follows from 8-12, another rhetorical question is now proposed. If the law is good and yet death came about through the introduction of the law, then has "what is good become death to me?" Again, he is proposing a question which seems obvious on the surface and yet which is based on a misunderstanding of what has occurred. Thus, the answer is, "Certainly not!"

Instead, sin (the thing which brings about death, not the law itself) "that it might appear sin" is what produced the death "through what is good." The fault isn't in the law, which is good. The fault is in the person's disobedient will.

In order to completely understand this, we can look to what Thomas Aquinas wrote in the 13th century. He said, "...evil never follows in the effect, unless some other evil pre-exists in the agent or in the matter... But in voluntary things the defect of the action comes from the will actually deficient, inasmuch as it does not actually subject itself to its proper rule. This defect, however, is not a fault, but fault follows upon it from the fact that the will acts with this defect."

The astonishingly profound thought of Aquinas is merely an explanation of Paul's thoughts here in Romans. "The defect of the action" – in this case disobeying the command, "comes from will actually deficient." In the case of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, this was a result of the lack of the knowledge of good and evil; they were in a state of innocence - this is their deficiency.

But was this God's fault? No! Aquinas says it is "deficient, inasmuch as it does not actually subject itself to its proper rule." What was the proper rule concerning their state of innocence? It was to obey their Creator and not eat the fruit; the good commandment which they were given.

When they disobeyed by using free will, was it because of a fault in them as created by God? Again - No! It "is not a fault, but fault follows upon it from the fact that the will, (meaning their free will) acts with this defect." The blame is placed squarely and solely on man.

And nothing has changed since then. When we act with our free will in a manner contrary to whatever good law is given, it produces "fault" or "sin." And the sin produces death. It is not the law, but the exercising of our free will which brings this about.

Did God know that this would be the case? Of course He did. But He also knew that free will in man was a necessity for an honest, reciprocal relationship of love. In the end, free-will, despite all of the evil which has come from it, is still the better option for man. Because with the fall comes the hope of restoration through Christ. And with the introduction of the law comes the final point of this verse. The commandment was given "so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."

In other words, by giving a commandment, sin is known to be sin. By giving the Law of Moses which included many commandments, sin "might become exceedingly sinful." The law shows us our desperately fallen state and thus our desperate need for Christ. Through Him, we receive imputed righteousness and through Him we aren't just saved from this body of death, we are eternally saved from it. Through sin we see our unrighteousness. Through much sin, we see it all the more. And the more we see it, the more glorious appears the grace of God through Jesus!

Life application: Your life is one marked with failure and sin, but through Christ what was so desperately fouled up can be purified, made spotless, and restored completely. Through Christ, the past is gone, and a new path is found. We can now exercise our free will to the glory of God and not for a life of sin.

*Heavenly Father, I simply can't grasp the immense mercy You have lavished upon me. You are so far above me and so glorious, and I have lived a life which has continuously been one of doing wrong, thinking bad thoughts, and failing to measure up to Your perfect law. And yet, despite my failures, You offered me Your righteousness through the*

*gift of Your Son. I simply can't grasp the immense mercy You have lavished upon me. Amen.*

**For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.** Romans 7:14

There are many viewpoints as to who Paul is speaking about in this verse when he says "I." As we've seen, he used the term previously, not specifically speaking of himself, but as a way of showing the struggle which exists in all people.

Some scholars look at what he is saying in this verse as any individual's struggle against sin under their own power - be it Jew under the law or gentile who simply understands man's depravity and his wars with the unwritten code. Others see it as the difficult struggle of those who have called on Jesus and yet continue to struggle with sin in their lives. This would be those ranging from "carnal" Christians - meaning those who are saved and yet are immature in their faith and practice, all the way to those who are fully mature but not yet completely sanctified; they still struggle with the "old Adam" in their life.

The debate about who Paul is referring to is actually unnecessary. It was demonstrated in verse 9 that Paul was using the term "I" in regard to his humanity. He used "coveting" as a means of demonstrating the conflict which arises, but coveting doesn't cover the entire law; it was used to represent any commandment in the law and thus any law.

He hasn't changed tracks in his thoughts and the "I" in this verse follows along the same line. The law God gave to Adam and Eve was spiritual, but they were in innocence. When they ate of the fruit, they attained the knowledge of good and evil, sin revived in them, and they died. Since that time, the knowledge has caused a war in the members of humanity. When a good law is given - be it conscience or be it the Law of Moses - the war rages.

All that God has done is good and the "law is spiritual." However, we as humans are "carnal, sold under sin." This is an inherited state. We aren't born to fall; we are born fallen. When we see a good law, our carnal selves war with it because of our sin nature.

Life application: As you progress in your Christian life, maturing from infancy to maturity, you will continue to struggle with sin. Although it's natural, it is also something you can overcome, but not in yourself. The struggle we're told about is a struggle between our earthly selves and that which is spiritual. By being filled with the Spirit, we allow the spiritual side to reign. We will continue to learn and develop this in the chapters ahead.

*Lord, when I am tempted to do something I shouldn't do and I follow through with it, my conscience gets seared a little bit. Each time... a little bit more. I can see how the things that once appalled me are now a part of my daily life. Renew my mind Lord. Help me to see my failings for what they are and then help me to remove them from my life. I know that through the power of Your Spirit this can happen! Amen.*

**For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.** Romans 7:15

There is a war in our lives which rages on, regardless of whether we are saved believers in Christ or not. We are earthly beings, bound to our fallen bodies. Having been saved by Christ allows us to see our fallen state for what it is and it causes this battle to rage all the more sometimes. Despite this, Paul has been talking about the state of one under the law. He's on the same path here, but is using this state to show us how the law highlights our sin nature.

In verse 13, we saw that sin, so that it might appear sin, was producing death in us through the law. This was so that "through the commandment" sin "might become exceedingly sinful." To see this as the Bible demonstrates, we can go to the account in Exodus where God gave the law to the people. In Exodus 24:7 we read these words - "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.'"

The very thing they willed to do though is the thing they didn't practice. In short order, they had fallen into disobedience of the very law that they proclaimed they would obey. They went out and corrupted themselves, not fully understanding the nature of their actions. When they made a golden calf, they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4)

In their confusion of who God is, they violated the very covenant that they had sworn to. The thing they willed to do, which was to worship God, they actually did not practice. And the thing they hated, which was to bring reproach on the God they desired to honor, this is the thing they did. This is the nature of sin and the death which is produced by the law. When a law is given, it naturally leads to this state.

As noted, this doesn't automatically change when one calls on Christ. If it did, Paul could not have elsewhere said in Ephesians 2:12, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" He isn't hinting that we could lose our salvation by saying this, but that we will continue to have this struggle. Coming up in the verses

ahead, Paul will show us the remedy for our situation, but the following verse in Ephesians 2:13, hints at it. "...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

Life application: Since you called on Jesus, have you struggled with your inward man? Have you done those things you wish you hadn't done? And the things you wish to do, are they seemingly out of your grasp? If you have this conflict, understand that it is normal but that it can be defeated. Allowing yourself to be "filled with the Spirit" will set you on the right path. But one must understand how that happens. Being filled with the Spirit is a passive, not an active, occurrence. We have all of the Spirit we will ever receive the moment we are saved. But the Spirit can get more of us. We must yield to Him through prayer, study of the word, fellowshiping with other believers in worship of the Lord, etc. Make a concerted effort to do these things and the war in you will diminish until it is gone.

*Oh, my beautiful Lord. I love You. The things You have created are a treat to my eyes and to my senses. The wisdom You have displayed in the placement of the clouds and the movement of the planets excites me. The joy I get from seeing the animals and birds amazes me. The food You fill me with satisfies me. I simply marvel at all You've done for us. Thank You Lord! Amen.*

**If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.**

Romans 7:16

This verse is an obvious truth. If the thing that I will to do, which is based on the law (see the previous verse's example concerning the people of Israel at the giving of the law), is the thing that I don't practice, and the thing that I do is the thing I will not to do (which is something contrary to the law), then "I agree with the law that it is good."

To get this straight, because the wording can be hard to grasp, just think of a law which is good and reasonable - say for example, keeping the posted speed limit of 40 mph. I want to keep the law, and probably for more than one reason. For example, I know the law is there to protect others. I certainly don't want to run over other people. The law is there to protect property. I don't want to skid out of control because I am driving faster than what is prudent (and road engineers are always right...). The law is also there to protect me. I don't want to end up in the hospital or in a wooden box. For these and other reasons (like maybe getting a speeding ticket), I will to do the law.

However, this is the thing that I don't practice. I don't pay attention sometimes; I go 45 without realizing it. Maybe I'm late for an appointment and so I speed, promising myself

that it's just this one time. Or, I may have a broken speedometer and my guesswork is faulty concerning the rate I'm travelling at. I'm not doing what I actually will to do in each case, even in the "late for the appointment" thing. This is true because I wouldn't have otherwise "promised myself" anything.

In all three of the instances, I had something bad happen. When I wasn't paying attention, I ran someone over. When I was late for the appointment, I lost control and took out four mailboxes and a yard gnome. When my speedometer was broken, I got a \$250.00 speeding ticket by the local sheriff. The thing I willed to do, which was to obey the law and avoid all of these things, is the thing I failed to do. And the thing that I willed not to do, which was to break the law and have all these terrible things result, well, that is what I did, and I suffered the consequences.

Because of these things, I have to agree that the law is good. This is exactly what Paul is telling us. God gave Adam and Eve a law and He had His good reasons for doing so. When they broke that law and received the just penalty for their violation, I guarantee they agreed that the law was good. In fact, one premise of the Bible after that point is that we have been trying to get back to "Eden" ever since. Regardless of whether we're doing it the right way or not, everyone is looking for something better. We know this world is a world of fault ending in death and we have to agree that the law was, in fact, good. Every law introduced by God since that time has contained the same overarching truth.

Life application: Far too often when we break a law, we attempt to divert the blame elsewhere. It is so much easier to do this, but if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit our faults and agree that if the law was a good and just law, that we failed. This is particularly true with God's laws. When you fall short of His requirements, confess it and ask Him to redirect you toward obedience.

*Heavenly Father, You know where my thoughts about You are wrong. Just because I think I'm right doesn't mean I am. And so, Lord, search out my life and those things that I have placed my faith in, and open my eyes to the areas which are misdirected. Let me not be so stubborn as to ignore the truth of a matter, but help me to be open and willing to change in order to be pleasing to You. Guide me, O God. Amen.*

**But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Romans 7:17**

Paul continues to personify sin. He shows the contrast between Sin and himself. The sin in him causes him to take actions contrary to the will that he wishes he could exercise. All of this was made known by the introduction of the law, but it isn't the law's fault that

these things have come about. He (and thus we, because he is speaking in terms of his human nature) is being shown the truth of his nature and the contrast which wars inside of him.

And even the unregenerate know of this war in their soul. It is universally displayed in humanity - in their writings, in movies, in plays, in daily life too. Cultures and people talk about sin in terms that show us that they understand the war, even if they haven't properly identified how it works. Paul, by divine inspiration, is showing us the truth of the matter.

When we call on Christ, we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. This is an indwelling that previously didn't exist. There will be a point of relief from this battle, but it is a battle. Hence, we speak of "indwelling sin" in the believer as well. The two are at war and this is highlighted when we call on Christ. Let us not turn our eyes from the truths Paul will continue to reveal to us.

Life application: Yes, sin dwells in me, but greater than sin is the presence of the Holy Spirit - available to all who have called on Christ. It is He who can give us victory over the fleshly man. Let us remember that this "filling" of the Spirit is revealed as passive in nature. We must grant it to Him through the development of our Christian walk. Let us welcome the Spirit through study, prayer, fellowship, and a life which is obedient to Christ our Lord.

*Precious, glorious God - I look to You each day as I rise for the opening of Your hand of grace. The job I have, the food I eat, the family and friends that surround me - all of these and so much more come because You have placed me at this point in time. Help me to realize that nothing good comes except from You and that You are truly tending to my every need. Amen.*

**For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. Romans 7:18**

It was previously noted that Paul's personal pronoun "I" is being used to speak of his humanity and thus it is something that pertains to all of us. "For I know" is written to take us back to his statement that he "is carnal, sold under sin." This is now referred to as his "flesh." The physical being of man is fallen and in us "nothing good dwells." This is a state known as "total depravity." However, this term is perceived by scholars in a variety of ways.

Some go to the extreme that we are utterly corrupt and incapable of doing good or even responding to good. In essence, the image of God in man has been erased or is so significantly marred that we are utterly fallen, corrupt, and wicked. Others see total depravity as the image of God being effaced in man. There is nothing good in and of ourselves, but we can see what is good, respond to what is good, and choose what is good. The image of God is marred, but it is still a noticeable trait of man. A third option is that we are fallen, but there is goodness in us none-the-less.

The first option is obviously incorrect. The Bible states that we must "believe" certain things in order to be saved. The Bible notes that as fallen sons of Adam, we must respond, accept God's gift, receive, etc. If we were totally depraved, such as Calvinists claim, this wouldn't be possible. We would have to make up a new doctrine - being regenerated in order to believe, then believing, then being saved. In essence, we would be saved before we were saved. This is convoluted thinking.

The third option isn't allowed by what Paul states here and elsewhere. We have no innate goodness in us. When something good is marred, it is no longer good. It is defective.

However, there is a suitable middle ground. Man is fallen, the image of God in him is marred, but he has been given intelligence and the ability to see that which is good. With that intelligence, he can choose the good or choose the bad. This is what the Bible shows us, time and time again and in both testaments. It is a category mistake to say that because we are depraved and spiritually dead, that we cannot see what is good and reach out for it. And the rest of Paul's comments in this verse verifies this.

Nothing good dwells in our flesh, but "for to will is present with me." How can someone claim that total depravity requires us to be regenerated first in order to believe? The will, which Paul has already said wants to do good is obviously capable of seeing the good or it wouldn't will to do good at all! The answer to our dilemma will be found before the end of the chapter. It will explain "how to perform what is good." The thing that Paul (and thus all of us) couldn't find is presented to humanity as a gift. As beings with free will, we must reach out and accept this gift.

Life application: Proverbs states, "The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him" (18:17). This is true in many ways, including theology. Listen carefully to various viewpoints, pray for the Lord to open your heart and understanding to the truth, and use the brains God has given you to reject what is wrong. One error in theology invariably leads down paths of more errors. Be sound in your doctrine and be approved in your theology.



*Oh, my wonderful Lord! As I go about my day, help me to look with new eyes at those around me. You didn't just come for some and not for others, but You came to redeem any who will follow You. Race, color, national origin - these things don't matter to You. We all came from one man, our father Adam, and thus we are all people in the same human race. Let my heart look in love at others as You do. Amen.*

**For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.**  
Romans 7:19

This sentiment is very similar to 7:15 - "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do." These parallel sentiments show us, quite clearly for even the hardest head to think through, that we have a will which desires to do good. This is so obvious that Paul has said it twice, hoping that we won't mistake the fact... and yet we do. We come up with irregular doctrines which deny free will in order to establish boxes and limiting parameters which actually don't exist.

The term "free will" is used to indicate that we have the ability to make choices - we see the good and, hopefully, choose the good. However, the use of the term free will isn't meant to show that we are always able to exercise this will so that it is manifest in our fleshly body. Paul shows that we will to do good - this is our free, volitional will. However, this good that we will to do is not what we end up doing - this is the limiting factor on our will; restriction of the exercise of what we will.

Instead of exercising this will as we often desire, we take the opposite course of action. Our flesh, our carnal selves, cause us to practice "the evil I will not to do." We should put the stress on "I" throughout these verses. Anytime "I" is introduced it will end in fault. It happened in Eden and it has continued to happen throughout history as people have set aside His good law(s) and attempted to merit His favor on their own. The fact is, that if intent to do good was good enough, then the majority of the people of the world would be on the highway to heaven. However, intent inevitably leads to failure when "I" is involved. The flesh thrives on the "I" of our carnal selves.

The free will we are given, and it is indeed a gift of God's grace, is not for the exercise of "I" but for the choice for God. The doctrine of grace is not abolished through the teaching of free will as Calvinists claim; it is established. First, as a grace, we have been given this gift, and as a grace this gift continues in us, even after the fall. Free will, as was noted by Thomas Aquinas in our evaluation of Romans 7:13, was what caused the fall. To state otherwise would be to ascribe the fault (the sin) to God. Secondly, the exercising of one's free will in "choosing the good we see" in no way implies that we are able to either subjugate the evil, nor accomplish the good.

These are graces which are bestowed upon us after we make the choice. God does the work, and we receive it by faith. Thus, grace is fully established in the doctrine of free will. Calvinism, in this respect, is so far from the truth of the doctrine of Paul, that to accept it is to inevitably be led down one wrong path after another.

Life application: When reading the Bible, the simplest and most obvious explanation in the reading of the text is the wisest choice. However, this cannot be applied to single verses which have been ripped out of context. Instead, everything must remain in context and then be taken with the obvious intent of the wording. You have been given free will to accept or reject this premise, choose well.

*Lord, the concept of grace is established and given its highest luster in the free will You have granted us. The will itself is a grace. With it, we are able to choose the good, and then You accomplish the good we have chosen. Thus, the grace is displayed in Your work on our behalf. Grace is established and You are glorified. What a perfectly wonderful God You are. I choose to praise You! Amen.*

**Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.**  
Romans 7:20

This verse repeats and consolidates the thought of verses 16 and 17. Why would Paul do this, saying the same thing a second time? The reason is that it is highlighting the issue and it is verifying the two "for's" found in verses 18 & 19. In other words, he is being extremely precise in his thoughts. These thoughts could be considered improperly contemplated and relayed by a surface review of the wording.

In order to substantiate that he is, in fact, correct in his analysis, he has stated the truth of the matter (verses 16 & 17), and then defended it in a way which highlighted the truth of his thoughts (verses 18 & 19), and then restated what has been found to be correct in the first place.

Sometimes it's important to state the same thing more than once so that it can be properly understood. With a few intervening words of explanation, a matter can be verified and then repeated. So, sometimes it's important to state the same thing more than once so that it can be properly understood.

Life application: Repetition can never harm when instructing others in complicated matters. Also, repetition can never harm when instructing others in complicated matters.

*Heavenly Father, it's a new day with new opportunities awaiting me. Help me, O Lord, to use my time wisely and effectively - pursuing that which is good and pleasing in Your sight. Keep me from distractions that can only take my heart, my eyes, and my thoughts off of You. I love You and truly desire to be a pleasing vessel, filled with Your Spirit, Your wisdom, and Your love. Amen.*

**I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.**

Romans 7:21

A few points to consider about this verse. The first is that this is speaking of a war which can and does rage within believers. The second is that the war can be won; victory can be obtained in the battle and the way for it to happen is coming in just a few verses. Third, this war rages in all people, but the victory in the war is only available to those who follow the path which is given in those verses. And fourth, these verses do not speak of every person in every sense. In other words, though this premise is true, and it exists in the unregenerate soul, it is not all-encompassing in its effect. Too often Christians, particularly those in Calvinist circles, look at these verses and use them in the absolute sense -

Evil is present in humans;  
The remedy is only available to Christians;  
Therefore, non-Christians are absolutely evil.

This is not right thinking, nor does it take into consideration the obvious truth that people all around the world do good stuff all the time. The problem isn't in their good deeds, but rather the problem is in them. Good deeds don't lead to a right relationship with God. However, a lack of a relationship with God doesn't mean someone is entirely evil. It does mean that the evil in them is a barrier between them and God so that the good deeds they do are temporary and ultimately futile - they are as rags before His infinite holiness.

The "law" that Paul speaks of here is not a written law. He is stating that this is a force within us, which he is calling a law because it is as true as if it were written (just as gravity is a law even if it isn't written down; it simply is what it is). This law is that evil is present with "me." The "me" like the "I" and "me" earlier is a truth which is applicable to humanity in general, not just Paul specifically. This evil is in fact present even though our will is to do good.

This is the war which is raging in us and the battle lines move as we yield ourselves to God. In other words, when we run the show, the lines move in one direction and when

we allow God to do so, the battle lines quickly move in the other, but as long as we are in this body of flesh, we are subject to this evil which is present in us.

In his ever-consistent manner, Paul speaks this same truth in Galatians 5:16-18, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Life application: It is one or the other - fulfill the lusts of the flesh or walk in the Spirit. The lines move in one direction or another as we yield to the Spirit. Stay in constant contact with the Lord; speak to Him continuously; and read His word frequently. Live in a way which allows His presence full control of you always.

*Lord, this day I want to set myself aside and just praise You. You are infinitely worthy of glory, honor, majesty, and praise. I lift up my soul to You in delight and I raise my arms and my voice to You in acknowledgment of Your surpassing greatness. Be exalted O God. Dwell in the worship I offer, and revel in the praise of my lips. How great You are. Amen.*

### **For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. Romans 7:22**

Paul speaks here of the "law of God." In this verse and in the ensuing verses, he will speak of five separate laws –

- The law of God (7:22)
- The law of sin. (7:23) (...and death (8:2))
- The law "in my members" (7:23)
- The law "of my mind" (7:23)
- The law of the Spirit of life in Christ (8:2)

Without any comment, it should be obvious that there are conflicts between these. There are those which are earthly and those which are spiritual. They war with each other and often bring us into testing, conflict, and confusion.

Paul says he has "delight in the law of God..." The term "delight" is the Greek word *sunedomai* and this is its only occurrence in the New Testament. It is indicating a pleasure deep inside, as if in the heart. The law of God is the inward man's desire of the heart. But who is the "inward man" that he is speaking of? It is actually revealed in the 1st Psalm -

“Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.” Psalm 1:1-2

The inward man is the man who has already set his thoughts, conduct, and manner of life on the more noble things; the person that "sees the good" which God has laid out before him and who reaches for it. He rejects the wrong path and instead pursues God. This is what the psalmist is telling us and it translates into the person Paul calls "the inward man."

Life application: There is a proper path to pursue in life and it is given in the pages of the Bible. In order to follow this path, the wise soul will delight in this beautiful word and will meditate on it day and night. Be wise - pursue the knowledge of God as displayed in the pages of the Bible.

*Lord God, You have said that You are ever with me and that in You I live and move and have my being. I know this is true and so keep me ever aware of this fact. Remind me of Your presence at all times so that my life, conduct, thoughts, and actions will be directed toward proper living and upholding Your glory. You are God, help me to live in Your presence rightly. Amen.*

**But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.**

Romans 7:23

Verses 21-23 are to be taken as a unit. Verse 22 and 23 explain 21 - "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

21 - Paul (and thus us) will to do good, but evil is there present with him.

22 - The "will to do good" is that he delights in the law of God. This is his "inward man."

23 - "But" - this is the contrast and will be the explanation of the fact that "evil is there present with him." There is the law of God, but contrasting that is the "law in my members." The members of the body are the flesh which bring about our weakened state. When we get hungry, maybe we will sin by stealing food (Proverbs 6:30). When

we allow ourselves to be tempted through sexual enticement, we will sin through adultery (Proverbs 6:32). And so on...

In 1 Corinthians 6:15, we see it noted that as believers, our members need to be used for a higher purpose because they are positionally now members in Christ - "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!" This is the war that we are engaged in; the war which exists in our members.

It is "warring against the mind." Paul introduces a word for "warring against" which is found nowhere else in the New Testament - *antistrateuomenon*. This war sets our flesh against our will to do good and it is a conflict which can bring the greatest preacher or the most noble Christian woman into difficult straits.

Jesus noted this war on the night before His crucifixion. When he asked Peter, James, and John to stay near and watch with him, they fell asleep. Jesus' words to them show how difficult this battle is, even for those who walked with Him - "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

Peter had a similar failure which is noted in Galatians 2:11-21. When we allow ourselves to be distracted by our weaknesses, it brings us "into captivity to the law of sin which is in" our members. There is a cure for our difficult battle and there is victory which can be had in this war. In just a couple of verses, the good news is given. For those who rely on Christ, there is deliverance from this body of death.

Life application: As we struggle with the flesh, we need to continuously remind ourselves that victory can be attained. When the trials and temptations seem overwhelming, remember that Jesus prevailed and now, through Him, there is strength to defeat the desires of the flesh. Keep in the word, pray without ceasing, and be filled with the Spirit. The battle can be won.

*Lord God, You know the times that I have been hurt by others in my life. Help me to forgive those who ask for forgiveness and to hand over my hurt to You for those who still war against me. Don't let me become bitter by events of the past, but give me the ability to move forward in Your strength. Help me to be the person who is filled with joy, even to overflowing - a blessing to others, just as You bless me. Amen.*

**O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** Romans 7:24

It has been since verse 5 of chapter 7 that Paul has written of the conflict that we experience between the flesh and the "inward man." During these verses, he has repeated his thoughts as if to stress them to us. He has made a comparison, using himself as an example of all humanity; he has used personification, such as the presence of sin in us; etc. These tools have been used to highlight the state we are in as humans, and even as believers. We have a war which rages within us and tears at us as we struggle in this battle.

Here, he cries out his wretchedness using the Greek word *talaipōros*. It is a word which indicates being beaten down from continued strain. The battle leaves a person as if full of calluses and in a state of deep misery. Such a state includes immense side effects from the great, ongoing strain and hardship of the battle. The word is used only one other time in the New Testament. In Revelation 3:17, Jesus says this to those in the church at Laodicea in describing their wretched state, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..."

After the exclamatory cry, Paul makes his begging plea to whatever ear will heed him, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" It is the pitiful cry of any person who understands and feels the conflict and who desires relief from it. There are several prominent viewpoints on what the "body of death" means.

The first is that it is the law of sin found in our members which Paul has been describing. Albert Barnes sees the term "body of death" as a Hebraism which denotes the tendency of the body - "the corrupt principles of man, the carnal, evil affections that lead to death or condemnation." If this is correct, then the body of death is tied directly to the "body of sin" mentioned in earlier verses. This body of sin has been done away with as is noted in Romans 6:6. Thus the struggle which remains after salvation is real, but it is defeated. Only we cling to the old self, but in reality, the victory is won.

A second option is given by the Jew Philo who says it represents the physical body which is a burden to the soul of man. This body is carried about like a dead carcass. It never rests properly from birth even to death. However, the Bible teaches that man is a soul/body unity and that the soul without a body is "naked." Therefore, if the analysis of Philo is even close to correct, it can only be ascribed to a fallen body, not one as it was originally created for man.

The third option is that it refers to the ancient custom of taking a captive and tying him to a dead body as a type of punishment - face to face, hand to hand, body to body. He would then be compelled to drag this "body of death" with him wherever he went. It's

possible that this is actually what Paul was thinking of and he is merely using it as a description of the on-going battle we face. We are alive, but we still carry this "body of death" with us. Will we break the chains? Will we be free from the corruption which clings to us, infects us, and weighs us down? "Who? Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Life application: Yes, there is corruption in our earthly, fleshly body. We drag around the consequences of our past sins, and we often add to the corruption through more sins. But there is a way out. There is victory in this battle if we will but yield to Jesus. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Let us endeavor to truly live as if this is true.

*O God, I carry around the weight and the heavy burden of the sins I've committed. Some have affected me physically, some mentally, and some emotionally. And Lord, I know some have affected those around me as well. Deliver me, O God, that I may not bring more pain to myself or others. And above all, deliver me that I might not bring discredit upon Your glorious name! Amen.*

**I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.** Romans 7:25

Chapter 7 has led us time and time again to the conclusion that we are fallen beings in a real predicament. No matter what we will to do, the flesh overrides that will, and we do what we will not to do. The impossible dilemma for fallen man is resolved though in the Person of Jesus. Paul acknowledged his wretched state and then agonizingly asked, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

The cry was made for any person who truly wants to be free of the corrupt nature they were born with. Jesus explained the dilemma to us when speaking to those under the law -

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?' Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'" John 8:31-36



As Paul has shown in this chapter, the fact that they were under the law only magnified their guilt - a guilt all bear, even from birth. His explanation of what Jesus claimed during His earthly ministry has been clear and concise. Conscience could do nothing to resolve the problem, the law could do nothing to resolve it (and in fact only exacerbated the dilemma), and what we in our human weakness could not do - where everything else failed, Jesus prevailed. The release is found in Him.

Another exposition of this is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where the earthly man (Adam - representing all humanity) is contrasted to the heavenly Man (Jesus - to whom we move when we call on Him). Similar concepts are identified and explained, and the end result is given with words which confirm the thoughts of Romans 7 -

"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:56, 57

For all of us, there are choices to make. We can stay in Adam and die in him or we can move to Christ Jesus and live with Him. And even in Christ, we must choose how we will conduct ourselves as we await our glorification. Will we serve the law of God and live lives of holiness, or will we serve the flesh and obey the law of sin? The answer should be clear. Now that we know the remedy, let us pursue godliness and holiness through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Life application: How do you serve the law of God with your mind if you don't know the law of God? It is incumbent on you to read and know your Bible. Otherwise, your aspirations for following God are no better than a cup of dust on a hot day. Come to the waters and drink freely from the fountain of God's word.

*Oh God, I say I want to serve You, but then I make up my own ways of doing that. Serving You must be by following what You want, not what I want. Give me the hunger and desire to know Your word. After thinking it through, I realize that the only way I can properly honor and serve You is to know what You desire. I know that Your word, the Holy Bible, shows me what is right for this purpose. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 8

**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** Romans 8:1

This first verse of chapter 8 shows the culmination of all of Paul's previous discourse. He has worked slowly and methodically through the various doctrines of the previous seven chapters to come to this marvelous conclusion. It is a conclusion which needs to be evaluated in connection with everything that has thus far been said, or it will lead to further confusion. If properly understood, the fact that the chains of bondage are destroyed in Christ becomes evident.

In this coming chapter, as evidence of this certainty, Paul will deal extensively with the role of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Spirit will be spoken of 19 times in the NKJV translation. The work of Christ had to come before the giving of the Spirit and this is the logical progression of thought in Paul's writings -

- ✓ The state of man
- ✓ The introduction of the law and its consequences
- ✓ The work of Christ
- ✓ The effect of the work of Christ in man
- ✓ Life in the Spirit for man in Christ

Obviously, much more has been involved thus far, and the thoughts have moved back and forth through a vast array of interwoven concepts, but he has given us an overall framework which has led to this verse and which will carry us through the coming verses.

"Therefore" is the key to connecting us back to what has been submitted. Based on these things, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." The things which bound us are gone "in Christ Jesus." This doesn't mean that those who are in Him have been given a free pass to sin, nor does it mean that sins committed in Christ aren't to be condemned. Instead, we are given a contrast.

Based on the discussion of the law in chapter 7 we see that in Christ condemnation isn't pronounced in the same manner as it was under the law. Where the law always condemns, the gospel graciously pardons.

A problem and a misunderstanding does arise though from the rest of the verse - "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Is this a conditional statement on ultimate "condemnation" of the believer? In other words, is this saying that if one doesn't outwardly walk "according to the Spirit" they can lose their salvation and go back onto the avenue of destruction?

The answer is, "No." However, because of the wording and a misunderstanding of the context of Paul's thoughts, this is often what is proposed by scholars. As always, the context of a passage must be considered. Right from the beginning of Chapter 7, Paul gave the example of death nullifying law and then he equated that with Jesus' death nullifying the law for us. Thus, we are positionally "in Christ" and dead to the law and thus "in the Spirit." He then said that because of this "we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

The choice is still given to us how we will conduct our earthly walk, regardless of our heavenly position. "Condemnation" in this verse is the word *katakrima*. FF Bruce rightly calls it "punishment following sentence - in other words, penal servitude. There is no reason for those who are in Christ Jesus to serve sin as if they had never been pardoned and never been liberated from the prison-house of sin."

If you follow the logic, this isn't speaking then of condemnation in eternal hell, but the condemnation of living in prison which results from living in sin. If we "walk according to the Spirit" we are living a life of freedom from the bondage of sin. If we fail to conduct our lives according to this walk, then we will suffer the prison of our walk. As evidence for this, the rest of the New Testament shows us it time and time again.

For example, Paul says to those in Ephesus, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:28-32

For those in Christ who fail to follow the instruction and live in agreement with the Spirit they have been granted, they will receive the condemnation in the flesh that they deserve. However, this doesn't affect their eternal state in Christ. As always, the biblical truth of eternal salvation is upheld.

Life application: In Christ, we have freedom from the penalty of the law, and we stand justified in God's presence because of the work of Jesus. We also have the ability to serve God in the newness of the Spirit. Why would we want to cling to the flesh and suffer the consequences of such a choice? Instead, let us endeavor to live in Christ in holiness and virtue.

*Glorious, beautiful Lord! Thank You for the freedom You have given me through the cross of Christ. In His death, the law is taken away. In His resurrection, the Spirit is granted, and pardon is bestowed upon undeserving me. I never want to forget the marvel of what You have done. May I boast in nothing but the cross of Jesus. Thank You, O God, for the marvel of the cross. Amen.*

**For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2**

In the analysis of verse 7:22, the various "laws" were noted which reflect our state as humans. Some are negative laws, such as the "law of sin and death." Others are positive and which are granted to those who believe in Jesus. These are called "laws" because they work in a governing way, just as the laws of the universe do - gravity, motion, energy, thermodynamics, etc.

The "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is a governing law. This law is granted by faith in Christ. The moment a person believes the gospel which they have heard, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14). A new law is available to govern us and it "has made me free from the law of sin and death." One law replaces another in this case. We move from a position "in Adam" which carries the sentence of death and condemnation, to that of being "in Christ" which frees us from both.

Actually, there are three principal ways of being united to Christ. The first is that we are united by faith. Because of this relationship, we are born again and thus we are united by birth. Just as we were born into Adam, we are now born into Christ. And this means that we are in Christ in a third way, by essence. Jesus uses the symbolism of the vine and the branches. We share the same vitality and life source - this is the Spirit.

The Spirit is our guarantee of eternal life. He is the deposit which assures us that, despite the failings of our flesh, we are now children of God and "co-heirs" with Christ. But one final thought should be considered. We can work against the law of gravity through the use of an opposite force, a rocket for example. In the same way, we can work against the Spirit in us by not yielding to the Spirit. This goes back to the war Paul speaks of in chapter 7.

Life application: By faith, we are granted the Holy Spirit of promise. We are granted new life and a new direction. Let us not work against this great blessing, but yield to God. Stay in touch with the Lord through prayer, meditation on His word, fellowshiping with other believers, etc. What we have been granted is infinitely superior to what we gave up, so let us endeavor to move forward in this wonderful new life.

*Majesty and honor are Yours, O God. Help me to continuously seek out Your glory and not turn my eyes from the beauty of Your splendor. In this world, I often struggle with the carnal life. I'm bound to it in my flesh, but I know that it is temporary and fleeting. So, give me the wisdom and the desire to put these things behind me and seek only Your glorious perfection. Amen.*

**For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,... Romans 8:3**

Romans 8:3 is one of those verses worth putting to memory. It succinctly states a fact which is otherwise unimaginable. God gave the law to the people of Israel. Within that law is a statement which seemingly is one of the granting of life -

"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Leviticus 18:5

However, the reality is that the law actually brought about death. It couldn't grant life because "it was weak through the flesh." Man, because of his inherited corruption, is incapable of meeting the demands of the law. What was to bring life, actually brought death (Romans 7:10). And so, the law seemed to merely add heavy baggage on the highway to destruction. But then the news of eternal wonder was introduced into the stream of humanity.

What the law couldn't do, God did for us. Such is the nature of the work of God. It is a gift, and it is solely of His doing. Where the law further condemned us, we found a new avenue of release when God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." This is the incarnation - God united with humanity and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He bore the garments of flesh that we bear, but unlike ours which have the inherited baggage of Adam's fall, Jesus came through a woman, but not a man. He was conceived without sin; He had the "likeness" of sinful flesh, but actually was sinless.

God did this, sending His Son, "on account of sin." Sin entered the world when the devil wrought his work of deception in the Garden of Eden. The devil seemed to have gained

the victory, but John tells us in his first epistle that it was, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

This is what it means when Paul says, "on account of sin." The devil is the master of this world of sin, but Jesus came to undo his work - and He did! "He condemned sin in the flesh." By coming as Adam was, Jesus was fully qualified to replace the error he committed. Born sinless, Jesus was capable of prevailing over the law which was given. As it says in Leviticus, "if a man does, he shall live by them."

The marvel of the incarnation is that by coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, but bearing no sin, Jesus could do what no other person could even come close to doing. Through His work, we are now granted an offer - we can accept the work of Jesus on our behalf and be reconciled to God through Him, or we can choose to stay "in Adam" and attempt to be reconciled on our own merits.

This verse then is an explanation of the first two verses in Romans 8 - "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

Life application: We are weakened by the sinful flesh we inherited, but Christ had no such limitation. He prevailed over the law, thus condemning sin in the flesh. As great as that sounds, we need to remember that in order for this to happen, Christ had to go to the cross. When you rejoice in His work, never forget the high cost which was paid in the process.

*I stand amazed at what happened at the cross. Every word of the law and prophets looked forward to the coming Messiah, but who could have imagined what was included in receiving that title - humility, trials, suffering, and death. Before the exaltation there was humiliation. Before the victory, there was shame. I stand amazed at what happened at the cross. Thank You O God, for Calvary's cross. Amen.*

**...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:4**

The previous verse noted that Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh." This verse is a follow-up to that. By coming in the likeness of sinful flesh (being found in the appearance of man - Philippians 2:8) He prevailed over the flesh for us. In reality, in Him "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us." This is the Bible's doctrine of

substitution, one thing taking the place of another in order to accomplish an act or provide a benefit.

In the Old Testament, an animal was sacrificed in place of the sins of the people. The animal had done no wrong, but the sin was transferred to it as a temporary means of expiation and propitiation. These sacrifices looked forward to the coming Christ who would die on behalf of fallen man. In like manner, the righteousness of Christ is transferred to us. He did the work, fulfilling the law's righteous requirement and that is granted to those who trust in His work.

Because of the work of Christ, we have the ability to move from Adam to Jesus. The sin transfers to His cross; His righteousness transfers to us. This fulfillment of the law is granted to those "who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." This is the same concept as verse 8:1 which said that there is "now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

To understand this often-misinterpreted phrase, refer to the comments on 8:1. In short though, believers are in Christ positionally the moment they call on Him. We are justified and have moved from Adam to Christ. However, we can and often do walk contrary to this positional change because we are still in our fallen bodies. When we fail, it isn't the fault of the Spirit who has sealed us, but our carnal selves working to satisfy their own lusts.

How will this affect us if not for salvation? The answer is through rewards and losses. We all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and receive our rewards for our proper living and losses for our failures. Therefore, it is important for us to walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Life application: Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf. It is finished and nailed to the cross. Why would we attempt to go back and try to merit His favor by reintroducing that which He has fulfilled? It is a slap in His face and a rejection of what He has done. Let us rest in His work and be satisfied that through Him, the law which was contrary to us is fulfilled and now obsolete.

*Lord, when I think of the gift You have presented, it is beyond my ability to grasp. You have offered to give me Your righteousness in exchange for my heavy baggage of a life of sin and rebellion. How could I not but accept the terms? I bow my knees to Jesus, and I give my heart to You, O God. Thank You for the freedom by which I am truly free. Amen.*

**For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.**

Romans 8:5

A good complimentary passage to this verse can be found in Galatians 5:19-26 and will help one understand the difference between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Also, in Matthew 15:19, we see Jesus' words concerning such things - "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

These are things which could be described as "according to the flesh." It should be noted that some of them are a result of our humanity and not necessarily our physical being itself. In other words, the word "flesh" which comes from the Greek word *sarx*, gives the idea of something physical and tangible, but the things Jesus mentions like "thoughts," "false witness," etc. are not physical in nature. Instead, they come from the mind.

This then is tied into what Paul is saying. Those who live "according to the flesh" will inevitably "set their minds on the things of the flesh." This is the state of man, even those who are believers. The state of our walk with the Lord can be determined by how much of our mental capacity is spent mulling over the things which are flesh-directed. But it's important to note that being "in the flesh" isn't the same thing as the flesh being in us.

When we receive Christ as Lord, we move from being "in the flesh" to "in the Spirit." The old man is crucified and our headship changes from Adam to Christ. The flesh is still in us and it will remain so until we die or until the Lord comes at the rapture. Until one of those events occurs, we should attempt to live the life we have been granted. As we develop and mature as Christians we should "live according to the Spirit." This is an attitude where our minds and our lives are directed away from worldly things and lusts and toward the heavenly, eternal things.

For some, the change never really takes hold. For others, it may be delayed for even years and then suddenly grasp them. And yet others may have a profound change in their lives from the moment they receive Christ. In the end, the sadness of a life saved by the Lord and then never bearing fruit for Him will be realized in many when they stand before His judgment seat. Let us endeavor to not be in this position on that day.

Life application: If we are "in the Spirit" then we should endeavor to have the Spirit in us. Be filled with the Spirit through right thinking, reading and studying of the word, a



healthy prayer life, and fellowshiping with others in praise and worship of the Lord. This is certainly pleasing to God and is His desire for your life.

*Lord Jesus, You saved me from the pit and have set me in broad spaces. Now be with me as I learn Your word and endeavor to live according to its precepts. Help me not to misuse the intent of Your word, but to walk rightly and with pure doctrine. Lead me, guide me, and instruct me in the beautiful pages of the Bible. Amen.*

**For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.**

Romans 8:6

This continues the explanation of 8:2 - 8:5. It is now the fourth "for" in those verses. Paul's idea here is the building up of a storehouse of knowledge concerning his thought in verse 1. It is a logical defense of the difference between being in the Spirit and being in the flesh and what the benefits of being in the Spirit are.

Two thoughts to reconsider are that anyone who has called on Christ is positionally "in the Spirit." However, we can and often do live in the flesh actually. Paul is giving this instruction to show us the importance of living in the Spirit. As he says, "to be carnally minded is death." Those who haven't called on Christ are already condemned (John 3:18) and they cannot please God because the wall of sin and death from Adam remains.

Those who have called on Christ are the ones with the dilemma to resolve. If we remain carnally minded and don't give up on life in the flesh, it can only lead to death. A person who returns to drugs after calling on Christ will eventually suffer the results of the addiction. This is true with whatever carnal sin captivates our mind. It leads to corruption and death.

On the other hand, Paul says that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Calling on Christ is what restores us to God. It is the bridge we need to move to peace and fellowship with Him. If this is so, then the obvious path to peace and life would be to live in the Spirit which was granted when we made the call. God will not work contrary to His own will! Therefore, what He wills us to do is what is right and proper.

This train of thought is the obvious conclusion of what Paul is saying as is evidenced by verse 12 which still lies ahead. There he says that "we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." The choice must remain, or he couldn't even make this statement. Yes, we are saved, but we can and far too often live as if we are not. It is our choice and so we should endeavor to choose wisely.

Life application: It is often said that the Bible is a book of "don'ts." This is true to an extent, but every "don't" is given by the One who created us and therefore it is an admonition which looks to our ultimate good and for our benefit. Don't get bogged down in the mire of dismissive people's comments about the negative side of the Bible. Instead, know that for every negative, there is a resulting positive. God loves you and has blessed you with valuable instructions for life and peace.

*Heavenly Father, I know that there are many "don'ts" in the Bible, but I also know that every one of them is meant to lead to a resulting good. If You give a "don't" it is because You fashioned me and have my best in mind. I will rejoice in the "don'ts" because they will mold me into Your likeness as much as the "do's" do. Thank You for the "don'ts." Amen.*

**Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Romans 8:7**

This verse reiterates the phrase used in Romans 8:6, *phronēma tēs sarkos* or "the carnal mind." This is more often than not misunderstood to refer to the mind itself as if it is an authoritative statement on the depravity of man. But Paul is speaking of the minding of the flesh rather than the state of it. Whether a man is in Adam and minding the flesh or dead to Adam and alive in Christ, either way he can mind the flesh. When he does, this avenue is one which is at enmity with God.

There is a second problem with the misuse of this verse. Far too often it is used as a text to claim that any person who hasn't called on Christ is unable perceive any good at all or even understand the contents of the Bible in any real capacity. It becomes a tool of "superior knowledge and spiritual depth" for the believer against the lesser "unregenerate mind." This is problematic, because it would then logically imply that nobody could call on Christ. The message would be beyond fallen man's ability to grasp. This leads to the misguided Calvinist doctrine of being "regenerated" in order to believe. After this according to Calvinism, the belief is then what leads to salvation. This concept is found nowhere in the Bible.

If it were true, then after being regenerated the Bible should suddenly be completely understandable to the "now regenerate" soul. This is the last thing seen in believers. There is more disagreement about biblical doctrines among faithful believers than there are grains of sand on the sea.

Another validation of this can also be found in Old Testament verses such as Genesis 5:22-24 - "Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So

all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." If Enoch and many others prior to Christ walked with God, then it is obvious that the Calvinist viewpoint is untenable on this issue. "The carnal mind" is the minding of the flesh, not the state of it.

Such things as those found in Calvinist doctrine on this issue are not taught by Paul, nor does the Bible imply them at any point. In fact, throughout the Bible, those who have the Spirit - (David for example in the Old Testament and the Corinthian believers in the New) continuously fail to meet the law of God, and often they even fail to properly grasp it at all. Instead, they mind the flesh - even though they have the Spirit and thus "are not subject to the law of God." When minding the flesh, indeed, they cannot be. This truth is even seen in the apostles at times.

Where this verse says, "for it is not subject to the law of God" the "it" is speaking of the carnal mind, not the person. This carnal mind, be it in a believer or in a non-believer, is not and cannot be subject to the law of God. This is the reason why we are asked to think on that which is noble, reject that which is evil, fix our thoughts on Jesus, etc. When we fail to do this, our minds are obviously not subject to the law of God.

Life application: When you are born as a human, you can never get "more human," but humanity can get more of you. When you are born into Christ, you can never get more "born again," but Christ can get more of you. This is what Paul is speaking of. A person in Christ is in Christ, but Christ is in people in varying degrees. This is a state that we allow based on our obedience to Him, our proper knowledge and yielding to Him, and our fellowshiping with Him. If this is the state you desire, then fix your thoughts on Him and allow His Spirit to fill you and guide you.

*Lord Jesus, You are my hope, my desire, my longing. I shall set my gaze upon You and fix my thoughts upon You. Fill me and guide me. Keep me from myself and my earthly desires and give me the ability to understand the things of God which are revealed through You and Your Holy Spirit. I praise You for what You have done and will continue to do in me. Amen.*

**So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.** Romans 8:8

This verse is explicit and obvious - one who is "in the flesh" cannot please God. There are two possible instances tied up in the thought. The first is the unregenerate soul - the person who has not been cleansed by Jesus' work. Any person who has not come to Christ is in this category to the full measure. The second instance is a person who has called on Christ, but has his mind and actions directed to the things of the flesh. This is

the natural man being allowed to take over during our earthly walk. When we as believers please the flesh, it is obvious that we are not pleasing to God.

In the first instance, we can think of a bully down the street. He is wholly unpleasing to those around him. There are no family affections, and he is kept separate from our care or concern. In the second instance, we can think of our own children when they are disobedient. At such a time, they aren't pleasing to us and yet there is the stronger bond and tie of family. Despite their inability to please us due to their current actions, they are members of the family. Though unpleasing, they are not rejected.

In both circumstances, there is nothing to say that either child won't voluntarily turn and make right choices. The bully could give up his ways, seeing what is right and pleasing to those around him. If he were an orphan, he may even be adopted into the family because of his turn to right living. Likewise, our child will probably get over his disobedience and turn back to right living. If not, it doesn't make him any less our child.

The concept of total depravity in a person in no way negates volitional acts of the will to "see the good" and turn to it. Nor does calling on Jesus guarantee that we are instantly perfect saints who never sin and who can't lapse into more sin. Categories are important and acts of the will cannot be dismissed in our theological conceptions of who we are in relation to God. The difference in the two who "cannot please God" mentioned above is that one is a family member and the other isn't. The change in relationship doesn't necessarily guarantee that our on-going relationship will be perfect, but it does guarantee final results.

Life application: Romans 8:8 is clearly stated. If we are in the flesh, we cannot please God. Some people are in the flesh completely, having not called on Christ. They are apart from the covenant promises of God. Some people are living in the flesh, despite having moved from Adam to Christ. This could be us and therefore we need to be attentive to our new state and family ties and live our lives in a manner which is pleasing to our Lord and God.

*Heavenly Father, You adopted me into Your family because of Jesus. How unworthy I was of that honor and how unworthy I still am. My thoughts and actions at times belie the person I have been called to be and I ask that You redirect me in those times, turning me back to the straight and narrow path which is pleasing to You. Thank You for Your attentive care. Amen.*

**But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. Romans 8:9**

The past verses have shown the contrast between being "in the Spirit" and "in the flesh." Now, we are told very directly that if we are in Christ, we are "not in the flesh but in the Spirit." And then Paul qualifies his statement, "if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you." This is our actual state before God if we are truly believers. We are positionally in the Spirit. As noted in previous verses, this doesn't mean we are now glorified and incapable of sin. Nor does it mean that we can't live as if "in the flesh." This kind of thinking is obviously wrong and leads down avenues of absurdity.

To be in position and in practice are not always in accord with each other. In position we have moved from carnal Adam to spiritual Christ if we have believed the gospel and received the Spirit.

The next sentence goes on to state, "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." This is as obvious a statement as can be seen. If we don't have the Spirit of Christ, we don't belong to Christ. What is less obvious is the exact meaning of "the Spirit of Christ." Some scholars state that this is not speaking of the Holy Spirit (meaning as an entity), but rather the "temper" or "disposition" of Christ. In other words, conducting ourselves in the same type of walk as He walks.

The reason for this analysis is because the term "Spirit of Christ" is used only one other time in the Bible, in 1 Peter 1:11. That, however, isn't a valid argument. Meaning is derived based on the intent of the writer. The intent is certainly being tied to the preceding sentence which mentions the "Spirit of God." This then is parallelism; the repetition of a thought to make a point. The terms Holy Spirit, Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, etc. are used synonymously throughout the New Testament and such is the case here.

The Spirit issues from God the Father, through the Son as is evidenced in passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19 -

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

The issuing of the Spirit is actually more important than one might assume. Whether He issues from the Father apart from the Son or from the Father through the Son is an

immensely important theological concept to be considered. Disagreement on this issue caused one of the greatest rifts in Christianity, but the Bible is clear on the progression of the Spirit. What Paul is showing us here is that "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ" are one in the same; they are both terms speaking of "the Holy Spirit."

Life application: Seemingly small matters can actually carry great theological weight and importance and therefore must be considered both carefully and with respect to the intent of God as revealed in Scripture. Little diversions from the avenue of sound interpretation can lead to great flaws in our theology.

*Heavenly Father, when I look at a marvelous sunrise, I feel awe and excitement. I look at the grain of wood closely and I see beauty and it interests me. The fluttering of a butterfly and the swooping of birds catch my curiosity and I find enjoyment there. All of the creation came from Your wisdom... if it is marvelous, then how much more glorious are You! Praises be to the Source of all things in which I find delight. Amen.*

**And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.** Romans 8:10

"If Christ is in you..." This can mean nothing other than the doctrine of the Trinity. In verse 9, we read that we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit "... if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you." Then came the mentioning of "the Spirit of Christ." Some, as noted, have tried to diminish the weight and intent of that by stating it implies "disposition" rather than "personhood."

However, verse 10 clearly states "if Christ is in you." This is an indwelling, not a disposition. These two verses, combined with verse 11, can mean nothing other than what the plain text shows. The Three are One because it is said elsewhere that God the Father raised Christ from the dead (Galatians 1:1).

Paul shows us that if in fact Christ is in us that our "body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Our mortal bodies are dead. Disagreement does come over the phrase that our "body is dead because of sin." But looking back over the previous chapters, it is certain that it is speaking of our life before Christ. We were unregenerate in our nature; fallen in Adam. This body of death is replaced with life.

We have died to Christ and, positionally, we are seated with Him now (Ephesians 2:6). Therefore, we are alive, and eternally so, because of righteousness. This is the imputed righteousness of Christ. He is in us, we are sealed, and therefore we are alive. This is what Jesus spoke of in John 3 and what He also meant in John 11:25, 26 - "I am the

resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Life application: In Christ, we are dead to sin. Sin no longer has mastery over us. But it can still afflict us if we allow it to. It is incumbent on each of us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling - not in the sense that we must merit salvation through works, but that we must work in the salvation we have been given to the glory of God and not according to the flesh.

*Lord, the words of the Bible have meaning, and they have importance. If I pick and choose what I wish to accept, then I have really rejected Your word. I can see that it is all or nothing, and so what I need is to know what applies to me according to the context given. This is my desire today Lord - instruct me through Your word so that I will rightly divide it, to Your glory. Amen.*

**But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11**

As noted in 8:10, the Trinity is seen in the verses we've been looking at. Throughout the New Testament, the Spirit is given different titles which complete the same tasks.

- The Spirit of God dwells in us - Romans 8:9
- The Holy Spirit dwells in us - 1 Corinthians 6:19
- The Spirit of Christ dwells in us - Romans 8:9, 10
- God the Father raised Jesus from the dead - Galatians 1:1
- The Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead - Romans 8:11

This isn't intended to be a diversionary discourse on the Trinity, but here - along with several other key points in the New Testament, is a good spot to at least note this.

Having said that, we can now note the content of Romans 8:11. In this verse, Paul begins with "but." This is given in contrast to the thought in 8:10 which said, "the body is dead because of sin." Our bodies are fallen and as Paul notes elsewhere, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. ... Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption." 1 Corinthians 15:42 & 50

Despite our corrupt and fallen bodies, we who have trusted Jesus are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. It is what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:7 - "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." Like the precious oil which exceeds the value of the jar, the glory of the Spirit in us far surpasses the abasement of the mortal flesh in which He dwells.

Because this glorious Spirit has taken up residence in us, we have the absolute assurance that "He who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to [our] mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in [us]."

The surety of Christ's resurrection is found in us. The truth of eternal salvation is so evident from Scripture that if you attend in a church which teaches otherwise, it's time to get up and move to a more sound home. Paul isn't saying these words to confuse us, nor does God provide either confusion or waste of thought in His word.

Yes, our bodies are dead to sin, but they contain a guarantee (2 Corinthians 5:5) which is based on the surety of God's word that they are sealed and will be given life which is truly life. Our mortal shall be clothed in immortality. Hallelujah!

Life application: If salvation isn't eternal, then God made a mistake by sealing you with the Holy Spirit. God doesn't make mistakes. Your salvation is eternal. When you call on Jesus and believe in Him and His work then you are on the glide-path to glory.

*Heavenly Father, I may not be the greatest theologian in history, but I know my Lord and Savior is Jesus. Your word says that when I believed on Him, I received the Holy Spirit of promise - my Guarantee of future glory. I know, O God, that You don't make mistakes and so I know that I am saved despite myself. Thank You, O God, for the assurances found in Jesus! Amen.*

**Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.**  
Romans 8:12

"Therefore" is given as a summary of verses 9-11. Because of these things, "Therefore..."

After stating this he speaks to his audience, which includes us, as "brethren." In this, he is showing the bond of family which is formed by the union with the Spirit who dwells in each person who has called on Christ. We are now in a familial relationship, one which continues in the language of believers around the world today - "Hello Brother Steve."



Therefore, brethren, because of those things I just relayed to you, "we are debtors." He then explains this in what may seem a rather unusual way. He says, "not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." He uses a negative term to describe our debt.

This would be like explaining all of the good things somebody named Alex did for you by getting you off of drugs, and then turning around and saying, "You are a debtor (because of all these good things) not to Mark - to live and work for Mark." Mark was your drug supplier and if you had stuck with him, then you would have eventually died, having given him what you own and, in the end, thrown your life away as well.

This is what Paul is saying here. Therefore, we are debtors (as described to us in the preceding verses) - not to the one we once served. We are in fact debtors to God for the work of God in Christ. Through Christ in us, our body is dead because of sin, but our Spirit is alive because of righteousness. We are now truly alive in Christ. So why would we pay a debt to a dead body? It would make no sense. If we pay our debt to someone who is dead, then only death is the result. If we pay our debts to the One who lives in us, then the payment is accounted to that life.

This concept will be built on in the verses ahead and will culminate in some of the most glorious verses of the magnificence of life in Christ.

Life application: Believers in Christ are in a fallen body, but bear the sealing of the Holy Spirit; we are made alive in Christ. If existence implies a debt is owed, and it does, then who are we debtors to? Think it through - if our physical bodies are animated and yet dead, but our spirit is made alive in Christ, then to which should the debt be paid? We are debtors not to the flesh - to live according to the flesh, but to the Spirit - to live according to the Spirit. Let us think on this with every action we take.

*Lord Jesus, You saved me from the pit and have set me in broad spaces. Now be with me as I learn Your word and endeavor to live according to its precepts. Help me not to misuse the intent of Your word, but to walk rightly and with pure doctrine. Lead me, guide me, and instruct me in the beautiful pages of the Bible. Amen.*

**For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Romans 8:13**

One commentary concerning Romans 8:13 states: "This verse is perhaps the clearest, most concise statement of the way a person once in grace can lose his salvation." (New Testament Study Bible).

One must come to the table already believing that the loss of salvation is possible in order to come to this conclusion. If the concept of eternal salvation is taught both explicitly and implicitly throughout the New Testament, then any verse which appears to contradict this must be taken out of context. This is the problem with coming to the Bible with presuppositions. It is also a problem concerning the nature and workings of God.

God doesn't think as we do. His thoughts are immediate and intuitive, not discursive or syllogistic - within the framework of time (which He created). For a person to be sealed with the Spirit, the act must, by the very nature of God, be eternal in consequence. God cannot err and therefore it is impossible for Him to act against His nature or work against Himself. Further, if loss of salvation were possible because of sin after salvation, then no one would remain saved. God would be saving and then un-saving every person continuously as they re-received Christ and then sinned against Him. One's ultimate state could never truly be determined. It is folly and it is unclear in thinking.

"For" refers to the conclusion of the previous verse - "We (meaning believers) are debtors, but not to the flesh." We have been brought out of the body of death and are debtors to the One who brought us out. Therefore, the "for" is speaking of the state prior to this occurring. "For if you live according to the flesh (the life we were previously brought out of) you will die. But (in contrast to this) if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body (which actually occurred in you and which has now made you a debtor to the One who brought you out), you will live."

Though speaking in the present and future tenses in this verse, it is based on the past actions which were noted leading up to the "therefore" of verse 12. In other words, and as Albert Barnes so eloquently states, "No man can be saved in his sins. This closes the argument of the apostle for the superiority of the gospel to the Law in promoting the purity of man. By this train of reasoning, he has shown that the gospel has accomplished what the Law could not do - the sanctification of the soul, the destruction of the corrupt passions of our nature, and the recovery of man to God."

This verse has nothing to do with a loss of salvation. Rather it has everything to do with what occurred in our salvation. "In Christ, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." This doesn't give us license to sin, but it does cover the sins which we commit.

Life application: Time and time again we come to verses which appear to contradict each other. Jesus is said to be the Author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9) and yet difficult verses cause us to be unsure of this. There are no contradictions in God's word,

just misunderstandings because of our own failure to fully research or understand a matter. Let us come to the Bible without presuppositions and when we come to a passage which is difficult, we need to evaluate it, not as a stand-alone thought, but as part of a continuous stream of knowledge which is to be taken in proper context.

*Glorious God! Because my time is short and my life is limited, I occasionally become impatient with the events around me. At these times, remind me that You haven't forgotten my needs or desires. You already know the outcome and have figured in what is best for me, for those I encounter, and for the plan You are unfolding. Help me to remember this and to trust that my impatience is unnecessary. Amen.*

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** Romans 8:14

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**Note** - If you've ever been curious about the Nephilim and the "sons of God" from Genesis 6, below are links to a previous sermon which explains the meaning of those often-abused verses. As it ties in with this verse, I'm including it for those who are curious –

The sermon is available to watch on [YouTube](#) as well as [Sermon Audio](#)  
(Note: Sermon Audio also has an audio option as well as sermon notes, PDF)

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The "sons of God" as applicable to the post-resurrection New Testament are those who have been adopted by God through faith in Christ. We are "born again" thus moving from Adam to Christ. This concept is alluded to on numerous occasions, but here are two from Galatians -

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Galatians 3:26, 27

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Galatians 4:4-7

The "sons of God" referred to in Romans 8:14 are no different. Being led by the Spirit refers to those who have received the Spirit. This is the "baptized into Christ" spoken of in Galatians 3:27. Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the sign of this sonship. Being "led by the Spirit" is speaking of responding to the call of the Spirit - a call which is made to all who hear the message. Some follow the leading and some don't. Those who do and accept

Jesus as Lord are those who become sons of God. This will be evident in the next verses. It is He who leads to the call, and it is He who seals us when the call is made.

Life application: Have you accepted Jesus as Lord? If so, you are a child of God through adoption. Now it is incumbent on you to not "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). As you allowed the Spirit to lead you to life in Christ, now allow the Spirit to lead you in your Christian walk.

*Precious Heavenly Father, I have been blessed with so much - more than I deserve. Help me to remember this and not to feel exalted above others who have less and yet whom You love no less. Grant me the wisdom to use the blessings You've given me without haughtiness and with the heart to return a portion to You in gratitude for all You've given me. Thank You for hearing and responding to my prayer. Amen.*

**For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15**

This is now the third "for" which follows the "therefore" of verse 12. As he does frequently, even earlier in this chapter, Paul is building up a solid wall of doctrine, one point leading to the next in order to buttress his argument. Follow the progression -

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh;

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live;

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

This "for" is an explanation of the previous conclusion about being a son of God. It is a "for" which is divided into two thoughts. The first contrasts being led by "the Spirit of God" to having left "the spirit of bondage" to fear. And this is certain because you are "brethren." Because you are, then you are led by the Spirit of God. This means you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear. And what is this bondage? It is explained in Hebrews 2:14, 15 -

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

The bondage is the power of death and the fear which results from it. We've already seen in Romans that the law produces death in our mortal bodies. And so, Jesus shared in our humanity, fulfilled the law, died in fulfillment of the law, and carried away the death associated with the law. When the death was carried away, so was the fear which was connected to it.

If you truly believe the gospel and accept Christ, then you are truly free. Death has no power over you. This is as certain as the ground under your feet. The truth found in this message is absolute. As Jesus Himself proclaimed, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

The second portion of the explanation resulting from "for" is that because we are in Christ "brethren" "you received the Spirit of adoption." If we are adopted as sons of God, and we are, then we are His children. This leads to an obvious conclusion that should be considered before going on. If we were adopted and are now sons of God, then before we were adopted, we weren't sons of God. In other words, until you are in Christ, who fulfilled the law, died in fulfillment of the law, and carried away the penalty of the law, you are not a son of God.

Stated plainly, if you are not a true believer in Jesus Christ, then you have no family relationship to God. You are, as described elsewhere, a "child of wrath." This point shouldn't be missed because even in Christian churches, the "Fathership" of God is tossed about as if it were universal to humanity. The Bible doesn't teach this. It is either "in Christ" and a son of God, or not "in Christ" and an enemy of God.

With that clear, we can see the resulting benefit of the Spirit of adoption. Where once we were at complete odds with God, we can now cry out to Him as our "Abba, Father." Paul uses both the Aramaic and the Greek as Jesus did in Mark 14:36. Abba is an endearing and personal term closely associated with "daddy." It is the call of the child to the one who protects and feeds him. "Father" is the Greek *pater* which is the one who begets life. In this then, there is a respect and an adoration. Citing both languages then demonstrates our closeness to God and our gratitude and dependence on Him.

The Spirit of adoption is key to understanding our new position. Jesus is the Son of God. When we receive Him, we are now linked to God directly because of Him. God will no more reject us than He would His own beloved Jesus. The surety of being in Christ is complete, it is eternal, it is the hope of glory which will never fade.

Life application: If you are in Christ, death is defeated. Yes, these bodies will wear out and die, but that isn't the end of the story. As surely as Jesus came out of the grave, because it was impossible for death to hold Him, so is the surety of the same for you.

*Precious Heavenly Father - As sure as I am that Jesus came forth from the grave, so I am sure that I shall too. My hope isn't in a dead Savior, but in the risen Christ. If death is defeated through Him and I am in Him, then death is defeated in me. I stand on the truth of the gospel and in the glory of the work of the Messiah. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**  
Romans 8:16

That the Spirit bears witness of our state is a fairly common theme in the New Testament. One of several explicitly declared examples which confirms this is 1 Corinthians 2:12 –

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

As noted in 8:15, there is no universal "fatherhood" of God to humanity. Though this is a commonly held tenet by people around the world and a commonly taught doctrine by liberal Christian theologians, it is simply not a biblical tenet. Even the concept of the "brotherhood of man" is far too often used to convey meaning which isn't biblically supportable. Without Christ, there is not the truly spiritual family relationship which the Bible reveals.

However, in Christ, we are sealed with the Spirit and established together with other believers in a unique way. There is a new bond uniting us which, although may not be evident as Christians often rile against each other and tear each other down, exists on a spiritual level, nonetheless. This is manifest based on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:22 -

"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

This same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who adopts us, establishes us, anoints us, and seals us (among so many other things), also "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." This cannot be human derived knowledge, because if that were true, then what to say of the many who claim to be God's children apart from Christ? No, instead it is a knowledge imparted to us by God, through the Holy Spirit which assures us.

We can definitely say that we were born. Knowing that we are human and that humans are born of mothers who came from other humans, we can know with absolute certainty that we were born; it is a self-evident fact. So sure also should be the knowledge of our new birth in Christ. This doesn't mean that the knowledge remains. Not many people think on the fact that they are humans, and unfortunately many quite often act more like animals than they do as humans. Despite this, they are no less human.

Likewise, there are Christians who act in a manner far less worthy than the glorious name they bear. Equally sad is that some have even forgotten that they bear the name (2 Peter 1:9), but the Spirit doesn't forget, and it testifies and bears witness to the truth of the conversion. A child of God will remain a child of God, though he may suffer the consequences of a life not lived for his glorious Father.

Life application: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Are you living up to that high and exalted honor? In 2 Peter 1 verses 5-8, we are given valuable instruction to keep us from being barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Take a moment to read those verses and then determine to apply them to your life.

*My precious Lord, I am a jar of clay with many cracks and flaws, but the contents You have filled me with far surpasses the humbled body I am in. Help me to become a vessel which is honorable, glorifying to You, and worthy of the glorious Holy Spirit which testifies to my position in Christ. Bind up my cracks, fill in my flaws, and purify me with the washing of water by the word. Amen.*

**...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. Romans 8:17**

In Hebrews 1:2, Christ Jesus is said to be "heir of all things." In Matthew 28:18, Jesus Himself states that "all authority" in heaven and earth has been granted to Him. He is the recipient of it all. The Lamb has triumphed, and God the Father is pleased to bestow upon Him such glory. He is the Son of God and thus entitled to it all.

And so, Paul imparts to us a truth which is astounding in its weight and meaning for us. We can't fully know it in our fallen bodies. We look to Jesus and understand His authority, right to rule, power, and glory, but understanding isn't the same thing as comprehending. Our minds aren't capable of grasping His greatness. And as awesome and glorious is His rule and place of authority, we are told that we shall participate in it.

It has been noted that we are "sons of God." We are His children because of Christ. If children, then heirs. Under Roman law, all children - including those who were adopted into a family, became equal inheritors of an estate. Under Jewish law, it was different. The oldest son was given a double portion over the other sons. Paul is speaking of Roman, not Jewish, law.

Jesus shows us that this is true in Revelation 3:21 –

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Sitting on Jesus' throne implies full inheritance, nothing less. All of the rights and privileges of true sonship are realized because of mere faith in Christ. Adoption guarantees all this. We are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." However, a point that is almost universally overlooked in today's world of ease and comfort is the truth that calling on Christ doesn't necessarily mean a bank account full of cash and a house with elevators.

We have been given the same right to rule in heaven and the same right to suffer on earth. We can thank the Lord each day that we get up to a beautiful sunrise, a table full of food, and a job which pays for family vacations, but we can also thank Him when we suffer for His name. In 1 Peter 4:15, 16 we are shown what honorable Christian suffering involves -

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

The truth we shouldn't miss is that suffering, in and of itself, doesn't meet the necessary conditions for the glory of heaven's riches, only suffering with Christ does. When we suffer with Him in this manner, we find that we will "also be glorified together" with Him. There is nothing shameful in suffering for Christ and in fact, it is the most honorable of all aspects of our Christian walk. To suffer for Him, is to have emulated Him in His highest moment leading to glory - the cross.

This family relationship and its suffering and glory isn't intended to bestow upon us merely heaven either. Rather, Paul says we are "heirs of God." In other words, heaven is a side benefit of the true inheritance which is God Himself. It is this which is of highest value. What is coming is so astonishing that we will marvel in it for all eternity - the revealing of our Creator in an endless stream of wisdom,



wonderment, and delight - "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." Revelation 22:3, 4

Life application: To be an heir of God is a concept that we will never fully comprehend. Throughout the ages of ages, we will ceaselessly, endlessly see the riches of God and behold the marvel and majesty of His glory. As this is so, why should we draw back from suffering for Christ now? The highest honor of this earthly walk will be rewarded with the greatest glory of heaven's treasures.

*Heavenly Father, Your word says that for eternity we shall see You and serve You, walking in Your light and reveling in Your infinite glory. How can it be that You would bestow such an honor upon me? May my life now be a pleasing sacrifice to You. If I am called to suffer, may it be to Your glory. No matter what the trial or test, allow me the honor of facing it for You. Amen.*

**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18**

"For" refers directly back to the preceding thought, "if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Our suffering in Christ may not be what we hope for but despite it, there is the promise of glorification ahead. This is what Paul is telling us and then he gives words to comfort us about these things.

Referring to himself in the third person in 2 Corinthians 12, he tells us that he was caught up to the "third heaven." While there he "heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." If the hearing of Paradise was beyond our authorized knowledge, imagine what the seeing and experiencing must be. From one who had experienced first-hand the glory to come, he considered "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared" with what lay ahead.

And Paul knew suffering like most of us never will. In 2 Corinthians 11:22-29, he cites many of the trials and discomforts he had faced. Alone with his other infirmities, he was truly a man who would know. But to him, they were nothing. He knew and understood what was coming in an intimate way and so he, with this wonderful knowledge, implores us to follow in the footsteps of faith. Just as he had this certainty for himself, he shares to his reader of the "glory which shall be revealed in us." Later, he will pass on the same sentiment to the readers in Corinth. When he does, he makes a contrast between the suffering and the glory. No matter how immense the suffering now, he says it is "light." In contrast, the glory will be of "eternal weight" -

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

Life application: What is your pain? It will be healed for eternity. What is your sorrow? It will be exchanged for everlasting joy. What is your worry? It will be swapped out for comfort throughout the ages. If this is true, then the hope of it should carry you through the moment with peace and contentment. Place your cares on the Lord, for He cares for you.

*Precious Lord Jesus, You suffered at the cross so that I could stand before Your Father in glory. What can man do to me that could diminish the joy I feel. I will be content in my trials, in my sorrows, and in my weaknesses because in this contentment they reveal that I am truly Yours. I don't ask for these, but if and when they come, I will be pleased to accept them as a gift of Your grace. Amen.*

**For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.** Romans 8:19

In this subsection, verses 18-28, Paul uses the term "for" five times in various ways - "For I consider," "For we know," etc. In the preceding verse, "for" was given to explain comparisons between the suffering of this current walk and the glory to come. The "for" now is used to build on that concept of glory. This is important to consider, because if there are ten thousand commentaries on this verse, there are surely ten thousand various opinions on what it exactly means. It is an extremely complicated verse to pin down.

Therefore, looking to the progression of the thought - what it is built from and where it is leading to, should help to provide the clearest sense. This is needed because even translations differ. Is this section speaking of the "creation" or the "creature?" If it is about the "creature," is it speaking of all creation using a generic term for all the various aspects of creation, or is it speaking of living creatures in creation only, or of humans only? If humans, is it speaking of gentiles, Jews or both? Etc. All of these have been proposed and well defended by great and honorable scholars.

As you can see, the differences start right away and build into vast theological avenues. Fortunately, even with the complicated nature of the passage and the differing opinions, it is not a section which leads easily to heresy. So, to be wrong, although not a good

thing, isn't something that would lead others to not comprehend the message of salvation.

Verse 21 will state that "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Because the creation (or "creature" depending on the translation) is being tied in with what happens to the "children of God," it is likely that what Paul is speaking of is the whole of creation. Obviously, creation itself can't "eagerly wait" in the truest sense. So, what this means is that Paul is using personification to make his point.

This is a fallen world which is eagerly waiting for its return to how it was originally intended to be. Things now are not in an ideal state. When man fell, the creation fell with him. This is evidenced by the Genesis account –

"Cursed is the ground for your sake;  
In toil you shall eat of it  
All the days of your life.  
Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,  
And you shall eat the herb of the field." Genesis 3:17, 18

And again -

"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea."  
Genesis 9:2

The living and non-living creation has been frustrated. The ground was cursed (non-living) and this curse has affected the plant life. Animal life is also not as it was originally designed. The 360-day calendar of the Bible doesn't match the calendar we currently use. Thus, the revolution around the sun is not as it once was. And so forth. In other words, all of creation, although magnificently timed and orchestrated, is still not as it was originally intended to be.

The explanation for this is to be found in the next verse, but what is certain from this verse is that this fallen "creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." When the sons of God are revealed, the creation will be restored to the way it was originally intended. Isaiah speaks about this on several occasions.

Life application: There are complicated passages in the Bible which people disagree on which don't lead to heresy. There are also concepts in the Bible which when

misrepresented do. Let us evaluate those things which are of less weight without arrogance or accusation toward others, but let us hold firm to the truths which would otherwise lead others to heresy, not tolerating that which condemns precious souls.

*Lord God, there are myriads of religions and people are fully convinced they are right. But in the end, there can only be one Source of truth. Your word is truth, and it confirms itself because it is from Your hand. In the end, misdirected faith is wasted faith. I will not blindly step into the darkness, but only into Your revealed Light. I choose the truth; I choose Jesus. Amen.*

**For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; Romans 8:20**

"For" again is used to continue to explain the train of thought which proceeds from Paul's instruction on our glorification. He is now building on what he said in 8:19 - "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." Using personification of the creation, he says that it "eagerly waits." This ties back to verse 14. Those who "are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."

Someday, those who have come to Christ will be revealed in glory. Until that time, creation waits in a frustrated state. Why? Because "the creation was subjected to futility." This was seen in several examples from the Genesis account - the curse of the earth which now brings forth thorns and thistles, the enmity between men and animals, etc. This was done "not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope."

The creation didn't fall because it wanted to or because there was some type of fault in it originally. Instead, it fell because of man's sin. All creation came under the curse that was executed upon man. This was done to show humanity that sin exacts an immensely great price. God Himself subjected the creation to futility "in hope." The hope isn't God's hope, but creation's hope. Just as the creation was said to "eagerly wait" it is said here to "hope."

We are being shown from the tip of Paul's pen that creation has submitted to the futility wrought upon it on the account of man's misdeeds. It has fallen in "obedience to that superior power which had mysteriously linked its destinies with man's" (Jamieson Fausset Brown Biblical Commentary). The perfection of man coincided with the perfection of Eden. The fall in creation coincided with the fall of man. And the glorification of man will coincide with the restoration of the creation which had once been so gloriously perfect and which will again be in that wondrous state. Great stuff here.

Life Application: The whole creation fell through one man's sin which was done in innocence. Imagine the weight of our sin which is done with knowledge. Don't sin.

## **Tragedy in the Garden**

By Charlie Garrett

The woman was enticed, and she ate of the fruit  
She passed it on to Adam and he ate as well  
He became the second willing recruit  
And together they left a sad story to tell  
Their eyes were opened to their exposed state  
They realized that life in sin just ain't so great

They sewed together figs to hide their shame  
And made coverings that just wouldn't suffice  
The Lord questioned them about their hiding game  
And they realized that sin just ain't so nice  
"Where are you?" called the LORD. (Though he already knew)  
"I was hiding because I realized something wasn't right  
I was afraid to answer, I'm naked ... yes, it's true  
And so I hid myself, like a shadow in the night."

"Who told you that you were naked? What is this you did do?  
Have you taken of the fruit which I told you not to eat?"  
"It was the woman who did it... the one made by You  
She told me of its yumminess... and how it was so sweet."

I thought it would be so good, but I guess I paid the price  
I'm beginning to see that sin really ain't so nice

"Woman, what is this thing that you have done?  
Traded life under the heavens for life under the sun."  
"Oh, my LORD, it was the serpent. He deceived me and I ate  
And now I'm seeing that sin just ain't so great."

Oh God that we could take it back and undo what we have done  
Life was wonderful under the heavens  
But it's terrible under the sun

What can we do to make things right?

Where can we turn to be healed?  
How long will we be cast from Your sight?  
How long until the grave is unsealed?

I have a plan children, but you'll have to wait  
Many years under the sun toiling in the heat  
But I will someday open wide heaven's gate  
When my own Son, the devil He will defeat.

I will send my own Son, the devil to defeat.

*Glorious and Almighty God - I truly am overwhelmed at the promises contained in Your word. You have shown that creation was cursed due to man's sin, but You have also shown that this will be corrected some glorious day. The creation itself will be changed to a state of perfection and wonder. Lord, I long for that day and I hail the Lamb who made it possible. I praise You for the work of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**...because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Romans 8:21**

As noted in the preceding verse, not just man, but all of creation came under the curse that was executed upon man. The price and weight of sin is such that it affects not just the sinner, but it corrupts everything. The trials, troubles, and distresses of nature are a result of our disobedience. This is the great lesson for man since the fall. But what is fallen will be restored.

There is coming a time of worldly renewal which was seen by the ancient prophets. This is known as the Kingdom Age where Christ will reign from Jerusalem for 1000 years. However, there will still be death during this period and only after that reign will come the final correction of what was lost so long ago.

The promise of restoration is a hope that we can cling to as absolutely certain. What has to be considered through the Bible's words is that it was the devil who deceived man and it was because of this deception that the fall occurred. Without a restoration, the victory isn't truly complete. This is the reason for the dispensations which have been introduced into the stream of humanity. Each has led us through the unfolding of God's plan of this restoration.

In the end, this is a battle in the spiritual realm which is being realized in the temporal realm. John tells us succinctly the main reason for Christ's coming -

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

The devil has wrought his destruction and so Christ has come to destroy what he has wrought. When the destruction is destroyed, then what is left will be as was intended. The final chapters of the book of Revelation detail the glory which lies ahead when "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption." As Godet says, nature "possesses in the feeling of her unmerited suffering, a sort of presentiment of her future deliverance."

This deliverance from corruption's bondage will be "into the glorious liberty of the children of God." What is translated as "glorious liberty" is the phrase *eleutherian tēs doxēs*, "liberty of the glory." All of creation will be delivered from the pains of corruption. Sin shall be expiated from man and the fallen creation will be glorified into the same liberty that is bestowed upon the children of God.

### **The End of the Garden of God**

~Charlie Garrett

Your sentence is pronounced  
In pain you shall give birth  
Your husband will rule over you  
And he shall till the unforgiving earth

Your pains in childbirth will be increased  
Indeed, your labor will be most severe  
But when from your womb the child is released  
Again, the joy in your heart will appear

And Adam, because you listened to your wife  
And from the forbidden fruit you did eat  
I shall give you a burdensome life  
I've cursed the ground beneath your feet

For your crops you will till, and the soil will resist  
From it thorns and thistles will readily grow  
But the things on which you need to subsist  
Will take careful work with a plow and hoe

Someday you'll return to that ground  
As a seed planted in the soil  
And if by faith you live your life  
There shall be a reward for your time of toil

Now I will clothe you with garments of skin  
And send you out of this garden of delight  
Cherubs will faithfully guard the way back in  
Until My Son makes all things right

And when He does you can come back in  
Not because of anything you have done  
But His blood alone will cover your sin  
Such is the wondrous work of my Son

Hallelujah and Amen!

Life application: What the devil has fouled up through deception, Christ will fully reverse through truth and righteousness. In this world of woe there is a better hope. Fix your eyes on Jesus and the glory which lies ahead.

*Lord, as I see things wear out and fall apart; as I experience physical pains; as I see the death of people and creatures around me, I know that this isn't the way life was intended. At times, I wonder why You allow the trials to continue, but then I remember that You have a plan and that the glory to come will mean so much more because of the present difficulties. And so, thank You, even for the trials. Amen.*

**For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.** Romans 8:22

Again, for the fourth time in this section the verse is introduced with "for." This is then being tied back to verse 21 which said that the "creation was subject to futility" and that it "will be delivered from the bondage of corruption." He now explains, based on this knowledge that "we know..." In other words, what he is stating should be taken as a universal axiom - anyone can simply look around and tell.

"We know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs." There are earthquakes, there are floods, there are hurricanes, there are famines, and there are plagues. There is unnatural death, stars explode, meteors crash into the earth, etc. All of



these things, and so very many more are evidently not something one would think of as "normal" when thinking of an ideal world.

And yet, we have the intuition that there is an ideal that should exist. This is the stuff of dreams, legends, plays, and movies. It is something universally found in the heart and hope of man. This creation shouldn't act as it does, but it in fact does. And these "groans and labors with birth pangs" continue "together until now."

This was true at Paul's time and it continues to be true 2000 years later. The world which is hoped for has not yet arrived. There is a universal fault which will be corrected as he previously stated, "for we know" that things aren't as they should be.

Life Application: When you see a tsunami kill 200,000 people, you know that it isn't something that should happen. Something has caused it. Is it a mean and vindictive God? Is it a God who can't handle crises as they arrive? Or is it that there is a fault which was caused by our own rebellion? If the last is the case, will God correct it? We know the answer because we have the instruction manual to the problem in our possession. When crises arise, let us use the situation wisely and share the good news of Jesus Christ. No matter what the calamity, small or large, we can use it for His glory.

*Precious Lord Jesus, I see the immense devastation of floods, tornados, hurricanes, and the like and I know that You can use me during these times to help those who have been afflicted - both for their temporal and spiritual benefit. Give me the wisdom to use such times sensibly by sharing Your love and Your good news to those who have been brought low by these things. Amen.*

**Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.**  
Romans 8:23

The thought "not only that" is tying our personal groaning in with the "whole creation" of the previous verse. Everything in creation, and those who have been redeemed understand the glory ahead, and we are jointly waiting for that wondrous day. Paul notes those he is speaking about - "...we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit."

Firstfruits is a term which looks back to the Old Testament Feasts of the Lord in Leviticus 23 (and as noted in other OT passages). There, in Leviticus 23:9-13, the details of the feast are given. As with all of the Feasts of the Lord, they were fulfilled in the coming of Christ during His first advent. This particular feast was picturing His resurrection. Paul specifically ties them together in 1 Corinthians 15:23.

The Bible uses nature quite often to make spiritual applications. The wind, water, rocks, and agricultural themes, among so many others, are used in a manner which tell spiritual truths of the work of God in Christ, in Israel, in the church, and in the world at large. The firstfruits of the harvest picture Christ's resurrection and therefore the rest of the harvest looks forward to the great day when we likewise will see "the adoption, the redemption of our body."

There are several opinions as to who "we" are and also to the exact application of the term "firstfruits of the Spirit." Some say it is the Jewish believers who received the Spirit at Pentecost, but Paul wasn't among them at that time and so this view is unlikely.

Another view says that this is referring to the Spirit as a "pledge" of the good things to come in Christ. This can be assumed because the firstfruits during Israel's history were just that, they were an offering in hopes of an abundant harvest once the entire field had ripened. This also doesn't seem likely based on Paul's wording here as well as Christ being the actual Firstfruits.

What is more likely is that it is speaking in general terms of the early Christians during the apostolic age. This was still the time of signs occurring for the establishment and building up of the church until the Bible was complete. After that time, the signs were no longer necessary because the Holy Spirit has completed that portion of His redemptive work, a work which testifies to the truth of the message of Christ.

The Romans would have been included in this period, obviously, because the epistle written to them is a portion of the Bible which we now possess, and which testifies to the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The roles are now understood and so the time of firstfruits of the Spirit have moved into the ripening of the fields for the time of greater harvest to come.

Life Application: It is always good to return to the fountain and think through our position in redemptive history in comparison to the earlier stages which are recorded for us. The Bible is the well-spring of our faith in Christ, and it testifies to what has been accomplished in the establishment of the church and the doctrine of our faith. Is it sufficient for faith and practice or not? The answer is, "Yes." Cling to the words of Scripture as you await the coming of the Lord Jesus and the redemption of our bodies.

*Heavenly Father, You have bestowed upon us the wondrous gift which is Your word, the Holy Bible. In it I find riches and treasure unimaginable. I find there Your love for us, the giving of Your Son for us, and the work of Your Spirit for us. In it, doctrine is established,*

*the avenue to life is revealed, and the path for our current walk in holiness is shown to me. Thank You for Your precious word! Amen.*

**For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? Romans 8:24**

This is the final "for" of this subsection. Notice the logical progression of Paul's thoughts as they come from the tip of his pen -

We are children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we indeed suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

For - the present sufferings are inconsequential to the glory which shall be revealed in us

For - the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God

For - the creation was involuntarily subjected to futility but the creation itself will be delivered from this state into the same liberty as God's children

For - we know that even the creation is agonizing with labor pangs together until now, just as we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan as we wait for the redemption of our bodies

For - we were saved in this hope, but seeing isn't hope, it is realization

Verse 16 spoke of our suffering which will eventually be replaced with our glorification. Since that verse, he's built upon that thought to demonstrate what is intuitively known by all people, that this is a world which is not in an ideal state. It is something that is easily supported by observing the physical creation.

We are saved in the hope of being glorified and that hasn't happened yet, so we are in hope still, being preserved for the glory to come. Just as the creation fell with the fall of man, so will creation be restored with the restoration of man. It is yet future, and this is our hope. If it were to happen to either, then it would happen to the other. Therefore, "hope" would be realized in sight. If creation were redeemed, then we would see it and there would be no hope yet future in this regard. As he says, "why does one still hope for what he sees?" The answer is, "They don't - they live in that reality."

And this takes us back to what the "for" of this verse is for. It is explaining the thought of the previous verse - "...we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

The Spirit is our guarantee of the reality to come, not the final reality itself. Thus, the signs of the apostles which validated the indwelling of the Spirit, weren't an end in and of themselves. They were given as a demonstration of this hope. This is why those signs were given at the establishment of the church. To give an anchor for the hope yet to come. And this is why, despite the flagrant abuses of charismatic churches world-wide, these signs aren't necessary now. The Bible is published, the doctrine is established, and Jesus is revealed. Those signs are no longer necessary because we have the surety of God's word which fully explains the work of Messiah.

If God chooses to give us a sign, such as healing, this is His prerogative in any age. He did it prior to the coming of Christ and when He chooses to do it now, it will occur, but it is not a necessary part of our life in Christ. The record which testifies to His power and authority has been made; it is sufficient for our faith and practice.

Life application: What is your hope? If you have hold of what you wish for, then you don't have hope of it, you have what you wish for. At the present time, the work of the Spirit is a guarantee of what we hope for, not the final reality of the promises to come. The Spirit has breathed out the word of God for our edification. In it, we are told that we are sealed with Him when we believe. If the Spirit wrote the book, then the sealing must be true if the book is true. Is this your hope? If so, then your hope will be realized some glorious day when the sons of God are revealed.

*Glorious, precious Lord - Your word tells me that I am sealed with Your Spirit the moment I put my trust in the work of Christ. Because He wrote the book, then it must be true. I am baptized into the death of my Lord and raised to newness of life by the power of the resurrection. This is where my hope is grounded, and this is where I find my peace. Wonderful, blissful peace. Amen.*

**But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.**

Romans 8:25

"But" marks the contrast with the preceding verse: "For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?"

Instead of sight, which is the realization of our hope, we (even now 2000 years after Paul's letter) "hope for what we do not see." The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is a book of hope and promise for those who wait patiently on their God to fulfill His word and execute His plan. The New Testament shows us the fullness of this plan and helps clarify what the Old Testament only partially revealed. In the New there are numerous

passages about the hope which has been presented. As an inspiration to the longing soul, let's review but a few of them -

Galatians 5:5 - ...the hope of righteousness by faith

Colossians 1:5 - ...the hope which is laid up for you in heaven

Colossians 1:27 - Christ in you, the hope of glory

Ephesians 1:18 - ...the hope of His calling; the riches of the glory of His inheritance

1 Thessalonians 5:8 - ...the hope of your salvation

1 Timothy 1:1 - ...the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope

Titus 1:2 - ...the hope of eternal life

Titus 2:13 - ... the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

Because we have the guarantee, which is the sealing of the Spirit, these things have been promised; they are our hope. And because of the magnitude of the glory of what is coming, we have the ability to "eagerly wait for [them] with perseverance." Why should we feel any sense of hopelessness at all? The rich and famous may have it good in this life, but where is the hope? Unless they have something more to look forward to, their life is but a fading glory at best.

On the other hand, no matter what our station, because we have that which is eternal in our sight, we have more riches than they could ever imagine. All of it is stored up for us because of the work of Another. How can we not marvel at the grace and glory which proceeds from God?

Life application: When attending a funeral, mark well the difference between a person who was truly saved, and everyone knows it and a person who actually had no hope. Someday, unless the Lord comes for us first, you will be laid in a box as well. What message will be spoken over you on that day?

*Lord, should I die today, I would hope that every person who attended my funeral would know but one thing: I was Your servant - failing yes, but Your servant. And because of this, the box isn't my final home. I have a hope eternal in the fullness of Messiah, my Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.** Romans 8:26

News Flash: This verse has nothing to do with "speaking in tongues." This is not a verse which can be used to defend the unintelligible emanations which proceed forth during charismatic gatherings.

Paul uses the term "Likewise" to open this verse. It is the Greek word *hōsautōs* and means "in like manner." In like manner of what? Paul has said that the creation groans with birth pangs and we likewise groan, eagerly waiting for our body's redemption. This is the comparison that he is using. It is not an excuse to stand in church and draw unnecessary attention to oneself by making up a "prayer language."

This is actually an important theological issue and to diminish it as has been done in the past 100 years or so is to devalue the worth of sound biblical interpretation. And so, we continue - "Likewise the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses." We are mortal and we are weak. Some of us are weak in physical strength, some weak in health, some weak in knowledge, some weak in elocution, etc. The weakness of our prayer life is what Paul is speaking of.

We often have real needs and/or desires that we simply can't put into words because our thoughts, our ability to reason the issue out, or the interference of our emotions causes us to be unable to accurately express what is on our heart. When this happens, "we do not know what to pray for as we ought." This is our weakness and yet, it is not a problem to God. Instead, the "Spirit Himself" who is the third member of the triune God, makes intercession for us.

Paul says that it is He who searches our hearts and minds, and he uses a word, *hyperentynchanei*, which is found nowhere else in Scripture. The Spirit takes our place and makes the plea to God for us. This intercession has nothing to do with audible emanations flowing off our tongues. Instead, it is speaking of our internal "groanings, which cannot be uttered" because we don't know how to utter them. These are sorted out and brought to God in knowing and understanding. In other words, what we simply cannot tell God, the Spirit does for us.

The Spirit is the one who aids us, just as an advocate in a court of law would. We have no idea how to defend ourselves in a legal situation because we simply don't have the knowledge or training to do so. In such a case, we wouldn't walk up to the judge and start flapping off unintelligible syllables. Rather the advocate would speak on our behalf, carefully stating to the judge the things we are unable to probably elucidate.

This is the intent and meaning of what Paul is stating here. Because we can't put into words the things that we want to say but the Spirit can, and because the Spirit knows

the mind of God, the two are brought into a point of harmony. This is done silently and with the decorum of the Holy Spirit tending to His troubled child, not with outlandish fantasies of the mind and of the tongue.

Life application: If you want to make noises for the Lord, do them in a way which builds up the church and glorifies God. With such shouts of praise and honor, the Lord is well-pleased.

*Yes, Lord God! With my tongue I will speak and sing words of praise, glory, and honor to You. And with my heart and mind I will think on Your greatness at all times. When my words fail me, I will remain quiet and allow the Spirit to search me out and carry my troubles and woes to You for a happy resolution. In all ways, may You be glorified through the words and thoughts which proceed from me. Amen.*

**Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:27**

Who is it that searches the hearts and mind? In Jeremiah 17:10, we see it is the Lord, Jehovah -

I, the Lord, search the heart,  
I test the mind,  
Even to give every man according to his ways,  
According to the fruit of his doings.

In Revelation 2:23 we see that it is Jesus -

... I am He who searches the minds and hearts.

Elsewhere throughout the Bible, such as in the psalms, this is spoken of as being in the providence of God. In other words, something that is at the providence of God alone is something that is accomplished by all of the above; all are God. Each performs this function in a way which is appropriate to the situation and dispensation. Paul in this verse, which is tied to the Spirit in the previous verse, is speaking of us in our prayer life in relation to the Spirit. He says that it is "He who searches the hearts."

At the same time, He "knows what the mind of the Spirit is." The Spirit works in accord with His knowledge and becomes the one who "makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." This is the Spirit's role, but again it is not a role unique to

the Spirit. Coming up in just a few verses, Romans 8:34 says that it is Christ who also makes intercession for us (also see Hebrews 7:25).

Therefore, as the Spirit of God is searching us, He takes this information that even we can't properly make clear in our prayers, and He brings it before the throne of God. The "right hand of God" is the position of power and authority. At this glorious place, Christ intercedes for us. The marvel of the Trinity is that there is One God who is eternal and without division and yet He within Himself performs certain roles - we call them "persons."

This is something that is hard to grasp and theologians bandy concepts of God about, but in the end, one must look at a few facts that the Bible teaches -

- ✓ The Bible proclaims the Father is God
- ✓ The Bible proclaims Jesus is God
- ✓ The Bible proclaims that the Holy Spirit is God
- ✓ The Bible shows that all three members of the Godhead are eternal - no beginning, no end
- ✓ Time is created and we are in time
- ✓ Our concepts of God must be considered based on God's eternity, not how we interact with Him in time
- ✓ If we are wrong about the nature of the Trinity, it doesn't change who God is. God is God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Why is this important? Because the Bible proclaims these things to us. In our limited knowledge of God, we come up with our own misguided thoughts on these matters, such as whether Christ is God or not. Regardless of whether we can conceive of Jesus as God and eternal in His being, the Bible says He is. When we deny that He is, we must then deny the evident teaching of the Bible; thus, we now proclaim heresy. The importance of these matters is that they can keep others from salvation if this is what they are taught and what they believe.

Now understanding these intercessory roles a bit more, it would be good to note that on a human level, we also are given this honor, albeit in a limited way. We see the distinction mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:1 -

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men..."



We also have an intercessory role, bringing these things before God in order to transmit our desires and hopes before Him. When we are limited in doing so because of our lack of intercessory skill, isn't it comforting to know that God searches us out and does it for us? Great stuff from a wonderful Creator.

Life application: Let us first accept the premises of the Bible at face-value and then work within those parameters to develop our doctrine. If we don't do this, then our thinking about God - His nature and activity in our lives, becomes skewed. Better we don't understand and accept than to deny and then attempt to contemplate "why" our denial is right and acceptable.

*Lord, as I sit here in Your presence, the planets are moving in their paths, the stars are putting forth light and heat, the birds are moving on the winds, and creatures are walking on this beautiful planet. These things, and so very much more are all under Your constant care and control. If this is so, and I know it is, then I can feel confident that You have me in the same care. How I love You - I am carefree because You care for me. Amen.*

**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.** Romans 8:28

This is another of the recommended memory verses for each of us. It is something we can cling to and be both upheld by and inspired by all the days of our walk with Christ. "And we know" indicates certainty. If we know it, then why do we think and act as if the words aren't true? Be certain in what you know.

This verse is actually not a stand-alone thought, but it is tied into what Paul has been saying in the previous verses. As we wait for the redemption of our bodies and our glorification, we have weaknesses. At those times, the Spirit is with us, searching us out and making intercession to God for us.

Because of these things, "we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." None of this can be separated and still be true. It is a unified thought. In other words, we can't say that all things work together for those who love God in the general sense. Lots of people love "God" but have no relationship with Him, meaning the true God. For some, the god they love may not be the true God. Or they may love the true God, but have not understood the full revelation of Himself and thus cannot be pleasing to Him (see John 5:23 for example).

Having said that, "we know that all things work together..." This is referring to the creation while it is in its fallen state as noted in the previous verses. All of the common elements around us are being used toward a good end for those "who love God, and are the called according to His purpose." God has an end to this current state which will come about as He directs. He is purposing that end in and through creation and it is being done in a way that everything which occurs is happening towards that good end.

Those who are included in that good end can be assured that whatever occurs, no matter how seemingly bad, disastrous, or out of control is actually known to God and being used in the fulfillment of His plan. All things, good or bad, work together for good - that good end which shall result. This is a verse of comfort in a world of woe.

Life application: Memorizing verses such as Romans 8:28 can be a great help in times of trial. As long as they aren't misused or partially quoted, thus destroying the true intent, they are a valuable tool for our continued walk with God. Through them, we can praise Him in the storms as well as during the calm.

*O God, it's so easy to think I'm in Your favor when everything is going great, but it's another thing to think this way when the times of trouble come. But I know Your word is true and so even in the times of trouble, Your plan is being worked out for a good end; an end in which I am included in because of the wondrous work of Messiah. Thank You for my Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.** Romans 8:29

The concept of "predestination" is so complicated and so debated over, that to analyze it even in a minor way takes a book worth of information. Paul begins again with "For." He is saying this as a result of his statement in 8:28 about all things being worked out for good for those who are the called according to His purpose.

Based on this, he says that those whom God "foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." Those who are a part of God's plans and purposes will be conformed. It is already done in God's mind. This verse, along with the logical progression that Paul will make in the coming verses shows us that this is so. How did this come about? There is a vast array of views on this and many sub-views as well. We will explore four main categories based on a rational comparison of "when" and "how" things work in the mind of God.

Please note that this is an extremely limited analysis of the issue, and it doesn't cover all the bases, but is merely intended to demonstrate which major approach is correct and why. The four views to be looked at are supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, Wesleyanism, and sublapsarianism. Although these concepts are very complicated, a simple example of ducks in a river will be used to help you along so that you don't quack your head thinking too hard...

The wrong ones will be explained first, who believes them, and why.

The first is Supralapsarianism (supra - above). It says that election, or predestination, is logically prior to the decree to permit the fall of man. In other words, even before sin entered the picture, election was made for all people.

This view involves a group known as hyper-Calvinists and it is also known as double-predestination. It is held by only a small, radical, and biblically unsound group of people. This view inevitably leads to judgmental egoists who feel God loves them and hates everyone else.

Because God predestined humanity before He permitted the fall of man, He therefore elected some for salvation and elected others for condemnation. He created them saved or condemned. That is their state, and they have no choice in the matter. This means that God provides and applies salvation only for the elect, meaning limited atonement.

To explain, we'll use ducks in a river. God creates a pond and the ducks. He puts the ducks in the pond, but after the ducks enter the pond, there is a cataclysm and water starts draining from the pond into a river heading toward a waterfall. When the ones He created for salvation come along, He pulls them out of the water – whether they want it or not.

And the ones He created for condemnation... He actually pushes them down the river and into the waterfall before they can get out. This is a mean and angry God. But this is what some people believe. Double predestination means that God actually hates the non-elect, even though He created them.

With this doctrine, there is absolutely no reason to evangelize anyone. Why bother telling anyone about Jesus or sending out missionaries? God chose and that's that. It is as close to ascribing evil to God as one can come because it, in fact, does.

The second incorrect view is Infralapsarianism (infra - below). This concept says that the decree of election is logically after the decree to permit the fall. This is held by strong Calvinists, but it is not double predestination.

God created all and then permitted the fall. Since then, He has and will continue to elect some and will pass by others. He provides and applies salvation only for the elect (limited atonement). He chooses who will be saved and they have no choice in the matter.

RC Sproul, if you know who he is, would be in this category. This view still holds to limited atonement like the first view. In both views, God loves only the elect in terms of salvation. A problem with this is that God is love – He loves everyone equally. There is no increase or decrease in His love for us from His perspective.

Let's go back to the ducks to understand. God creates a quiet pond and the ducks. He puts the ducks in the pond, but after the ducks enter the pond, there is a cataclysm and water starts draining from the pond into a river heading toward a waterfall. When the ones He decides should be saved pass by, He pulls them out of the water – whether they want it or not.

The others simply head down the river and are destroyed in the waterfall. At least He doesn't push them down the river, but He also doesn't bother helping any of them out. They were simply not a part of his plan. This isn't a hateful God, but He is rather uncaring about those He didn't elect. Poor ducks...

Like the first view, there's no reason why someone would bother telling about Jesus or sending out missionaries. They will dispute this, but it is the logical result of such a view. If God chooses us for salvation apart from our will, then honestly, what is the point? Are God's plans going to be thwarted by us somehow?

Also, proponents of this view would say that if it was intended for all to be saved, then all would be saved – because God's sovereign intentions must come about. Therefore, if it wasn't intended for all to be saved, then it was only intended for some, the elect.

But this is a false dilemma. The atonement of Jesus is an offering, and it is intended to save all, but it only applies salvation for those who believe. Calvinism wrongly assumes that the atonement of Jesus has only one purpose which is to secure the elect's salvation – Jesus died so we can be saved.

In fact, Jesus' sacrifice according to Romans 1 has another purpose – to reveal the righteousness of God in judgment. God sends His Son to die in your place and you turn Him down. Even without the cross we are condemned. How much more just is God in judgment because of it!

The result of the idea of limited atonement is that it denies that God really desires all people to be saved. This is contrary to His omni-benevolence and also to the Bible itself that “none should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

So to understand this view more clearly you need to consider the concept of free-will. Do we freely choose Christ, or does God choose us apart from our will? The two options are known as monergism and synergism.

Monergism teaches that regeneration is completely the result of God's work and man has no part or cooperation in it. It is salvation by irresistible grace leading to regeneration and then to faith. In other words, a person is saved before they are saved. It is convoluted and it involves unclear thinking and a twisting of the Bible.

Also, this view actually usurps God. If you have no choice in your salvation, then how do you know you are saved? How can anyone make a claim that they're saved when they didn't have anything to do with their salvation? In other words, you are speaking for God by claiming salvation at all.

Of course, their answer is, “I believed after regeneration; therefore, I am saved.” However, there are false gospels and people believe them. There are people who believe wrongly and yet claim they are saved. When they find out they're wrong, they change their belief (hopefully) in order to be saved. So, when were they saved? When they believed correctly!

False gospels imply there is a true gospel, and the spirit of the antichrist implies there is a true Spirit. Belief must precede regeneration. And it does. This is what the Bible teaches. Your faith brings salvation. Finally, monergism denies free will, but free will is necessary for love because forced love isn't love at all.

Synergism teaches that we freely choose Christ and then are regenerated to life. This is exactly what the Bible teaches numerous times, both by Jesus' words (e.g., John 3:16) as well as the apostolic writings (e.g., Ephesians 1:13, 14). An argument against this though is that the Bible says we are dead in our sins and that it is Jesus who restores us to life. The argument is, “How can a dead person choose life?”

RC Sproul says it this way – “You have as much power to awaken yourself from spiritual death as a corpse has the power to awaken himself from physical death.”

This is a category mistake. We are spiritually dead in our sins. We are not dead beings. God made us with the ability to reason, to choose, and to decline. In fact, this is exactly what Genesis 3:22 implies. Mixing these categories leads to bad theology, such as monergism.

(To understand this, one can watch my sermon on free will, Genesis 2:16-17

*“Free to Will or Not Free to Will, That is the Question”* on [YouTube](#) or [Sermon Audio](#))

The Bible teaches what we would call anthropological hylomorphism – we are a soul/body unity. The spirit of man is dead, but the spirit of man is tied to the soul. Paul, speaking to saved believers in 2 Corinthians 5, says the soul without a body is naked. The spirit of man is made alive when we call on Christ, even if the body later dies.

This is eternal life, and it occurs the moment we believe. We don’t become a soul/body/spirit unity. Rather it is our soul which is now spiritually alive. Adam’s spirit died at the fall, faith in Christ regenerates that spirit. As I said, the spirit of antichrist which John speaks of confirms this.

The third wrong concept of our four major categories is Wesleyanism – named after John Wesley. This view says that God’s election is based on His foreknowledge but not necessarily in accord with it. In other words, God’s decrees are conditional - He changes His mind.

This is the beginning of major error and it goes back to a guy named Jacob Arminius who lived in the 1500s. His view denies eternal security. It reveals a God who is changing and makes mistakes.

John Wesley couldn’t decide what was right and so he followed the teaching of Arminius after asking God for a sign and then throwing lots twice. But we don’t get our theology from happenstance and chance. Instead, we get it from the Bible.

John Wesley, the Methodists, the Church of God, Mennonites, and others who hold this view are wrong. Like the previous view, they believe that God created all and then permitted the fall. Then He provides salvation for all people.

God knows who the elect are based on the foreseen faith of those who believe. Because of this faith, He applies salvation only to believers, but believers can lose their salvation.

For a duck example, God creates the pond, the river, and the ducks. He puts all the ducks in the pond, and they eventually go to the river which is heading toward a waterfall. As the ducks come by, He leaves His favorite perfect duck on the shore quacking for the ducks to come out...

“There’s a waterfall ahead. If you don’t come out, you’ll get quacked up.” Some of the ducks come out and some decide they like the river. Those that come out, however, can never know if they have upset the perfect duck and have to go back in the river.

There is never true safety and in fact, these ducks can’t really tell the river from the shore. The poor ducks spend their entire life trying to please a group of lower ducks that the perfect duck left behind.

If the lower duck (a pastor), says they have been bad ducks, then off they go to the river again. Imagine being one of these poor, unsure, and ever-worried groups of ducks. Poor ducks...

Our final view is what is correct. First, it makes sense from a philosophic standpoint. Second, it makes sense from a moral standpoint. And third, it is the only view which is supported by the Bible. And it answers the question of why we fell in the first place.

It also answers where evil came from without ever ascribing it to God. Without this view, one is forever searching for where evil came from. This is a question Dr. Sproul and others must, and do, ask. They can never find an answer to it because their theology leaves no room for it.

Their mistaken idea is that God created everything perfect and so if man fell, then God must have blown it by creating a being that could fall. This is particularly true because if intent to sin is evil (as Jesus clearly says), then Adam fell before the fall because he lusted after the fruit before he ate it. But they know God didn’t create evil, so “Whence comes evil?”

The correct view is sublapsarianism (sub - under or after). God’s order to provide salvation came before His order to elect the people of the world (Rev 13:8) – “I will send my Son to die, and then that all who call on Him will be saved.” It provides unlimited atonement for everyone potentially, but only for God’s people who choose Christ actually.

Like the previous two views, this view holds that God created all and then permitted the fall of man. He provides salvation for all people, but the elect of God are those who

believe. God passes by those who do not believe based on their rejecting His offer of Jesus. It isn't that He doesn't care about them, it is that they don't care about Him.

This view applies salvation only to believers who cannot lose it. Yes, there is security, eternal security, in the arms of Christ. A theological basis for this view is that God is omni-benevolent. In other words, He loves all of the people of the world.

Yes, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

There is no hatred of the person and no active passing by people. He offers to all and the elect respond. He desires all to repent and come to Him for His unmerited salvation and favor. This doesn't mean there is good in us, it means we see the good in Him and we come to it.

As far as our ducks are concerned, God creates the pond, the river, and the ducks. He puts all the ducks in the pond, and they eventually end in the river which is heading toward a waterfall. As the ducks come by, He leaves His favorite perfect duck on the shore quacking for the ducks to come out and offering bread which will sustain them and guide them...

"There's a waterfall ahead. If you don't come out, you'll get quacked up." Some of the ducks come out and some decide they like the river. Those that do come out are protected by this perfect duck. If they stray, it is not to the river.

There is a force field that will never allow them to go toward that terrible place again. These imperfect ducks are saved from it despite themselves. God was pleased that they believed and though they may have forgotten it (2 Peter 1:9), He never did. They are eternally secure in the fold of His perfect duck, and this is despite crummy pastor ducks who come behind Him.

The first two views hold to salvation only for the elect. The third view holds to salvation for believers but that they can lose it. The correct view holds to salvation for believers even though it is offered to all – and that when accepted it is a done deal, the salvation cannot be lost.

There is ample biblical support for both eternal salvation and salvation offered to all. Any verses which appear to contradict these views (such as John 6:44) are taken out of context by the theologically confused Christian.



So, having stated these things, Paul tells us in our subject verse that the predestination is for the reason "that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." Jesus was the first of the resurrection. All who call on Him are considered His "brethren." We are adopted into God's family and saved, eternally saved, despite ourselves.

Life application: To understand the workings of God as they apply to humans, one must properly understand the nature of God and also the nature of man. Should we err on either of these, then our thoughts about what God is doing, how He is doing it, and why He is doing it become skewed. When reading the Bible, we must accept the Bible as authoritative and then determine to discover the issues which lead to what the Bible proclaims. When we do this, we will be sound in our theology and free from the bondage of both legalism and scare tactics in relation to our state before God.

*Lord Jesus, the Bible says that You are the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Before the pillars of creation were set in place, Your cross was already planned to save a sinner such as me. How could such love exist? How could I refuse such an offer? Glory to God in the highest and surely - "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain." Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** Romans 8:30

"Moreover" adds to the great news of the previous verse. Yes, before creation God foreknew those who would receive His gift of grace found in Christ. Those whom He knew would receive this offer, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. But, as Paul notes, there is more. "Moreover" those "whom He predestined" for this honor, these He also called. This is the calling of the Spirit. However, this isn't just an offer, but rather it is an offer received.

We know this is the case because Paul next says that those "whom He called, these He also justified." The actions thus far, and the next to be mentioned, are connected in God's intuitive mind in a way which will be displayed in a sequence of time, which He created.

As Albert Barnes observes, "The connection is so certain that the one infallibly secures the other." Because God doesn't think in a sequence (He is outside of time), these things are as certain as if they had occurred at one moment. This includes his last thought of the verse, "and those whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Some claim that salvation isn't eternal, but when looking at such things from God's perspective, it becomes apparent that it must be. One action is no different than all of them as far as His eternal purposes are concerned. The foreknowledge, conforming, calling, justification, and glorification were purposed in His eternal mind, but they occur in time. The evidence for this is the last thought of the verse, "those whom He justified, these He also glorified."

We could possibly deny the sequence of events has eternal significance up to this point, but Paul is absolutely clear that we are "glorified." However, this is something that hasn't yet happened to any saved believer who is right now reading Paul's words. They are still in their fallen body, living in a fallen world, and from time to time sinning. And yet, according to this verse, we are already in heaven. This ties in with the thought in Ephesians 2:4-6 -

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."

We are, according to this passage, seated "together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The honor is already accomplished in God's mind and we are positionally with Christ in heaven, and yet we are in actuality still here on earth. Someday, according to the truth of eternal salvation, we will be actually sitting in this glorious spot.

Life application: Salvation is eternal, Christ is in control, and nothing can separate you from the love of God in Him. Stand firmly and unwaveringly on the truth that you are saved if you are in Christ. Be at peace in His work which got you there. He didn't hang on the cross to provide you with eternal insecurity.

*Heavenly Father, thank You that nothing in all of creation can separate me from Your love which is found in my Lord Jesus. In Him, I have all the assurances of eternal life and freedom from the bondage which once bound me. I know that what He did is all-sufficient to carry me safely to You even despite the times I fail. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

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

Romans 8:31

In Romans 8:31, Paul takes what has been stated thus far concerning the work of Christ and how it relates to us and he turns it around into a series of six questions. Why would

he do this? What is it about questions that refocus our attention? When you are presented with a question, do you evaluate it as a tool to get you to think on what has already been submitted? Are you ready for me to stop asking questions?...

Paul's first question encompasses the entire discourse of chapter 8. "What then shall we say to these things?" Review what has been stated, think on it, and resolve to align your thoughts about Christ with what you have read. I am free from the law of sin and death. Is this salvation eternal? Am I truly a son of God through adoption? Yes! I received the Spirit of adoption, I was predestined and called, and I accepted the call. Now I stand justified and even glorified because of this. Because of all that has been stated, "What then shall we say to these things?"

The answer is a resounding note of the victory found in Christ... "If God is for us, who can be against us?" There isn't enough ink in the world to type the number of exclamation points which should follow this thought! It is a truth we can stand on when the forces of sin and wickedness come against us. When our hearts are weighed down, we can meditate on this verse and others like it and receive strength to continue on -

The Lord is on my side;

I will not fear.

What can man do to me?

...

All nations surrounded me,

But in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.

Psalm 118:6 & 10

Life application: If you have received Jesus as Lord, God is in fact "for" you. As He is the owner of eternity and possessor of your soul, then nothing else can truly harm you. Stand fast in this fact and be comforted in the power of God which is now on your side.

*Lord, there are certain times that I need reassurance that You are there. When those times come, all I need to do is open Your word and read the marvelous truths which are contained in it. Because of Jesus, You are on my side. No power can take me from Your grasp, no fear will consume me, no heartache will overcome me. Instead, I have my confidence and hope in You! Amen.*

**He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Romans 8:32**

In verse 31, we were asked that if God is for us, who can be against us. In continuation of that thought, Paul explains why. "He who did not spare His own Son" is obviously speaking of God the Father. Father-ship implies Sonship. However, this Father/Son relationship does not imply something which occurred in time. God created time and we are living in it. We cannot apply family concepts to the Godhead in a one-to-one comparison with that of humanity.

The humanity of Jesus is united to the deity of Jesus without intermingling or separation of any kind. Jesus, the Son of Man was born into the stream of humanity, but the divine Son eternally exists within the Godhead, just as the Spirit does. God the Father did not spare His own Son (Jesus), but delivered Him up for us all. The fault which occurred in the stream of time demanded that action be taken to correct the fault. This is the incarnation. It is the uniting of God and Man in the Person of Jesus.

This is the One whom God did not spare. He "delivered Him up for us all." This thought can be taken in one of several ways. Note: this list is not all-inclusive -

- Jesus was delivered up for "all the elect" only - limited atonement
- Jesus was delivered up for "all" meaning everyone, and everyone is saved - universal salvation
- Jesus was delivered up for "all" everyone (unlimited atonement potential), but not everyone will receive Christ and be saved (limited atonement actual)

Based on the entire scope and premise of the Bible, the nature of God, and the obvious (and yet often denied) truth of free-will, the third option is correct. God delivered Christ up for all people. To those who have received this offering, "how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The term "with Him" is meant to show that even though Christ was delivered up for us, He prevailed over the ordeal and is Heir to all things.

Because He is Heir to all things and God delivered Him up for us, then it is evident that we also are given all things. This takes us back to verse 17 which noted that we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We were crucified with Christ, meaning that when He went to the cross, we likewise were there with Him. Our sin-nature was nailed to it. Because of this we are the recipients of what the Son receives - given freely by God to us because of the work of Another. Simply amazing.

Life application: Time and again we can see that Romans 8 is a wonderful place to go when life has us down. Though we lose all in this life, so much more awaits us in glory. Yes, things may be tough, but God will bring us through to riches unimaginable.

*Lord, would I trade the riches of Your word for an easy message which doesn't truly satisfy? Would I cling to a hope which isn't grounded in the truth? Would I be wise to listen to the fading sounds of clanging cymbals and the crackling of thorns lit under a pot? Rather Lord, I will listen to You as You have spoken to me through Your wondrous word. Give me wisdom and insight into this glorious gift - the Holy Bible. Amen.*

**Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.**

Romans 8:33

As if a lawyer in a courtroom, Paul argues his case - "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" Because God is the ultimate authority, who would even dare to do so? In the United States, we have what is known as the "presidential pardon." If a person is convicted of some crime, the US President has the authority to grant a pardon for that crime. Once the pardon is accepted by the person who has been named (and he can in fact turn it down), the crime is completely erased from the record. No one can ever come to them again and bring that charge against them. The highest authority of the land has approved it and it is gone completely and forever.

Every person on earth has likewise been granted a pardon before God. It is incumbent on them to receive it by calling on Jesus as Lord. When the conditions are met, the pardon is granted. As God is the Creator, He is the highest authority of all. Therefore, no person, no spirit, no demon or devil, can bring a charge against one who has been so forgiven. They are the elect of God and have been cleansed by the most purifying substance of all, "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

In Christ's work in fulfillment of the law, in His death, and in His resurrection "it is God who justifies." The lost soul is found, the sentence is pardoned, the declaration is pronounced - "Not guilty." This is the force and intent of what the Bible teaches. And, as an interesting note that no further explanation is needed on this matter, this is the last of the 13 times the word for "justify" is used in Romans.

Again, if one thinks this through with clarity of reasoning, it should be obvious that this implies eternal salvation. If a man is justified before God, will God -who is outside of time - change His mind about what has transpired? Of course not. The translation of this verse even covers that base because in the Greek it can be stated in the form of a question as well as a statement of fact, "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? Shall God who justifies?"

It is absurd in the highest sense to think that God would be fickle enough to condemn the same person He has justified. Eternal salvation is the only obvious conclusion to what has occurred in the pardoned soul.

Life application: Looking at what occurs in the believer from a legal standpoint - and it is a heavenly court by which we will be judged - we can know with absolute certainty that God is perfectly fair in His decisions and that those decisions bear eternal weight. Call on Jesus and rest in His eternal graces.

*O God, too often we act as if You could somehow act in an unjust or unrighteous manner. How slow we are to think through Your unchanging and perfect nature. I know that everything You do is in accord with Your nature and that You are perfectly fair in how You conduct all things. I rest in this as a great comfort. You have promised peace through Your Son and so in receiving Him, I have peace. Amen.*

**Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.** Romans 8:34

In the preceding verse it was implied through a rhetorical question that no one could bring a charge against God's elect because it is God who justifies. In continuation of our surety over the forces which would presume to come against us, Paul now asks his next question, "Who is he who condemns?" Like the previous question, the answer demands a "No one!" And then comes the explanation, "It is Christ who died."

Christ died for us. He became our substitute. His death paid our penalty, carried away our sin, and restored to us a propitious relationship with God. His righteousness has been imputed to us! Sin no longer separates us from the One who created us. So, who then could condemn us? It's simply not possible. And there is more...

"Furthermore" Christ "is also risen." His death and resurrection take us back to Romans 4:25, It was He...

"who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

Not only did Christ pay our penalty, carry away our sins, and restore our relationship to God, but He was raised for our justification. The resurrection proves these things for the soul who believes. This is why Paul ties the resurrection in with our calling on Jesus (Romans 10:9). Who would call on a dead Lord? But we don't call on a dead Lord.

Instead, we call on the risen Christ "who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Christ died for our sins, was raised for our justification, and is now performing His functions as our Mediator and our Advocate. He is interceding for us from the position of authority, symbolized by the term "right hand of God." This doesn't mean God has a body and is sitting on an actual throne with Jesus sitting on another throne next to Him. Rather, Jesus is in the position of God's authority.

Because He has done all these things, and because all authority has been granted to Him - who has done all these things for us - then how could another condemn us? It isn't possible. We are in Christ and fully protected from any external force which would dare attempt to do so. Such is the honor and blessing of being a child of God.

Life application: No person, no demon, no devil can condemn you. There is a far higher and greater power who has you completely safe and secure in the palm of His hand. When you feel the accusation of Satan telling you that you aren't worthy, remind him that though that may be true, Jesus is worthy, and you are in Him. No charge can stand against God's elect.

*Lord, sometimes Satan tells me that I am unworthy of the blessings You have bestowed upon me. And I know it is true, but I remind him that though I am unworthy, I am in You - My faith is in You, my trust is in You, my hope is in You. Though I am unworthy by myself, in You I have all the rights of a child of God. Thank You Lord for bestowing upon me that which I do not deserve. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Romans 8:35**

Another verse well worth committing to memory is found in Romans 8:35. Paul has just explained that there is none who can condemn those who have faith in Christ. He died for our sins and was raised for our justification. And even more, He is there at the right hand of God interceding for us. Because of this, another rhetorical question is proposed, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The only possible answer is, "No one." Any alternative would be unthinkable.

To help us think this through clearly, a list of possibilities is given which would normally separate the living -

Tribulation, Greek *thlipsis* - This generally denotes something which applies external pressure. If one stands on a watermelon, the melon will scrunch and explode. External pressures on us cause us to fold in, either physically or mentally, until we finally lose control. No matter what presses upon us, what it leads to is temporary; it has no eternal bearing on our state before God.

Distress, Greek *stenochōria* - This could be equated to being stuck in a tight, confining place. If one were buried alive, this would be a word which might be used. There is no freedom of movement, but only the confinement which causes anxiety. In 2 Corinthians 7:5, Paul speaks of the distress he faced - "Outside were conflicts, inside were fears." The external conflicts caused the internal fears. However, even though we may enter into dire, confining straights, Christ shall lead us to broad spaces where there will be eternal freedom of movement. See Psalm 18:19, for example.

Persecution, Greek *diōgmos* - If we walk in life and have others constantly attempting to overtake us and harm us, we are facing persecution. The intent is to destroy in name, in character, or even in person. Such is the fate of many in the world today as the Islamic and secular world attacks, reviles, and kills Christians because of their faith in the work of Jesus. No matter what they say or do, Christ is our Advocate, and He is our place of refuge. There should be no fear of what the world can do. It is but a light affliction.

Famine, Greek *limos* - This is the complete deprivation of what is needed to remain alive. It is a lack of food; it is a lack of water; it is the deficiency of nutrition which can only lead to death. Though we may lack food or water, there is a place awaiting us where there shall be no lack. "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat..." Revelation 7:16

Nakedness, Greek *gymnotēs*- This isn't speaking of a state of immodesty, but rather a state of deprivation of the necessities for protection. It is the state of being without any clothing at all. Imagine the anguish of being stripped bare in the midst of the heat of the desert or during the falling of a heavy wet snow. There can only be one end to such treatment, misery followed by death. However, in Christ, we are granted eternal garments with which to cover ourselves. See Revelation 3:5, for example.

Peril, Greek *kindynos* - This is anything which would cause danger or risk. If we walk into the ocean, maybe we will step on something with a poison barb. If we flee in haste, maybe we will slip and break a limb. If we cut ourselves maybe an incurable infection will result. Peril includes anything which is a result of the curse pronounced so long ago upon creation. Whatever is against us as human beings and which could harm us, it will



be forgotten someday when we are delivered into the paradise God has prepared for His people. Revelation 21:3 tells us that in the future, there shall be no more curse.

Sword, Greek *machaira* - This is surely speaking of the state of martyrdom that many Christians have faced, are facing, and will continue to face. The term "the edge of the sword" in Hebrew is actually "the mouth of the sword." The sword is a consuming instrument which is never satisfied. Its hunger is only for more death. However, should you - O Christian - face the sword, it can only lead you through the Door and into the world where death is swallowed up in victory. Christ has prevailed over such things. Fear not.

Life application: There are a multitude of things which can harm us or kill us, but none of them can prevail over us. In Christ, the battle is already won. If you desire to have your faith strengthened today, take time to read Hebrews 11 which tells of the faith of those who have gone before.

*Heavenly Father, I have the assurance that no matter what trial or struggle comes against me, there is a better hope than this temporary, earthly walk. I know that no distress, peril, persecution, or want can keep me from the promises You have made. And so, I place my life in Your capable hands, knowing that You shall lead me to waters of rest. Amen.*

**As it is written:**

**"For Your sake we are killed all day long;**

**We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."** Romans 8:36

Here, Paul returns to the fountain, Scripture itself, to continue with the previous thought. This is a quote from Psalm 44:22. The Psalm is written about the sufferings of the people of Israel, the people of God. The surrounding nations had attacked and plundered them, and the psalmist cried out his plea to God about the matter. Despite what was happening, he reminded God of their faithfulness -

All this has come upon us;  
But we have not forgotten You,  
Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.

Paul looks to the treatment of the New Testament saints in the same way. Despite all of the woes which could come against them as noted in 8:35, they would remain faithful to God. In 1 Corinthians 4:9, he highlights a similar note concerning the apostles -

"For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men."

"For Your sake" means "God" and it is related to the gospel message found in Christ Jesus. Because of our obedience to this glorious display of love, "we are killed all day long." This isn't just hyperbole. Christians were already being singled out and martyred for their faith at Paul's time. From Stephen, the first recorded martyr (Acts 7:60), the slaughter of Christians has gone on unabated for two millennia. The floor of the Roman coliseum is still stained with the blood which flowed there eons ago.

"All day long" is an idiom which means, "ceaselessly." The blood flows and the people's faith remains and is strengthened. The surety of eternal life in Christ makes such suffering not only tolerable, but acceptable to the one facing the ordeal. Because it is, "We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." A sheep will simply follow where it is led, without question. They don't run away as they approach their doom. Instead, they obediently walk behind the shepherd where he leads.

The thought being relayed is that where Christ leads, be it to a life of length and green pastures, or to a slaughterhouse for His glory, His sheep will follow. The reason isn't because of blind faith. The reason is because of revealed light. Christ has risen and those in Christ will rise. "What can man do to me? Christ is on my side."

Life Application: A Christian's life of prosperity and ease doesn't indicate God loves that person any more than the one suffering in a dirty prison cell awaiting execution. Should the comfortable life you face suddenly come to a screeching halt and persecution comes to your door, will you still be thankful and willingly follow your Shepherd? Think about it now, who knows what tomorrow will bring.

*Heavenly Father, long ago, the psalmist wrote these words -*

*For Your sake we are killed all day long;*

*We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

*The New Testament repeats them. This tells me I may have to face trials, persecution, or even death for my faith in Christ. Should this honor come my way, I will be obedient.*

*Where the Shepherd leads, I will follow. Amen.*

**Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**

Romans 8:37

In verse 35, the list of "these things" was given. It included seven things which are contrary to us - tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Because these come against us as faithful believers, "we are accounted as sheep for slaughter." The world may laugh at our faithfulness to God even in these attacks against us and even to the point of martyrdom. But Paul says despite such mocking, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors..."

The word he uses for "more than conquerors" is *hypernikōmen*. It comes from two other Greek words - *huper* which we would translate as hyper, and *nikao*, meaning victory. The word *nikao* is the basis for Nike - the god of victory (and a good athletic shoe -ed. DBV Apprentice). The idea which we are given is that we are hyper-victorious "through Him who loved us." "Through Him" implies that we are in no way victorious on our own. Without Christ, those seven words of woe would overcome us and our life-journey would be ended. But in Christ, they can't even be considered minor setbacks.

In fact, the trials and perils we face, when faced in Christ and for Christ, only make the victory sweeter and they serve to complement the "hyper-ness" of the already supreme victory. As Paul notes in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Yes, in Christ we are more than conquerors.

Life application: Be sure to rightly apply Romans 8:37. When Paul says that "we are more than conquerors in Christ," he does it in a verse beginning with "yet." To understand the context, we need to evaluate what verses are being tied to. In the case of this verse, it is tied to suffering. If you suffer, know that your suffering is already defeated. Through Christ who strengthens you, the victory is already assured.

*Lord, when I wake up, there are pains in my body and so I rub on ointment. When I go to read, I need glasses. My head hurts Lord, and I take aspirin. When things aren't right with me physically, I use that which corrects or heals my failing. How can I expect to treat my spiritual weaknesses any differently? Lord, open my heart and mind to understand Your word - the cure for all my spiritual woes. Amen.*

**For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,...** Romans 8:38

This is the first half of a two-part thought which sums up Paul's thoughts in Romans 8. Paul, whose credentials were well known at the time of the writing of this epistle (for example, please refer to Philippians 3:4-6) looked at the world around him, both the spiritual world and the physical world, and compared it to his position in Christ. In his

joy and in the surety of his salvation, he wrote words which are as true to us as they were to him.

"I am persuaded..." In essence, he is saying, "Based on everything I know and how it relates to my position in Christ, I will submit the following. I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor power, nor things present nor things to come..."

None of these things have the power to interfere with what will be stated in verse 39. All of these things are found in creation and therefore are under the control of the Creator. All of these are found also within the stream of time (which is itself a part of creation) and therefore, from the beginning to the end, nothing has the ability to affect that which Paul will reveal in the next verse.

Life application: God is the Creator of all things. The creation consists of temporal things such as time, space, and matter. It also consists of spiritual things such as angels and the realm in which they exist. If you are in Christ, then you are secure apart from these things. Have faith that your security is beyond the grasp of anything in creation.

*Glorious God, You have sent Your Son into the world as a way for us to understand You intimately. What was once beyond our grasp, can now be understood. What was once unseen, is now visible. Before what was something we could only speculate on, is now written in Your word for us to know with certainty. Thank You for the surety You have given us because of Jesus. Amen.*

**...nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Romans 8:39

Romans 8:39 should be cited with 8:38 to get a full sense of Paul's final thought of this chapter. They are amazing words which we can cling to throughout our walk in this veil of tears and trials.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The apostle, a man who had the highest credentials within the Jewish society, and a man who had been personally called and ordained by the risen Christ for carrying the gospel message to "Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15) then suffered

immense trials for the name of Jesus. He knew with absolute certainty of his calling and the hope of glory to come. Fully convinced and assured, he cites a list of ten things which can in no way "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The list from 8:38 continues now in 8:39. Neither "height nor depth" could be speaking of a variety of things - heaven or hell; angelic forces or demonic forces; the highest prosperity or the lowest poverty; etc. Whichever Paul intended, it is understood that from the highest point of that concept, to the very lowest (and thus anywhere in between) there is complete assurance in Jesus Christ. At no level could there be the introduction of something to steal us away from our Lord.

"Nor any other created thing" includes anything that isn't listed in his note. God is the Creator. Anything other than God is created. Therefore, nothing - absolutely nothing - can ever separate us from the love that has bound us to Him; a love that is found in Jesus Christ. This is the assurance of the one who has believed in Jesus and been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13, 14). This verse is the absolute guarantee of eternal salvation. Nothing can separate us from the One to whom we have been joined.

Life application: The notion that one can "lose" their salvation is so far removed from the teaching of Scripture that it is unimaginable that the idea could even be contemplated, much less taught. But it is. Don't let anyone ever steal from you the joy of your salvation. Instead, know that the God who called you has also justified you. And He has, in His mind, already glorified you. Let nothing ever take that assurance away from you.

*Lord, in my life I have enjoyed a variety of foods that have brought delight to my taste. I have heard the sound of many instruments and an endless stream of new compositions, each beautifully arranged for the pleasure of my hearing. All of my senses have been filled with an abundance of delight. By thinking on what is created, I marvel at You the Creator! Surely, the wonder of what is, shows how much more glorious You are. Praises to You, O God. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 9

### **I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ... Romans 9:1**

After eight detailed chapters concerning deep theological and doctrinal truths, chapter 9 suddenly turns in a new direction - the state of the Jewish people in the world and their status before God at Paul's present and into the future. This discourse will continue through chapter 11. After this section will come Paul's exhortations to the church in Rome to close out the book. Because of the seemingly unrelated nature of Romans 9-11, it is often called a "parenthesis" in the book. But the importance of Israel as a people is an integral part of what God is doing in human history.

The "church age," also known as the "Dispensation of Grace" will not continue on forever. Depending on how you interpret the rest of the Bible, and especially Israel's status, your expectation of what will occur after the church age will be completely different than someone who perceives Israel's future role differently. In other words, "Is God through with Israel?" "Has the church replaced Israel?" "Is there still a plan and purpose for the people of Israel?" What is correct and how can we tell?

In 9:1, Paul begins with "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying." What he will relate to us is either truth or it is a lie. If it is a lie, then nothing else he has said can be held as reliable either. In other words, his words here are either an anchor which holds fast for the entire epistle, or they are the cunning deception of a man who desired to pull his audience into the depths of a raging ocean. By invoking the title of "Christ" in his vow, he is making a claim that Christ is, in fact, God. This can be determined from the Old Testament, of which he once served as a Pharisee. In Deuteronomy 6:13 it says –

"You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name."

By invoking Christ in Romans 9:1, he is either blaspheming the name of the Lord (Jehovah) or he is claiming that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God - Jehovah in the flesh. After claiming the truth in Christ and affirming it, he reaffirms it by calling on the Holy Spirit as a witness to his conscience. The matter which he will state is of such importance to him that he has brought the very fellowship of the Spirit who resides in him into the matter. In essence, either I am crazy, or the Spirit testifies to the truth as a witness along with me.

Life application: Jesus, as well as the apostles after Him, tell us to let our yes be yes and our no be no. In other words, let our words be of such weight that when we speak, those around us will know they are the truth. At times, however, a matter may be of such importance that we must invoke God in our words. Invoking anything less than God is idolatry. Let us never flippantly invoke God's name and let us never invoke anything in creation when making a vow.

*Lord God, sometimes I find that just being still in Your presence and thinking on Your greatness is the most wonderful place to be. I can think on Your creation and all its beauty. I can think on Your word and all its lessons, and I can think on what You have given me in the life of Your Son. At times like these, I am filled with the joy of Your presence. Thank You for the quiet moments with You. Amen.*

**... that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. Romans 9:2**

This is the continuation of the previous half of Paul's thought. He had stated that he was speaking the truth and that his conscience bore witness in the Holy Spirit to this fact. His heart truly had "great sorrow and continual grief." The reason for this pain will be explained as the chapter unfolds and as he writes his great dialogue on the state of Israel during this time of their rejection of Christ Jesus.

What Paul shows us here, and what we will find throughout the New Testament, is that there truly is a time for grief. As Solomon puts it in Ecclesiastes 3:4 -

A time to weep,  
And a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn,  
And a time to dance;

At the same time as bearing his grief, Paul was also filled with joy continually (e.g., 2 Corinthians 7:4). From this we learn that there is room for both states in the heart at the same time and that there is nothing wrong or deceptive with it. Our lives can be filled with joy immeasurable at the prospect of eternity with Jesus and yet broken at the unsaved status of those we love. Paul shows us that this is so and therefore we can confidently live in the same manner without belying the joy of our salvation.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with grieving. In fact, it would show a failing in us if we didn't grieve over the lost. Let your heart be broken for that which breaks the Lord's heart.

*Heavenly Father, my life is filled with joy, peace, and contentment at the promise I have in Christ. I am full to overflowing in this way. And at the same time, my heart grieves for those who haven't received the peace and salvation which You freely offer to all. Please open the eyes of those I love to the truth of the good news. This is my prayer today. Amen.*

**For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, ... Romans 9:3**

Here we have the explanation for Paul's comments in verses 1 & 2 which stated that he was being truthful in Christ and that his conscience bore witness in the Holy Spirit concerning his sorrow and grief of heart. And what was the reason? It was for the sake of his fellow "countrymen according to the flesh," meaning his Jewish brethren, the people of Israel.

His burden was so great for them that he says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren." It is astonishing how many scholars come to this verse and reject the plain sense of what Paul is saying. It is simple, direct, and to the point. If he could, he would trade his own place in Christ for the sake of the salvation of his people. Scholars simply cannot conceive that he means what he says, and they go into great and lengthy discourses on why he doesn't really mean this.

The verb Paul uses for "I could wish" is *ēuchomēn*. It is in the imperfect tense, indicative mood, and middle or passive voice. The translation "I could wish" is exactly what he is saying, not "I did wish" or "I would, but" or any other forced translation. Paul truly meant what he said, just as Moses meant the same thing after Israel's great sin of idolatry at the base of Mount Sinai -

"Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.'" Exodus 32:31, 32

Paul was fully aware that one cannot take the place of another in eternal damnation. However, it didn't change the feelings he had concerning the matter. This is the reason for invoking the name of Christ and the witness of the Spirit in the first two verses of chapter 9. The person who truly understands the state of the afterlife for those who fail to receive Christ's gift is then impelled by the highest sense of responsibility to share that message. And his heart should be so broken for their state that they would likewise be willing to take their place rather than see them perish.



As we move through chapters 9-11, we will see Paul's thoughts concerning Israel, both in his present and into the future. When one sees the church as replacing Israel, then of course they would try to force a translation other than what Paul clearly intended. But when we see that their rejection of Christ is not the end of the story for them, Paul's words make all the more sense.

Life application: How broken is your heart for the lost around you? And not just those whom you love or are close to, but those with whom you have no affiliation at all except the bond of humanity. When we look at ourselves as sinners saved by grace, then how can we not look at those around us and feel the pain of a broken heart at their fallen state?

*Heavenly Father, I may not share the same politics or ideologies of those around me, but I share the common bond of humanity. I once was blind to the truth of Your word and was on the wide path leading to destruction. Now that my destiny has changed, give me the desire and the ability to lead others onto the narrow path which leads to life. Break my heart for the lost around me, O God. Amen.*

**...who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ... Romans 9:4**

Verses 4 & 5 now describe Paul's "countrymen according to the flesh" mentioned in verse 3. In these verses nine terms are used to describe them:

Israelites - The direct, blood descendants of Jacob who became Israel. This includes the following sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Also included in the list are Joseph's two sons - Manasseh and Ephraim. These are the people, Israel. Israel is not the church, though there are Israelites in the church. And the church is not Israel; it is a separate working of God during a particular dispensation.

To whom pertain the adoption - God adopted this group of people, bringing them into a covenant relationship and calling them His own special people. Among other verses pointing to this is Deuteronomy 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."

The glory - Time and again, the glory of God was manifest to the people of Israel. It occurred in a pillar of cloud and of fire at the Exodus. It happened at the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness and again at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem

at Solomon's time. The glory was manifest in particular appearances to select people as well, such as to the father and mother of Samson at the announcement of his birth. The glory was also manifest to Israel in another way. The radiance and glory of God was manifest to Israel in the Person of Jesus (e.g., John 1:14).

The covenants - The covenant promises of God have come through this specially chosen line of people - through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who is Israel). The covenant at Sinai was directed to them and for them. David was given a covenant promise as well. Later a New Covenant was promised to the people in Jeremiah 31:31 and it was instituted and realized through the shed blood of a Son of Israel - Jesus.

The giving of the law - This was a unique moment in history when God brought a single group of people near to Himself, displayed His glory before them, and gave them a corporate body of laws which the people agreed to uphold. The law, being the fifth dispensation of God's workings in human history was given to show God's righteous standards "which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 18:5).

The service of God - This is speaking of the temple service and functions which were performed by the priests and Levites for the people of Israel. God's presence dwelt first in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Sacrifices, offerings, and devotions were presented to Him, serving Him during the dispensation of the law.

The promises - Promises of blessing for obedience, of punishment for disobedience, of exile and return, of God's faithfulness even through Israel's unfaithfulness - such promises were made to and through this group of people. And the greatest promise was made to them as well. It is the promise of the coming Messiah foretold in Genesis 3:15 and who was anticipated by each faithful generation since Adam. And despite their rejection of Him, this Messiah has promised to return to this wayward and obstinate group of people when they finally call on Him -

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" Matthew 23:37-39.

Life application: Israel is a distinct group of people, descended from the patriarch Jacob. The church is not Israel and yet there are those from Israel in the church. Mixing these categories will lead to faulty theology, so don't mix these categories.

*Heavenly Father, it is the greatest comfort to know that You care for me and have called me to be Yours through the work of Your Son. Though I fail, I know that You will never let me go. I stand on the surety of my salvation, knowing that I was unworthy to receive it and I am unworthy to retain it. I know that it was a gift of Your grace and it continues to be so. Thank You for Your faithfulness to Your unfaithful servant. Amen.*

**...of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. Romans 9:5**

Paul continues his list of honors which have been bestowed upon the people of Israel which began in verse 4:

Of whom are the fathers - The fathers are also known as the "patriarchs," a term referring to the "first" fathers. They are the heads of the household of God's people who are looked upon as exemplars of faith in and fellowship with God. The patriarchs include Abraham (Hebrews 7:4), the great man of faith who was called and given the promises of God, the sign of circumcision, and who continues to be used as the epitome of faithfulness throughout the pages of the Bible. Isaac and Jacob are considered (though not explicitly termed) patriarchs also. The sons of Israel (Acts 7:8) are called patriarchs as well. And finally, in Acts 2:29, King David is called a patriarch.

From whom, according to the flesh, Christ came - The greatest honor of all for the people of Israel is that one which is noted here. They are the people, the chosen line, through whom came the Messiah, the Christ. His human lineage (according to the flesh) is traced through this group of people and it is they whose records detail His ancestry all the way back to the first man, Adam. In the end, everything is tied together in the "oracles of God" as Paul noted back in Romans 3:1, 2 –

"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."

The reason why this is so important to note, along with the other distinctions given by Paul in Romans 9:4 & 5 is that these oracles, meaning the Old Testament, are what tell of the coming Christ and the names of those included in His genealogy - even those not listed in the New Testament record. They also testify to the other distinctions (such as the covenant promises, etc.). These were recorded, maintained, and handed down by (and through) the people of Israel. This honor, bestowed upon this group, is not to be thought minimal in any way. Without these records, the knowledge of Christ and His work wouldn't be properly understood.

The reason for this is that even in the Old Testament, it can be discerned that this coming One would be "over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." In other words, the deity of Jesus Christ can be understood, clearly and plainly, even from the Old Testament. In addition to this, His manhood is seen as well. Therefore, it is implicit that what was coming as recorded by Israel was the incarnation - God stepping into His own creation and doing what was necessary to right the fault which occurred at the beginning.

Unfortunately for Israel, as Jesus noted in Luke 12:47-48, because these oracles testified to Him (John 5:39), Israel should have known better -

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

Much, a great deal indeed, was given to Israel and they handled the responsibility negligently. Because of this, they went into exile for a second time. How this would affect the rest of the world, and how it will affect this special group of people in the future, will be discussed by Paul in detail in the verses and chapters ahead.

The Jew

Scattered by God's avenging hand,  
Afflicted and forlorn,  
Sad wanderers from their pleasant land,  
Do Judah's children mourn;  
And e'en in Christian countries, few  
Breathe thoughts of pity for the Jew.

Yet listen, Gentile, do you love  
The Bible's precious page?  
Then let your hearts with kindness move  
To Israel's' heritage:  
Who traced those lines of love for you -  
Each sacred writer was a Jew.  
And then as years and ages passed,  
And nations rose and fell,  
Though clouds and darkness oft were cast  
O'er captive Israel,

The oracles of God for you  
Were kept in safety by the Jew.

And when the great Redeemer came  
For guilty man to bleed,  
He did not take an angel's name  
No - Born of Abraham's seed  
Jesus, who gave His life for you,  
The gentle savior was a Jew.  
And though His own received Him not  
And turned in pride away,  
Whence is the Gentile's happier lot?  
Are you more just than they?  
No: God in pity turned to you -  
Have you no pity for the Jew?

Go, then, and bend your knee to pray  
For Israel's ancient race;  
Ask the dear Savior every day  
To call them by His grace;  
Go, for a debt of love is due  
From Christian Gentiles to the Jew.

Author unknown

Life application: All of Scripture points to Jesus - His incarnation, which is the uniting of God with humanity. Although this may be a hard concept for us as humans to grasp, it is the clear intent and truth found in Scripture. A denial of the deity of Jesus Christ is a denial of God's work on our behalf. One who denies Jesus Christ is Lord cannot be saved.

*Lord! I am so thankful for those around me that have different gifts. There are hungry people and You have given some the desire to tend to and feed them. There are children waiting to be educated and there are those who enjoy teaching them. There are people in foreign countries who need to hear about Jesus, and You have lit a fire in the hearts of some to become missionaries. You have all the bases covered because You are great, O God! Amen.*

**But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, ... Romans 9:6**

One has to pay attention to what they are reading concerning Israel or suddenly a false impression of who "Israel" is comes into play. Israel is not the church, and the church is not Israel. There is nothing in Paul's writings to indicate otherwise and everything to dispel such a notion.

However, far too often, people in the church look at verses such as Romans 9:6 and, tying them together with other verses, come to the conclusion that if there are those who are not Israel who are "of Israel," then the opposite must somehow be true; those who are of Israel now were not previously "of Israel." This is a faulty premise and isn't supportable at all.

Having said this, Paul will show how those who were not God's people (Israel) become God's people (by faith) and how those who were God's people (Israel) are not truly God's people (because they lack faith). Again, the categories are set between Israel and non-Israel, and who are God's people and who are not God's people. Keep these categories straight and the error of thinking that the church becomes Israel won't be made.

With this understanding, Paul begins 9:6 with "But." This is showing a contrast of his thoughts on verses 1-5. He has been describing the honors and distinctions of being a son of Israel and now he shows the contrast, "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect." The word, which establishes and explains the duties of the people of Israel, isn't to blame for any fault which arises in the people. It is the basis for who they are and explains how they were to conduct themselves because of their honored status.

As we proceed through his thoughts in the coming verses and chapters, he will quote this very word of God which details their responsibilities, and which identifies those who are truly of Israel. This is why he mentions it now. Once this baseline for his thoughts (the Scriptures) is noted, he then makes his pronouncement (which will be supported by this baseline) - "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel..."

The seemingly contradictory statement will be fully explained by using the very Scriptures that the Israelites stand on as their evidence for being God's special people in the first place.

Life application: When we come to conclusions from concepts in the Bible, they must square with the various categories which the Bible sets down first. If we misunderstand

these categories, then false assumptions will result. Sometimes it's not easy to define categories, particularly when we already have ideas about what we want to believe. Making charts as you read and study is often a good idea to help you align your thoughts with what the Bible intends.

*Oh Lord! How I treasure Your word. In it I find lessons for moral living - examples of right and wrong morality. I also find examples of what pleases You. Quite often, You tell me directly that something is displeasing in Your sight or that with a certain action You are well-pleased. You've given all the information I need to be agreeable in Your eyes. Now Lord, help me to learn and follow that narrow and pleasant path. Amen.*

**...nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called."** Romans 9:7

In order to substantiate his statement, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel..." Paul returns to the fountain of Scripture to validate that this concept already has precedence. Abraham had a son through his maidservant Hagar named Ishmael. He was Abraham's firstborn, but God rejected Ishmael and his line for the honor of ushering in the Messiah. In fact, no descendant of Ishmael is recorded as being in this line for the rest of the Bible. Instead, God told Abraham that he would, in fact, have a son through his wife Sarah who had been barren for many decades. When the son came, he was named Isaac.

Sometime after Isaac's birth, Sarah died and Abraham went on to have more children through his other wives and concubines. And yet, the reckoning of Abraham's seed was and would remain only through Isaac. The precedent was set in this example, that being a descendant of someone by blood doesn't necessarily mean that they will be included in the spiritual blessings which may accompany the bloodline.

This premise should be obvious because, ultimately, we all descend from one man, Adam. But to make the point of election clear, Paul is using those to whom the promises were given and then showing that not all of their descendants are included in those promises.

This same thing will happen again after Abraham and Paul will cite that example as well in order to continue to make his case concerning election. As a sure example that what he is saying is correct we see the same thing being relayed by Jesus in a verbal altercation with the Pharisees. He shows that one's bloodline is not the only factor that can be considered in our relationship with God -

"They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father.' Then they said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.'" John 8:39-44

Life application: When witnessing to others about Jesus, asking "Are you a Christian?" isn't the best approach to determining the truth of the matter. In fact, it can set up a barrier which will then be hard to break down. The reason is that many people believe that they are Christians because they were born into a Christian home. However, being a saved Christian isn't congenital. Instead, every individual must choose to follow Christ.

*Lord God, throughout the Bible, we see You directing the course of human events for Your own wise purposes. Nothing occurs apart from Your sovereign knowledge and everything has been arranged for a good end for those who are called according to Your purposes. Use me, Lord, as an instrument of this great plan so that You will be glorified through my life. Amen.*

**That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.** Romans 9:8

This verse is speaking directly of the line of promise from Abraham. This line is through Isaac as opposed to all of the children of Abraham who physically descended from him. Because it is speaking in this fashion, the implication is that the same concept applies to later generations as well.

Concerning Abraham, who is being spoken of in verse 7, "those who are the children of flesh" are all born directly from him but who are not of the promise - Ishmael, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (and any others not recorded, but who physically descend from him). It then says, "these are not the children of God."

In this list, Isaac wasn't named even though he was born from Abraham. I've done this because Paul is making a point about those who are of the promise as opposed to those



who are not of the promise. The difference is found in his words "but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."

Taking all of Abraham's physical descendants and calling them "the children of God" would be a mistake. Other than Isaac, they are merely human beings born in the natural way and to whom no promise was made. However, Isaac came by promise as will be seen in verse 8:29.

As noted above, Paul is showing that the same concept certainly applies to later generations as well. Those who believe are of the same line of promise as Isaac. Those who don't believe are excluded from the line, even though they were physically born as descendants of Abraham.

To understand this fully, all we need to do is look at the world today. Many claim physical descent from Abraham. Arabs, for example, trace their descent from Ishmael. However, they are not sons of God because of this descent. They are only sons of God if they are Arabs who believe in Christ. If they are Muslims, then they are not sons of God.

The Jews who don't believe in Jesus cannot be sons of promise. This is because the promise given to and through Isaac was the promise of the Messiah. It was not a promise intended to stop with Isaac and it wasn't a promise that was intended to stop with Jacob. The branches continue to come out of the tree until Messiah is revealed. Those who have faith in this Branch are grafted into the tree and become children of God by faith. Those who don't are cast out as rejected branches.

Life application: The only bearing that physical descent has on God's redemptive program was in order for humanity to lead to the Messiah. This line continued on for thousands of years until it came to Mary, born of the line of David. However, the Bible records that even Mary had other sons and they are not all Messiahs. Only Jesus fulfills the plan and so even Mary's other sons had to call on Jesus as Lord. As you can see, your physical descent into a Christian home is irrelevant. Only personal faith in Jesus counts toward your adoption as a child of God.

*Lord God, when I'm alone in my thoughts about the day, sometimes I'm angry at the actions of others, sometimes I feel foolish about something I said or did, and at other times I'm worn out from the troubles that come against me like an overwhelming flood. But then I remember that You are there. You cared enough to send Your Son for me and so I know You care enough to listen as I tell You of my day. Thank You for being there. Amen.*

**For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."**  
Romans 9:9

As a way of seeing what Paul is doing with his words over the past few verses, note how he ties them together into greater concepts -

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." (9:6-9)

As you can see, he is making a direct connection between the "word of God" and the "word of promise." The Greek word *logos* is used for both concepts. He is also tying the "children of God" in with the "children of promise." The foreknowledge of God is seen quite clearly here, and the connection becomes a demonstrable truth as he reaches back into past recorded history to show it. And not only is it recorded history, but it is the recorded history which establishes the people of Israel and the covenant promises.

Understanding this allows us to see more clearly what he will tell us concerning our own election. Using the Scriptures (the word of God) as the basis for his statement, he begins with "For." This is stated in order to substantiate what he just claimed in the preceding verse - That "those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."

So, "For this is the word of promise" is given to demonstrate this. If something came by a promise before it actually occurred, then it cannot be ascribed to what is usual. People have children all the time, but it occurs after the union of two people and when that union is at the right time and with all of the right conditions. It is not something that we can say will definitively happen; when it will happen; what sex the child will be; etc.

So, when God said to Abraham, "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son" it is reflecting something outside of the normal. It is showing that the promise is tied into the word which has been spoken. If the word is true, then the promise is actually the word itself - they are one and the same. And thus, it is because Genesis 17:19 records,

"Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him."

Not only was a son promised, but his name was given - Isaac. In addition to this, the selection of the child was tied directly to the covenant which had already been announced to Abraham. And further, the timing of the event was also given as seen in Genesis 18:10 –

“I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.”

The promise is, in fact, the word. God's pronouncements issue from Who He is. This is the extraordinary marvel which is the word of God, the Holy Bible. If it is the word of God (and it has proven itself time and time again), then what it proclaims must come about.

Life application: People who claim they have a "word from the Lord" or a "vision from God" will be held accountable for what they speak. Too often, such terms are thrown out with no backing and which don't come true. Imagine the consequences of ascribing a word from God which isn't a word from God! Don't be swayed by those who throw out visions and fantasies from their heads. We are accountable for where we place our faith.

*Heavenly Father, help me to be discerning in what I believe. Keep me from those who claim to have a "word" from You, but who are making false claims. I know that Your word is true and so anything which contradicts it cannot be true. Without knowing Your word, I won't be able to tell the difference, and so give me the hunger and ability to read it and understand it every day. I ask that You keep me in the truth. Amen.*

**And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac... Romans 9:10**

This is the second instance recorded by Paul concerning his statement in verse 8 –

"...those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed."

First, he brought in the promise of a son through Sarah, a woman who had been barren for many decades and who was past her normal child-bearing years. And yet, God opened her womb and gave Abraham a son through her. Now we are reminded of the unusual occurrence of the birth of sons to Isaac and Rebecca.

Details will be given in verses 11 through 13, but knowing the circumstances prior to the conception of these children is enough to show us that God is in control. In Genesis 25:20, 21 we read this -

"Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived."

It was a full 19 years of marriage and still no child was conceived by Rebekah. Like Sarah before her, she remained barren. However, God is gracious, and He listens to the prayers of His people. Isaac pleaded with the Lord and the Lord granted his plea. The line leading to the Messiah would continue and it would do so through this woman who was barren for so long. At the age of 60, after 20 years of waiting, Isaac would become a father.

Life application: In Christ, good things come to those who wait. As the 27th Psalm implores you, "Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!"

*My Lord and my God - Life continually challenges me and it often seems that things are out of control. But when I think back on the times in the past when it seemed this way, I find that You led me through each trial. Why should I feel the future ones will be any different? I have the certainty that You are there with me and so I will wait patiently on Your good timing in all things - both the good and the difficult. Amen.*

**... (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),**  
Romans 9:11

Without jumping ahead to verse 12 (to which this verse is pointing), we can still discern several key concepts. There were two children, twins, in the womb of Rebekah - Jacob and Esau. They were physically formed and fashioned by God before they were born, and God knew how this would affect their development as people (see Jeremiah 1:5, for example). Their physical development will have a bearing on their character as much as their upbringing after their birth does. Therefore, God's purposes will be revealed even through these things. A description of the two is found in Genesis 25:24-28 -

"So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so

they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

These two children, before they had "done any good or evil," were known to God. Their physical traits were fashioned by Him and these physical traits certainly were translated into their demeanor as well, Esau being a hunter and Jacob being mild and dwelling in tents. However, while in the womb, these traits hadn't yet been a part of their development as post-birth humans. They had done nothing to merit the bestowing of physical traits which would shape them.

In fact, they had done nothing at all to merit anything. Where they were born, when they were born, to whom they were born, etc. were all solely at the will and predetermined choice of God. Every aspect of who they were or would be came by the foreknowledge of God "that the purpose of God according to election might stand."

This is an immensely important concept for all people, not just Jacob and Esau. We have no right to call into question God's sovereign choices. We are bestowed life, time, and place according to His will. Paul will use this logic later in chapter 9 to explain to each of us that what God wills is right, whether we like it or not. Whether Esau liked or didn't like being born with hypertrichosis is irrelevant; he was. God made the choice, and he came out like a hairy red garment.

The reason for his birth in this manner is long and detailed, but it points directly to the work of Christ. God was using these two boys' physical attributes (which would lead to their lifelong development and demeanor) to demonstrate spiritual truths and also to develop pictures of the coming Messiah. These things were purposed by God and His election firmly established His will in the plan of redemption. And because they occurred prior to any volitional choices of Jacob and Esau, they were "not of works, but of Him who calls."

Every aspect of who these two were or would be was determined by God from before the creation of the world. How do we know this? Because Jacob leads directly to Jesus, being His ancestor. And speaking of Jesus in Revelation 13:8 it says that He is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Before the world was created, Jesus' death was predetermined. If this is so, then everything leading to that death was also predetermined. Any minute diversion - whether in the animate or even the inanimate

creation could change all of history. Therefore, all things were known from eternity past by God.

Understanding this, we can look at our own lives, and the lives of all people who have ever lived, and we see that works have absolutely no part in what our eternal destiny will be. How can we work for that which is granted by God's election? We can only receive it as work already accomplished by Him.

Knowing this though may lead us to view life as fatalistic, but this isn't the intent of these verses. There is nothing in them, or in any biblical passage or concept, which negates free will in accepting the work of Jesus. In fact, the concept of free will is actually upheld by knowing these things. Just because God knows what the choice will be in no way means that the choice we make isn't valid. It merely shows the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God who even knows what we will choose to do before we do it.

Vincent's word studies, quoting Godet, have the following thought on the matter - "Eternal salvation is not contemplated. 'The matter in question is the part they play regarded from the theocratic stand-point.'" Paul is speaking of the election and choices of Jacob and Esau from God's perspective and in accord with the will of God. But what needs to be noted when considering this is Paul's statement of the boys as not yet "having done any good or evil."

If these babies will eventually do evil, which in fact they will, then to deny free will in them would be to ascribe the doing of the evil to God. This is why the concept of free will is actually upheld by what is being discussed. We are free moral beings who make our own choices. God merely knows what those choices will be. He is not the Author of evil, but He is able to use our evil towards a good end.

To understand this better, an example may help. God gave the directive to Noah to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1)." Explicit in this verse is that there is a God. Implicit in this verse is that in the bearing of children in order to fill the earth there is a responsibility to this God. If someone has children and they don't train the child in the way of the Lord, then they are not fulfilling God's will for the children. If such a person procreates and claims they are fulfilling God's mandate while at the same time denying God through their actions, then they are not truly fulfilling God's mandate. The condemnation of those children came through the free will choice of not acknowledging the very God that they claim they are acknowledging through the procreation. Free will must be, and in fact is, a central part of our relationship with God.

Life application: To deny free will in man ultimately leads to ascribing the evil in the world to God. Calvinist (and other) doctrine will deny this, but it is the logical result of verses such as Romans 9:11. God's formation of us, which ultimately helps determine who we are, doesn't lessen our responsibility to act in a morally right manner.

*Wise and glorious God, I know that even before I was born You already knew everything about me. You knew what I would look like, the joys and trials I would encounter, the number of my days, and everything else that is connected to my life. As I know this is true, then why should I worry as my life unfolds? Instead, through the good and the bad I will praise You more! Amen.*

**...it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.”** Romans 9:12

This continues what was said in verse 11. Before the twins were born to Rebekah, they struggled in her womb. Children will fight as children do - apparently even in the womb, but this is an unusual occurrence because they actually beat each other up. The Hebrew word in Genesis is *yithrosatsu* and these two were really punching and bruising each other. Mom was worried about both their safety and hers as well.

Because of this, she went to inquire of the Lord. The account is found in Genesis 25:22, 23 –

But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the Lord.

And the Lord said to her:

“Two nations are in your womb,  
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;  
One people shall be stronger than the other,  
And the older shall serve the younger.”

At a time when the children were not yet born, nor had they done any good or evil, God made His divine election - The older shall serve the younger. The natural order of family life was once again reversed as had already happened several times in Genesis. The younger was placed ahead of the older. And thus, we again see the doctrine of Divine Election introduced into redemptive history.

This doctrine will find its ultimate fulfillment in the work of Jesus and which is so clearly explained by Paul throughout the New Testament. Before they were even born, God elected the older to serve the younger. However, this serving and subordination isn't limited to the children. Rather, the verse in Genesis says, “two nations are in your

womb.” It is therefore speaking both of the immediate and the future. In this then is also a picture of the true people of God, the elect.

It is astonishing how much is in this verse concerning the doctrines of the Bible, the foreknowledge of God, and the confusion that results from what is being said. Seminaries have entire courses on concepts which arise from what is being discussed about what the Lord told Rebekah.

What is being stated has led to some of the most heated battles in church history. If you follow what Calvin taught, you can trace it here. If you follow what Wesley taught, you can come here. In the end, and of all of the countless arguments about theology, there is always one right answer. God is clear, but we misunderstand. In the analysis of Romans 8:29, it was discussed which view of election is correct and why.

Although these things may seem tedious or overwhelming, they are actually of the highest importance in the life of the believer. If a wrong view of God's election is considered, then how we perceive our relationship with Christ can be affected in unhealthy ways. It won't change our standing concerning salvation, but it can certainly affect our level of happiness in Christ. To help us solidify why this is such an important issue, we can turn to Malachi where he speaks of these two children at the time before the coming of the Lord in relation to the attitude of the people in Israel –

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’” Says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.” Malachi 1:2, 3

According to His own wisdom, without regard to our merits, God bestows upon us life, time, and place. Some people have been created for noble purposes and some for ignoble purposes according to that placement. However, all who have the opportunity to hear the message are also given the opportunity to respond to it.

In substantiation of this, we can look at the future of these people – the Israelites and the Edomites. They have descended from Jacob and Esau who are named in both Malachi and Romans. After being subject to the Israelites, the Edomites were eventually assimilated into the Jewish society. This is noted by the Jewish historian Josephus. He says that about 129 BC John Hyrcanus -

“subdued all the Idumeans (Edomites); and permitted them to stay in that country, if they would circumcise their genitals, and make use of the laws of the Jews; and they



were so desirous of living in the country of their forefathers, that they submitted to the use of circumcision, and of the rest of the Jewish ways of living; at which time therefore this befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews.”

After this, the same group was cut off from God’s favor when they rejected Jesus. That lasted for 2000 years, exactly as the Bible predicted would happen. However, the day has come, and they are re-gathered and have been returned to their land. The Bible, in both Testaments, says that someday Israel will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and that “all Israel shall be saved.” This includes the Edomite people that were assimilated into Israel before their dispersion.

And even more than that, there are Jews who have accepted Christ since the first century and who continue to do so today. They are provided the same salvation and the same promises as anyone else that comes from any line of the sons of Adam.

Were the verse in Genesis to have said, “Two babies are in your womb, and two children shall be separated from your body. One child will be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” then people might have some type of argument for an opposing view on what God's election actually means.

But the verse doesn’t say that. Instead, it says, “Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.”

Every word of God is pure and every word is intended to lead us to a right understanding of who He is and what He desires for His creatures.

Life application: Individual verses, especially those which are citing the Old Testament, cannot be ripped out of context in order to establish theology. If they are, then only confusion and an unhealthy relationship with God results. Keep things in context and verify everything you read and hear.

*Lord, oftentimes I am presented with conflicting views on what Your word is saying to me. Where I seek for clarity, I find debate. I know that Your word has no contradictions in it and so I ask that You help me to properly receive and process what I am told. I wish, above all, to be a pleasing follower of Your intent for me and so I ask this that You be glorified through the proper application of Your word in my life. Amen.*

**As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Romans 9:13**

Paul continues to make his argument concerning election directly from the fountain which is God's word. This is a direct quote from a portion of Malachi 1:2, 3 -

Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"  
Says the Lord.  
"Yet Jacob I have loved;  
But Esau I have hated,  
And laid waste his mountains and his heritage  
For the jackals of the wilderness."

The terminology used in this verse causes undue stress and even anguish among some Christians. "What kind of loving God 'hates' like this?" And so, the words of Paul are often dismissed as being inaccurate and judgmental. He is disregarded and it's back to the beatitudes for a lifetime of sermons which fail to take in the whole counsel of God, not understanding at all what God is saying or why these pictures from the Old Testament were ever used in the first place.

However, there are many such examples to be found in both testaments which speak of love and hate in a comparative sense. First let us turn to the words of Joab which were directed to his king, the great King David -

"Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, 'Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends.'" 2 Samuel 19:6, 7

Joab was commenting in a comparative and ironic manner to show David that his actions were only harming his relationship with his subjects. It cannot be assumed at all that he actually meant that David hated his friends. In the book of wisdom called Proverbs, we read this from Solomon's hand -

He who spares his rod hates his son,  
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly. Proverbs 13:24

Again, is Solomon implying that a person who fails to chastise his son truly hates him? The answer is, "No." Instead, the results of what a person's life will be like when they go unpunished can only be miserable. It truly is as if the parents hated them for allowing them to end in such a sad state; the analysis is again comparative. And even Jesus spoke in this manner -

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:26

Does Jesus expect us to hate in the sense of literal hatred, or is it that our love for Him should be such that any other loving emotion to be found in us should be closer to hatred than this highest love for Him? The answer is obvious. Vincent's word studies explains the sentiment rightly when it states, "The expression is intentionally strong as an expression of moral antipathy. ... No idea of malice is implied of course."

Understanding this, we should now determine who God is speaking about in this quote by Paul from Malachi. The answer is not Esau the person, but Esau the group who descends from the person. As noted, in the commentary on 9:12, the prophecy given to Rebekah prior to the birth of the children was clear in this regard -

“Two nations are in your womb,  
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;  
One people shall be stronger than the other,  
And the older shall serve the younger.”

And not only this, but so is the remaining portion of the prophecy from Malachi. The continuation of verse 3 speaks of "laying waste his mountains and his heritage." Then in verse 4, "Edom" is quoted. In other words, Edom is representative of the Edomite people. Therefore, both "Esau" and "Edom" are referring to the people descended from Esau, not the individual.

Before Jacob and Esau had done anything good or evil, God's election was made. However, it wasn't merely pointing to the election of the individual, but the election of the group who would descend from him. If this is so, then it can be substantiated that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel" as he proposed in verse 9:6. God's election must be based on something other than what we would immediately think.

Life application: The Bible makes it clear that what God looks for in individuals is faith. Our heritage, culture, race, economic status, etc. have nothing to do with God's favor. He took a harlot from the cursed line of Canaan and brought her into the ancestry of Jesus. He also cut off kings who descended directly from David. He is not looking at the externals, but the internals - and He is doing it with you as well.

*Lord God, if You can take a harlot from the people of Jericho in the land of Canaan and bring her under Your covenant care, I know You can use me too. If You are willing to*

*grant her a place in the ancestry of Jesus, then I know You can place me in Your family as well. No matter who I once was, in Christ I am clean, holy, and spotless. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

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

Romans 9:14

To understand why Paul asks this, we simply need to go back to the previous verses concerning election. God chose Isaac and not Ishmael. God chose Jacob and not Esau. God said he loved Jacob but hated Esau. Is this somehow a demonstration of God being unrighteous? Paul's answer is an emphatic "Certainly not!" He uses the widely translated term *mē genoito*. The concept is unthinkable.

Remember the analogy that Paul has been making. He is saying that not all of those who are physically descended from Israel are actually of Israel. Those Jews who reject the idea of Jesus as the Messiah still hold fast to their Jewish identity, trusting that this brings about salvation. He has now shown that this is a false premise and that apart from the Messiah their heritage has no bearing on their status before God.

He has erected a box around them and shown them, from the very Scriptures which establish them as a people, that they are excluded from the promise if they reject their Messiah. And now he will show that they cannot claim that this demonstrates unrighteousness with God. In fact, it would be unthinkable even without his coming reasons. The very notion that the God of Abraham could be unrighteous is contrary to everything their Scriptures reveal.

His argument for the righteousness of God will be found in those Scriptures. He, taking their truthfulness as an axiom, will use them to make his case. However, from a scientific and philosophic standpoint, we can deduce that God cannot be unrighteous.

Science has demonstrated that time, space, and matter all occurred simultaneously; they had a beginning. They could not create themselves or they would have existed prior to their existence; a logical contradiction. Therefore, if they had a beginning, there was a Beginner - God.

This God is outside of time, space, and matter (before, beyond, after... outside) because He caused them to be; He created them. There is no material aspect to Him; He is perfectly simple and without parts. This must be so because if God had parts, there would be time associated with those parts. Therefore, God must be perfectly simple in this respect. There is also no possibility for change in God; He is pure actuality (He has

no “potentiality” or “potential to become/change”). If God could “become” then He would be lacking attributes associated with the very concept of “God.” He is. Further, any change would imply movement of time, but He created time and therefore He has no potential to change.

And this is just how the Bible describes Him:

Parts – No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. John 1:18

Eternal – ...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:15, 16

Pure actuality; no potential for change – I the LORD do not change. Malachi 3:6

Through this simple line of reasoning, we can determine that God, in fact, cannot be unrighteous. If He is righteous, then His righteousness is. It cannot increase or decrease. The same is true with His truthfulness, love, grace, mercy, holiness, and justice. These attributes are perfectly represented in Him, without change. They define His character.

Understanding this, we can determine that no text which claims to be from God which shows otherwise can be from God. The Koran, for example, shows God is vindictive and changing; it cannot be true. Searching the world's collection of religious texts reveals only one document which correctly portrays God as He is, the Holy Bible. Paul will return to this source, which proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, to show that there is no unrighteousness with God in His selection of some and rejection of others.

Life application: God is logical, orderly, and without contradiction or change. He is transcendent above from His creation, but He works within it and directs it, somewhat like a painter and his painting. If we can grasp His nature, then we can see more clearly where we err in our theology and we can correct it to align with His intent and His will for us as is revealed in the Bible. Never stop contemplating the nature of God as is revealed to us in His creation and in His word.

*God, if the power to level a city is found in a handful of uranium, then how powerful You must be. There is a world around me which is miniscule in comparison to the sun. And the sun is but a dot in comparison to many other stars. And there are billions of stars which fill billions of galaxies. Oh God, if there is that much power in what You have*

*created, then I can be confident that You have the power to take care of me. You are great, O God. Amen.*

**For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." Romans 9:15**

Again, Paul returns to Scripture to make his case. He asked the question, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" He then answered, "Certainly not." To show that this is true from a scriptural standpoint, he goes to the account of Moses as he led the Israelites in the desert. In Exodus 32 came the account of the golden idol. After their great and grievous sin, Moses pled with the Lord for a blanket forgiveness of the sins of the people; it was refused -

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.'" Exodus 32:33

However, Aaron sinned in regard to the calf and yet he continued on as the high priest. Although not explicitly stated, this then must be indicating that the sin was one of continued disbelief, not just the sin of the golden calf. In chapter 33, the Lord first states that because of their rebellion, His presence wouldn't be in their midst as they made their journey to Canaan, but rather His Angel would go before them.

Moses then pled with the Lord for Him to go with them. The reason was that if He didn't, then how could there be a distinction between them and the other people of the world? What better way could His grace be demonstrated? And so, the Lord, after having so tested Moses in this way, agreed. At this point, we see the following exchange-

"And he said, 'Please, show me Your glory.' Then He said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'" Exodus 33:18, 19

It is this statement from the Lord which Paul cites to demonstrate that there is, in fact, no unrighteousness with God. In order to understand this, both grace and mercy should be defined in a simple to understand manner -

Grace - getting what you don't deserve  
Mercy - not getting what you do deserve

Whether "grace" or "mercy" is being described, the same concept applies. God demonstrated mercy where it wasn't due, and he bestowed grace where it wasn't due as well. Not destroying the Israelites for their unfaithfulness was a demonstration of His mercy. And the bestowing of His goodness continuing to go with them was a demonstration of His grace. Neither of these could be claimed, only accepted.

Likewise, the gift of His goodness passing before Moses was separate from any merit on Moses' part. Moses asked for something he didn't deserve, and it was granted. Further, when he asked to see His glory, the response was that the Lord would "make all My goodness pass before you."

The "glory" requested is in fact pure goodness. This perfect goodness wasn't seen to Moses before this; it had been withheld. If this is so, and the display was unique to Moses, then how could someone else claim they deserved it? If they couldn't do this, then how could they claim that God is unrighteous? If He has unbounded goodness which is unseen to human eyes and which is undeserved to those eyes, then any display of His mercy and grace which would reveal a portion of that goodness is also unmerited.

We stand on planet earth and have been given life. No guarantee was given when we were born and whatever our lot is, came about apart from our will. We don't deserve more, but because of the conduct of our lives, we certainly deserve less - either a withholding of His grace or a withholding of His mercy. All of this is seen in this one verse.

God is sovereign and whatever goodness He bestows upon us is completely unmerited. We have no right to make a claim on anything beyond what we have, whatever it is that we have. Try going outside and yelling at the sky, "I demand to be rich." What do you think the result will be? Now apply this to our salvation as humans. Who are we to demand heaven? Who are we to "earn" heaven? And who are we to "claim" heaven based on our human lineage?

If we can't make a claim against God based on any of these things, then how can we find unrighteousness in God? Jew or Gentile, we are actually all in the same boat.

Life application: Moses asked to see the glory of the Lord. The Lord responded that He would cause all of His goodness to pass before Him. Moses' eyes beheld the Lord's glory by beholding His goodness. Now, on this side of the cross, we have that same honor. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The glory of the Lord is revealed in the person of Jesus. All of the goodness of God, His grace and

truth, is seen in Jesus. How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? And how can we make a claim against God when He has so revealed Himself to us?

*How could I, a human being, claim that You are unfair? Do I exercise authority over You who created me? O God, forgive me when I question those things which have come about by Your will. Though I struggle with the trials, losses, and woes of this life, I know that I have no right to hold my fist up in defiance of what You have ordained. I am man, You are God. Your will be done. Amen.*

**So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.**  
Romans 9:16

"So then" is given as a result of what Paul has been saying about election. He cited the case of Abraham's promise leading to Isaac, which means Ishmael wasn't selected. Not only that, but it was announced to him that his long barren wife Sarah would have a child and that it would be a son. He then cited the account of Jacob who was selected as the son of choice over Esau prior to the birth of the twins; Esau being rejected. This occurred before they had done any good or evil.

Following this, he cited the account of Moses and quoted Exodus 33:19 to show that God's sovereign decisions are in no way unrighteous. With these points settled, Paul now says, "So then..." Understanding these things we now know that "it is not of him who wills." From the context we can discern that this statement is not speaking about free will. In other words, this is not a text to say that we do not choose Christ. It is a text that says that God's election is based on His foreknowledge and His direction. That in no way negates our choice.

God chose Isaac and rejected Ishmael as the son of promise. God also chose Jacob and likewise rejected Esau. Is there anything in Scripture to indicate that either Ishmael or Esau wasn't saved? Esau is called "a fornicator and a profane person" in Hebrews, but it is speaking of what he did at a particular time, not every choice he made. Paul speaks about himself in a similar manner in 1 Timothy 1:13 - "...although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man..."

"He who wills" is speaking of our state before God. We do not "will" where we will be born, when we will be born, or to what family we will be born. We also don't decide what our genetic makeup will be, or how high will be our level of intelligence. These are sovereign choices of God, but they in no way indicate that we are not granted free will. These things, all of them decided by God, are a part of who we are and all bear on the free-will choices we make, but the choice is ours none-the-less. Did Esau not choose to



sell his birthright? Did God not know that he would do so in advance? Does God's advanced knowledge somehow change that fact that Esau made the choice?

This being stated by Paul, and now understood by us, we can proceed to the next point which is that it is also not "of him who runs." The term he uses here is *trechontos*. This is a word used to describe an athlete in competitive games. When they are so engaged, they run with all of their effort and with intent of purpose. This isn't saying that we as individuals don't earnestly strive to be saved. People all over the world are doing so. Some strive by blowing themselves up for their salvation. Some strive by going to church and praying to Mary and saying the rosary. Some strive by joining a monastery. And so on...

Despite such effort of the will, there is no merit in it for salvation. The person who rightly pursues God and the person who wrongly pursues Him are both dependent on His mercy. However, only those who rightly pursue Him will receive it. We can "run the race" all we want, rightly or wrongly, and in the end, it doesn't change our need for what God grants. We know this is so because Paul uses the same word for "runs" twice in 1 Corinthians 9:24 -

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."

How could he say this at all if it weren't so?

Life application: In the end, salvation is of the Lord. The plan of salvation is His and it is up to us to accept that plan. There is nothing we can "will" to change it and there is no amount of effort we can exert that will negate our need for it. We must come to Christ in order to receive God's mercy.

*Lord, You alone decide how we can be reconciled to You. There is no intensity of our spirit which can change what You decide, and there is no amount of effort that we can put forth which can change our need for it. We can build a tower to heaven, but only You can open its door when we get there. I accept the open Door which You have offered. I accept Jesus. Amen.*

**For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."**

Romans 9:17

Once again, Paul turns directly to the Scriptures (Exodus 9:16) to justify the statements he is making. "For" is looking back on the previous thought of God showing mercy on whom He will show mercy apart from our will or work. And so, he says, "For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh..."

He goes to the exodus account, one of the most noted in Scripture, and one which shows the power of God and the selection of Israel as His people. They are called the "least of all peoples" in Deuteronomy 7:7 indicating their size and strength, and yet they were saved from the massive powerhouse of the nations, Egypt.

And so, to demonstrate His power in effecting His purposes, He selected this small group of people on whom to lavish His care and affection. By doing so He would be glorified. To show that He is able to accomplish even the unimaginable, He raised up Pharaoh to be a part of this plan. As the account says, "For this purpose I have raised you up..." The intent is, "By my sovereign choice and for my own reasons, you as a leader of this great and powerful nation were placed, established, and carried to this moment."

The Greek word Paul uses for "raised up" is *exēgeira*. It is a word used only twice in the New Testament and so the context must be considered from those two passages. The second instance is in 1 Corinthians 6:14 -

"And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power."

In both instances, it is showing God's active role in the direction of people. The word means to "raise out completely" and it emphasizes its end-impact on the person God raises. In other words, God has raised up Pharaoh, has sustained him throughout his life, and has directed the events of his life to mold him in the exact way so that when his moment of destiny with the approaching exodus comes, he will respond in the manner which will bring God the anticipated glory for what occurs - "that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."

Every particular of the Pharaoh, as well as every particular of Egypt, was determined by God for the moment. The number of soldiers, for example, was pre-ordained. A smaller force may have led him to choose a different path. Every detail was orchestrated to bring Pharaoh to make the decisions that he made. But... he made them. God directed the events, but the choices were still made by the man. God in no way determined the evil choices Pharaoh made, but the choices came as a result of his makeup.

This is how such events work - both for "good and for evil" as was noted in the explanation of the twins, Jacob and Esau. And this is how the events work for us as well. We are a product of the things which make us the people we are, all selected by God to mold and form us. And yet, we are granted free will to choose the path we take. Just because God knows what those choices will be in no way changes the fact that we make them.

Life application: In the end, calling on Jesus is a choice of the will. When the choice is made, He seals us with the Spirit and sets us on a new and wonderful course. This course will last for eternity in His presence. Such is the grace and mercy of God.

*Lord, I just love You. Amen.*

### **Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.**

Romans 9:18

This verse is as clear a statement as one can find concerning God's sovereignty. However, even in this verse debate arises as to what it exactly means. Some believe it means that God actively hardens some and actively saves others. This is known as double-predestination. In essence, God created some to be condemned and He created some to be saved. Apart from this truly unbiblical concept of double predestination there are several other opinions about what actually occurs concerning God's election of people. This is all discussed in detail in the analysis of 8:29.

We know from James 1:13, 14, that God is not the one who leads others into committing evil. Those verses state, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

So how can Romans 9:18 be squared with this? The answer is that "hardens" is being tied to the preceding verse about Pharaoh. To "harden" is not the exertion of a positive influence, such as adding hardener to resin to make it a solid. Another good example would be the heart itself, but in a physical, not spiritual way. We could say God literally and actively hardened our heart, calcifying it and clogging up our arteries, or we could say that God passively hardened our hearts by allowing us to eat the wrong foods and live a lethargic and couch-potato type existence.

The second example is equivalent to what God did in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. God molded us as individuals, giving us predispositions to certain things as He saw fit. However, those predispositions don't in any way negate our responsibility as individuals.

We may be predisposed to eating foods that taste good, but which are not healthy. We may be predisposed to idleness because of our genetic makeup too. But ultimately, we are responsible to get up, live right, and eat a healthy diet.

Pharaoh was left to make his own decisions after he was molded and shaped into the time and the moment when the decision would be made. The choice was still his and by making his choices, his heart was hardened. We too have our hearts hardened as we reject God's intent for us.

Life application: Are you predisposed to a certain type of sin? Maybe drunkenness, homosexuality, or some other sin? If so, God has already shown you that these types of behavior are wrong. He does not force you to do these things. Rather, they are volitional acts of the will. Just because one has a predisposition to a particular sin doesn't mean they must act on it. However, in today's world, we are taught that acting on our impulses is ok. It is not and we will be held accountable for our actions. In judgment, we will have no right to question the decisions God renders.

*Heavenly Father, those things that I struggle with, the sins that I have a predisposition to commit, are difficult for me to face. However, I know that You provide more grace. Because this is true, I can overcome my weaknesses and live as You would expect of me. I know this is true and that You will change me as I seek after You. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.*

**You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"**  
Romans 9:19

In the manner of anyone who wants to live their life in an unholy and self-centered way, Paul now proposes a question that would be fitting for such a soul. "Ok Paul, if everything you have said thus far is true, then why does God still find fault in me? Tell me then, if God works in a sovereign manner, apart from my decisions, then how can what I do be found as wrong? His will is going to come about, and if my actions only lead to the fulfillment of His will, then I am actually helping His plan come about... I'm not resisting Him at all."

This is actually a common sentiment which is proposed around the world every day by folks who revel living in sin. The first problem with such a thought is that God is God. What we do doesn't change that. The same is true with the law.

Example: The law says that horse thieves are to be killed. Someone steals Johnny's horses, and he chases them and kills them. The law judges Johnny as a murderer and

sentences him to death. Johnny says, "I was merely fulfilling the law. How can the law find fault?"

The problem with his logic is that the law requires a judge and jury to sentence and convict horse thieves, not Johnny. Johnny has taken the law into his own hands and worked apart from the law to bring about justice. Johnny has forfeited his right to ask such a question.

What we do may in fact be a part of God's plan, as Pharaoh's actions were, but Pharaoh didn't heed the word of the Creator in the execution of what he did (see Exodus 5:2 for one of many examples). He worked in a way contrary to the law, even though the end came out as God determined. God has no difficulty in securing His end, and He is doing it through the free-will of man.

When a person says, "I wasn't resisting His will" he is proposing an assumption that God's plans have somehow negated his own choices; an assumption that is both arrogant and one that thus attributes evil intent to God while looking for acquittal of their own wrong actions. It is an assumption that 1) cannot be proved, and 2) would indicate any crime or moral perversion must also be condoned.

When we hold up our puny little fist and shake it towards God, such an action is done in defiance of our Creator - willingly and with our own evil intent. God didn't create us to blaspheme His name, but when we do, it was known to Him before the world was created that we would do so. We will not be excused by manipulating words to defend ourselves. In the end, we will only be seen as the fools we are.

Life application: Free will has been granted to man. How much better to use it to bring glory to God than to bring shame upon ourselves. Call on Jesus, be restored to God, and be cleansed of the poor free-will choices you have made in the past.

*Lord, I cannot blame You for my own wrong actions. Even though You knew the things I would do and have used them to bring about Your plans, they were still my choices. Now, I'd like a new direction. I desire that my future choices and actions be used for Your glory. Forgive me of my past and guide me into the future for Your name's sake. Amen.*

**But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"** Romans 9:20

This verse is speaking of the sovereignty of God concerning His creatures. This is obvious when looked at from the surrounding verses and even when quoted in its entirety.

However, far too often, only a portion of it is cited in a way which twists its meaning and intent, "Who are you to reply against God?" This is done in order to buttress one's preconceptions about a matter, perhaps the doctrines of the Bible. Example -

Sergiopolous - "Predestination means that God chooses us and that we have no say in the matter. Free will is excluded."

Dwyerinius - "That's simply not correct. Predestination in no way negates our free-will; in fact, it highlights it."

Sergiopolous - "Who are you to reply against God?"

If you hear someone quote this verse in this way, ignore his argument. You will never change his mind when he believes he is speaking for God, on God's behalf. The argument will merely follow this useless path until frustration takes over.

This verse, as noted, is speaking of the sovereignty of God concerning us. On Judgment Day, Pharaoh won't be able to use an argument against God's sovereign decisions which related to him. He may say, "You raised me up and hardened my heart in order to demonstrate Your glory. And, in fact, You were glorified through me. Therefore, You owe me... big time. You can't condemn me." Just as this won't work with Pharaoh, the same will be true with all of God's wayward creatures.

Paul begins with, "But indeed." This is in response to the proposed statement of verse 9:19 -

"Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

To show that this argument will go precisely nowhere, Paul's next words are "O man." The conversation is one between a finite, fallen being and the infinitely wise and glorious Creator. Which has the right to question? Which has the right to rule? Which has the authority to judge as is fitting the position? "Certainly not you, O man. Who are you to reply against God?"

Job, the man of patience and one who walked in a blameless and upright manner before God, thought he had a reason to question the Almighty. However, God addressed him at length with questions to which Job had no answer. Finally, Job exclaimed -

"Behold, I am vile;  
What shall I answer You?  
I lay my hand over my mouth.

Once I have spoken, but I will not answer;  
Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further." Job 40:4, 5

But God continued to challenge him, showing him that He has a right to conduct His affairs as He sees fit and good. After this second line of questions, Job responded again -

"I know that You can do everything,  
And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.  
You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?'  
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,  
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.  
Listen, please, and let me speak;  
You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'  
"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,  
But now my eye sees You.  
Therefore I abhor myself,  
And repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:2-6

If Job, whom God recognized as one who is "blameless and upright" had no right to challenge God, how much more any others who willfully reject Him? There is no challenge, and no right to challenge, which can stand up against the sovereign Creator. This includes the question, "Why have you made me like this?" God chose our time, place, and position for His reasons. We merely have to accept that those things were beyond our control.

It is He who formed us and therefore He has the right to do so in whatever manner, location, and time that He so chooses. As humans, we are unqualified to understand the subjects of the questions. He is infinite in wisdom and therefore we can only understand Him in His being in a limited way. He is infinite in His existence and therefore we cannot understand His plan as it is conceived from beginning to end. And He is infinite in His power and so we cannot understand Him in the force which He exerts when executing His plan.

He is God; we are man.

Life application: Be careful how you question God. If you don't understand what is happening and you desire to ask, do it in humility and without words of accusation or condemnation. Such words can only turn around and highlight your own sinful nature.

*Lord God Almighty, there are things which happen around me which I simply don't understand. I feel frustrated and don't see why You have allowed these things to happen. Oftentimes, they make me feel helpless, out of control, and yes - even angry. But I also understand that You are God and I am man. In my frustration, I will wait on You. Through my trials, my hope remains in You. Amen.*

**Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? Romans 9:21**

The concept of the potter and the clay is found in many instances throughout Scripture. Not quoting some of the relevant verses would be a loss, so we will cite and briefly evaluate a few. In Isaiah, we are shown that by speaking against the one who forms the clay, we "have things turned around." -

"Surely you have things turned around!  
Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay;  
For shall the thing made say of him who made it,  
'He did not make me'?  
Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,  
'He has no understanding'"? Isaiah 29:16

What thing which is created can speak against the One who creates? It is illogical and arrogant. Isaiah precisely defines who is who in the next verse -

"But now, O Lord,  
You are our Father;  
We are the clay, and You our potter;  
And all we are the work of Your hand." Isaiah 64:8

The Lord (Jehovah) is a Father to His people. As the One who called His chosen people, Isaiah acknowledges that they can be taken and formed as He sees fit. They are the work of His hand and therefore they are at His mercy in all respects.

One final example from the Old Testament was given to Israel as a reminder of this –

"Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make." Jeremiah 18:3, 4



The clay was created by God and the forming of that clay is at His discretion. Paul, in the New Testament, uses this same terminology to again show us that God is sovereign over His creation. But why is this such a common theme and where does it find its roots? The answer is that it goes back to the very beginning of man's time on earth. In Genesis 2, we see the following -

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (2:7)

"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." (2:21, 22)

Man was formed from the dust of the earth by the Potter. Take a handful of dust, add in water, and one has clay. The man was molded, the man was formed, the man became a living being. After this, a portion of that clay was taken to form the woman as the Potter saw fit to shape and form. So let us ask some questions about Adam and Eve –

Did God or Adam decide that he would be a man?  
Did God or Adam decide his weight?  
Did God or Adam decide the time of his creation?  
Did God or Adam determine his foot size?  
etc.

Did God or Eve decide that she would come from man?  
Did God or Eve determine her hair color?  
Did God or Eve decide she would have white or red teeth?  
etc.

Such questions could go on infinitely. Every minute detail of the time, place, and form of Adam and Eve was decided and followed through with by God. Even the fact that Adam would be male and Eve a female. Now that the pattern is set, it asks us to accept our lot in these matters. Women are women and men are men. Rejecting this then is an affront to the Creator.

The same is true with our culture, our skin color, the family we were born into, etc. These things were decided by God before He spoke the universe into existence. Our genetic makeup comes from our parents and theirs from their parents... leading all the way back to our first parents.

God, as the great Potter, has the "power over the clay." Because of His wisdom and His foreknowledge concerning a plan, which is so vast and detailed that we can only see a miniscule part of it, He has determined from this "same lump (Adam) to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor."

Considering this, it must be stated that from within this lump also came all the genetic makeup for the human side of Jesus. The "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" implies that everything leading to that Lamb had to be known in advance. Every human interaction and every man and woman who would unite to bring another child into the world was factored in. This included the union between brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters, kings and prostitutes, Jews and gentiles.

Does the Potter have power over the clay? The answer is, "Yes, O God. Your plan will come about, because You are the Potter, and we are the clay."

Life application: You have been blessed with life at a particular moment in history. Your sex, height, skin color, etc. was all chosen to bring glory to God. Go forth and be an acceptable jar of clay, filled with God's Holy Spirit, even to overflowing, that others may glorify God when they see you.

*Lord God, I am the jar - made of the finest formed clay. Though my exterior be painted black, white, red, or yellow; though I be short and round, or tall and thin; though I be male or female, I am a jar ready to be filled with Your Spirit, even to overflowing. And so use me, O God. You are the Potter, and I am the clay. I was formed by You to bring You honor and glory. Yes, fill me and use me, O Lord, for Your glory. Amen.*

**What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ... Romans 9:22**

Here in this verse, we see the first portion of a train of thought which could easily be confused with the doctrine known as double-predestination - God creating some for destruction and some for salvation. One would have to ignore the vast body of evidence to the contrary to come to this conclusion though.

It should be noted that a contrast is being made between those who will receive mercy and those who won't. This shows us, quite clearly, that there are two groups of people on earth - the lost and the saved: sinners and saints. If "all have sinned" as the Bible shows us to be true (Romans 3:23) then all were once lost. The category of the saints is one which is received after being a part of the category of the lost - and none deserved to be saved. Therefore, when Paul says, "What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to

make His power known" he is saying that it is something which is deserved by all people. We can go to Ephesians 2:3 to confirm this -

"...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."

Understanding that we were all under God's wrath, we can now put in context the second half of this verse (which is cited as a validation of his comments about Pharaoh). God "endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction." The term "much longsuffering" indicates that God was extremely patient with these people, allowing them to continue on when they only deserved destruction. But remember again, we also were "children of wrath" and so this is speaking of us as much as it is of Pharaoh or anyone else who has existed.

God has spared us, despite our fallen and rebellious state. During this time, he offered to us His pardon, and being saved, we must have accepted it. God likewise offered the Pharaoh temporal pardon. "Let my people go" indicates that if Pharaoh obliged, he wouldn't have been destroyed. It also allows that Pharaoh could have said, "If these are Your people, and You are God, then I will join to Your people." Proof of this is found in Ruth 1:16, 17 -

“Entreat me not to leave you,  
Or to turn back from following after you;  
For wherever you go, I will go;  
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;  
Your people shall be my people,  
And your God, my God.  
Where you die, I will die,  
And there will I be buried.  
The Lord do so to me, and more also,  
If anything but death parts you and me.”

Ruth was in the same boat as Pharaoh (the boat we all were in) until she made her eternity-changing decision. Before she was a vessel of God's mercy, she was a vessel prepared for destruction. Pharaoh had a choice to make, and he chose unwisely. Double predestination cannot be found in this verse. Nor can be found the concept of monergism (salvation apart from free-will).

Life application: When you see the lost, know that this means more than a casual concept of "not going to heaven." Instead, it means that they are vessels prepared for destruction. How can you willingly hold back the good news which will bring them life when such a fate is otherwise assured?

*Lord, Your word teaches that there are just two categories of people - the lost and the saved. Your word also teaches that there is but one way to move from "lost" to "saved" and that is through the shed blood of Christ. I thank You that He died for me and I ask that You use me as a vessel to share this great gospel of hope with others. Guide me to doors of opportunity and then give me the right words of instruction to receptive hearts. Amen.*

**...and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, ... Romans 9:23**

This verse contrasts what was just said in 9:22 –

"What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."

It should be noted that "prepared" in 9:22 is a completely different word than in 9:23. The words are *katērtismena* and *proētoimasen*. The use of the two differing words shows us that those who were prepared for glory were placed in this category in a different manner than those who were fitted for destruction. In other words, the concept of double predestination cannot be found in these verses. In fact, it shows that the two results came about in an entirely different way.

What needs to be remembered is where these two groups came from - the same lump (v21). The potter makes two jars. One goes to a king's palace where it holds perfume. The other goes to a shop where it is filled with used cooking oil. The question is, does he make the two jars, deciding in advance which will be used in which location, or does he make the pots the same - one going to one location and one the other? In this instance, the use of two different words favors the latter. Both are of the same lump, but one ends in an ignoble use and will be destroyed after use. It will be taken out and tossed in the dump - it is fitted for destruction. The other ends in a noble use and so it will be kept and refilled as time goes by. Someday maybe it will be placed in a fine art museum - it is prepared for glory.

But what if both of them were bought by the same person in the king's castle and both were used for perfume. Then both of them would have been "prepared for glory." Albert Barnes notes the distinction between the two -

"We are here brought to a remarkable difference between God's mode of dealing with them and with the wicked. Here it is expressly affirmed that God himself had prepared them for glory. In regard to the wicked, it is simply affirmed that they "were fitted" for destruction, without affirming anything of the agency by which it was done. That God prepares his people for glory - commences and continues the work of their redemption - is abundantly taught in the Scriptures..."

In the Bible, ever since Adam's transgression, "destruction" is seen as the default setting for humanity. We are all "fitted" for destruction. When the change in nature occurs by accepting God's provision (such as when the Hebrew Abraham "believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" or when Guirinopolous Lanciavinus the Roman called on Jesus as Lord and believed in his heart that God raised Him from the dead) our default setting of being fitted for destruction changes to being prepared for glory.

With this in view, we can see why God would want to endure "with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction." The reason is that they can, in fact, find mercy if they pursue it. By doing so "He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy."

There will be no thought of injustice when judgment comes upon the wicked because it is where all are headed. But when the jars receive God's provision, they are filled with God's Holy Spirit and are thus spared from what is justly due. They receive His mercy and are prepared for glory. There can be found nothing unjust in how God deals with His people because He has dealt in a completely fair manner with all of them.

Life application: Understanding that all of us are under the same sentence of condemnation can help us to see that God is completely fair in how He deals with man. We can't blame God for giving any of us what we already deserve. However, if God bestows upon us His grace and mercy, then we can't take any credit for that either.

*Lord, Your word says that we have all sinned and fallen short of Your glory. If it were up to us, there could only be one possible destination. But in Your grace and mercy, You have offered us a pardon through the death of Your Son. Thank You for the innocent Lamb who was slain in place of my sin. Thank You for the cross of Calvary. Amen.*

**...even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?** Romans 9:24

Paul has been speaking of election in the preceding paragraphs. He now turns to the concept of our calling. This progression is found in Romans 8:30 -

"Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

The Jews and Gentiles are those described in the preceding verse (9:23), "the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory." When speaking of these individuals, the Greek word *ex* is used for "of the." This word means more precisely "out of" or "from" and indicates, as has already been revealed elsewhere in Romans, that this is a select portion of the Jews and Gentiles. It is not a national privilege, but an individual honor - for both Jew and Gentile.

This calling of the Gentiles, and selection of a portion of the Jews, is not unique to Paul. Rather, it was prophesied in the Old Testament as well. Passages such as Isaiah 49:6 show us this is so -

"Indeed He says,  
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

God has always preserved a righteous remnant of the people of Israel (see Isaiah 1:9, for example). Preserving a remnant implies that not all are called. But along with this remnant would be something that is often overlooked by this covenant people. God promised to send His Servant not only for them, but to be "as a light to the Gentiles" as well. This promise is hinted all along, but was somehow dismissed by the Israelites.

Life application: In Christ, the boundaries of life are removed. There is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Gentile, black nor white, male nor female. When one is in Christ, they are a child of God and one of the elect. Handle your relationships with others in Christ in a manner fitting your calling.

*Lord God, there are so many things to worry about and fret over, but You have asked me to not do so. Rather, You have told me to be anxious for nothing and to bring my troubles to You in prayer. And so, with a grateful heart, I come to You, thanking You for*

*that privilege which is available through my Rock and Refuge - Jesus. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**As He says also in Hosea:**

**"I will call them My people, who were not My people,  
And her beloved, who was not beloved." Romans 9:25**

As he has consistently done in order to substantiate his claims, Paul turns again directly to Scripture to show that God's election and calling are not just for the Jews. Now, he turns to the prophet Hosea. There in Hosea 2:23, we are shown that God's people are rejected or called according to a plan and a wisdom that we don't always fully understand.

Hosea was a prophet who was used by God in a most unusual way. He married a woman named Gomer per the Lord's instructions which stated -

"Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry  
And children of harlotry,  
For the land has committed great harlotry  
By departing from the Lord."

Gomer had three children. The first was named Jezreel, "God sows." The second was named Lo-Ruhamah, "No mercy." The third was named Lo-Ammi, "Not my people." What is implied is that the first child was born to Hosea whereas the second two were children of harlotry. God used this dysfunctional family, with an unfaithful wife and illegitimate children, to show how He works even among those who are not His while rejecting those who are His. However, even His rejection is something that won't continue on forever. Instead, He will call His rejected people back to Himself.

The symbolism of the book of Hosea is so rich and beautiful. We reject God; God calls us back. And so, Paul uses the words of this book to show us these truths in his letter to the Romans. As the apostle to the Gentiles, he shows us how God worked through the Jews to demonstrate His character and His righteous requirements. In due time, Christ came and fulfilled these requirements, thus allowing all to share in His goodness, but at this point, the Jews rejected Him.

During this time of rejection, Paul tells us of the dispensation of grace which is poured out upon the Gentiles, he being the minister of this period. Passages such as Ephesians 3:1-9 show us this. His thoughts there are summed up in verses 8 and 9 -

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ."

However, despite Israel's rejection of Christ, the symbolism of Hosea (as Jesus' words and Paul's writings also) shows us that they too will be called back by God at some point in the future. When the "times of the Gentiles" end, God's attention will be focused on His people who have long rejected Him.

As a sort of hidden confirmation of these things and as if opening up a treasure of beautiful gems, the passage Paul refers to in Hosea is marked with a special pattern known as a chiasm. This pattern shows the contrast of rejection and acceptance by God. A chiasm is a pattern which states a truth and then turns around and restates it in the opposite order. Sometimes, such as in the case of this one in Hosea, the pattern says the opposite as it unfolds, thus it is a chiasm of contrasts. I discovered this one in 2007. I hope you will enjoy seeing both the grace and mercy of God revealed in it -

Hosea 1:9-2:23 - "But Me she forgot," says the LORD.

A Chiasm of Contrasts - Our Unfaithfulness and God's Unlimited Mercy (11/23/07)

- a 1:9 You are not my people, I will not be your God.
- b 1:10 Jezreel (God will sow).
- c 2:3 Dry Land, thirst.
- d 2:5 Wife departs from her husband.
- e 2:7 Wife returns to her husband.
- f 2:9 Take away the new wine.
- g 2:10-12 God punishes Israel.
- h 2:13 God will punish her.
- x 2:13 "But Me she forgot," says the LORD.
- h 2:14a God will allure her.
- g 2:14b God comforts Israel.
- f 2:15 Give vineyards.
- e 2:16 LORD says, "That you will call me 'My Husband.'"
- d 2:19 Husband betroths wife.
- c 2:21, 22 Grain, new wine, oil.
- b 2:22 Jezreel (God will sow).
- a 2:23 You are my people; You are my God.



Life application: Though the gentiles were once out of the picture, there were still hints of God's love for them - Ruth for example. And though the Jews rejected Christ, God has not given up on them. He will again call them as a people to Himself, thus demonstrating that He truly is a God of grace and mercy.

*Lord, the treasures found in Your word fill me with wonder and awe. I know that the Bible is a gift of incomparable worth and so I ask that You give me the resolve and desire to read it, study it, share it, and love it all of my days. Help me to be a proper steward of Your word, handling it rightly and honoring You with my care of it. To Your glory I pray. Amen.*

**“And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,  
‘You are not My people,’  
There they shall be called sons of the living God.”** Romans 9:26

Verse 26 is a continuation of Paul's citing of Hosea. He turns from chapter 2, back to chapter 1 and cites verse 10. This is, as was noted yesterday, speaking to Israel about Israel. This select group of people had rejected Him. Because of this, He had rejected them. But God says,

"It shall come to pass" - As surely as time will move forward, there will be a time when the thing will come about.

"In the place where it was said to them" - The nation was exiled for disobedience. Before that occurred, it was said through the prophets that there would be a sentence pronounced. And then, after the exile happened, in that place, the pronouncement was made.

"You are not My people" - The bond is broken and you who once were the object of my affection and the apple of my eye have now been cast off and disinherited.

But what is implied for the term "You are not My people" is also implied for the second statement...

"There they shall be called sons of the living God" - In that same place of prophecy, which is the land of Israel, and in that same place of judgment, which is exile from the land, God has determined that Israel shall once again "be called sons of the living God."

This was seen very clearly in the chiasm which was included with the commentary on 9:25. What God rejects, God can also reclaim as His.

The term "shall be" is, in the biblical context, as reliable as if it were already done. In other words, when God speaks that something "shall be" it is as certain as something that has already come to pass. Jesus speaks this way at times, such as in Mark 11:17 -

"Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'"?"

Understanding God's sovereign decree concerning Israel, we can therefore deduce that the same is true concerning the gentiles. If God can disinherit His people and then re-establish them as His own, then He can do so for those who are outside of that specially chosen line as well. This is where Paul is going with this, which we will see as he continues along.

During the time of Israel's exile for disobedience, there has been a time of God's favor upon the gentile world. The precedent has been set in Israel and therefore it can, and does, apply to those who are not Israel as well. The interesting thing for people alive in this day is that Israel as a nation has been re-gathered to Israel the land. It does appear that the prophecy which was pronounced is coming to pass. If so, then the "times of the gentiles" may now be coming to a close.

Life application: If God's word says something will come to pass, it is as certain as if it has already happened. When we dismiss prophecies because they don't fit our theology, we treat God's word as less-than-reliable. Likewise, when we dismiss a particular verse because it is contrary to what we want to hear, we hold God's word in contempt. What God says, should always take precedence over what we do or don't like.

*Heavenly Father, at times I have dismissed a particular verse or tenet in Your word because it was contrary to what I thought was correct. However, as I have grown in Your word, I have learned that what I like or don't like is completely irrelevant. You are God; I am man. May I never dismiss even the slightest precept, but hold fast to what You instruct. Thank You for Your word. Amen.*

**Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. Romans 9:27**

Paul has established that there was, in fact, a plan and a place for the gentiles in God's redemptive workings, but to demonstrate that what had occurred to Israel should have been expected, he turns again to their own Scriptures. He cites Isaiah 10:22, 23 as supporting verses, but he could have pulled out countless others.

Paul says that "Isaiah also cries out..." In other words, what he wrote wasn't a quiet "Oh, by the way..." comment written by one of the minor prophets. Rather, it is a declarative statement by Israel's prince of the prophets which should have been heard and heeded. Paul's statement that Isaiah "cries out" is intended to show that there was simply no excuse for not understanding his words. They were boldly proclaimed and should have been painfully evident to the people.

And they weren't written about the surrounding nations as so many prophetic utterances were. Instead, they were "concerning Israel." God was telling them in advance that despite being His chosen people, there would be consequences for rebellion. Such consequences included a state which would bring them almost to the point of extermination - "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea" is an obvious description. There were millions of Israelites living in the land and feeling secure in their status. This was a state that they could look all the way back to Abraham for -

"By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies." Genesis 22:16, 17

The father whom they looked back to was given incredible promises which recognized them as God's people. From him came Isaac and then Jacob. Through this line came the exodus and the giving of the law. Among this people could be found God's temple and the great line of kings, meaning the Davidic dynasty. Surely, they were safe and secure. But Isaiah told them something different; something they didn't want to heed, "the remnant will be saved."

A remnant is but a small portion of the whole and is the part which is least favored, such as when one cuts off the extra portion of a carpet. Normally, the choice part is kept, but the remnant is discarded. But in the case of Israel, the opposite would be true. Only the remnant would be saved. Paul, citing Isaiah in this way, surely meant to show the nation that what he wrote wasn't just pertaining to the time of the Babylonian exile, but that it was an established principle that could (and was going to be) repeated. Solomon wrote of this principle in Ecclesiastes -

That which has been is what will be,  
That which is done is what will be done,  
And there is nothing new under the sun. Ecclesiastes 1:9

God had exiled the northern kingdom to Assyria. He did it again to the southern kingdom when they were taken to Babylon. Paul was demonstrating that this would again occur because of their rejection of Christ.

Understanding that this was known to Paul from the very Scriptures which established Israel as a people, we can properly evaluate what he will say in the coming chapters and verses concerning Israel of Paul's future (and our present). Failing to heed this established pattern has led to the doctrine of "replacement theology" which says that the church has replaced them. Paul is showing, in advance, that this isn't the case. As happened before, so it will be again – "a remnant will be saved."

Life application: God's intent and purpose for Israel didn't end with the coming of Jesus. Nor did the church replace Israel as a people. Rather, during Israel's time of exile for their rejection of Him, God has worked to procure a unique people for Himself from among the Gentiles. When this dispensation ends, God's attention will be redirected fully toward Israel, preparing them for the return of Jesus. He will dwell among them during the next dispensation, the millennial reign of Christ. Because this is what the Bible teaches, remember to pray for Israel - that eyes will be opened, and that hearts will be converted.

*Heavenly Father, You have returned Israel to their land for Your reasons, including as a preparation for the return of Your Son. This truth is seen in both testaments of Your word and is evident to any who are willing to search out the truth of the matter. Open eyes and hearts to this wonderful news - that Jesus is returning to His people when they call on Him as Lord. May it be soon. Amen.*

**For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,  
Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth. Romans 9:28**

Romans 9:28 is a quote from Isaiah 10:23. However, Paul cites the Greek translation of the verse. The Hebrew reads a bit differently, but the general sense of the passage comes through either way.

It needs to be remembered that this verse is speaking of Israel, just as the previous one is. The distinction between Israel and the church is consistently clear. There is not an overlapping of the two, nor does Paul ever attempt to demonstrate that Israel transitions to the church; one replacing the other.

The previous verse, speaking of Israel who were "as the sand of the sea," will be so depleted in number that only "the remnant will be saved." The way this will occur is

spoken of now. It will be accomplished by the Lord who "will finish the work." This means that the Lord will bring the deed to a completion. What He has spoken will surely come to pass and it will be executed exactly as He spoke - "only a remnant will be saved."

Not only will He finish the work, but he will "cut it short in righteousness." This will surely come to pass, and it will come to pass speedily. Cutting something short means that what one might originally perceive as a lengthy process will suddenly and exactly come about. The reason for this swift action is because it is done "in righteousness." What God does is always perfectly just, including the execution of His judgment. And as an explanation of why this is so, we are given the second half of the verse - "Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth."

From Isaiah's perspective, the "Lord" in this verse is referring to "Jehovah." He is the covenant keeping God who bestows the blessings and executes the curses upon the covenant people. The list of blessings and curses is detailed in both Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. When the people adhered to the covenant's precepts, the blessings were lavished upon them. However, when disobedient, the curses would come. And yet, as a continued grace even in times of disobedience, the promise of a protected remnant remained -

"Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God." Leviticus 26:44

Outside of this remnant though, there would be only judgment by the hand of the Lord. He promised to "make a short work upon the earth." This "short work" is the execution of the decree, thus showing His adherence to the covenant they rejected. Finally, "upon the earth" is not speaking of the entire earth, but rather the land of Israel. The term in Hebrew is *ha'aretz*. This term is commonly used throughout the Old Testament when speaking of Canaan alone. Even in the New Testament this sentiment is found. An example of this was Jesus speaking to the people of Israel in Matthew 5:5 -

"Blessed are the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth."

Life application: God has been faithful to His covenant people Israel. Even in their judgment His faithfulness is seen. If He failed to meet the promises of His covenant, including those detailing judgment, He would not be a proper Steward of that covenant. The very act of judgment demonstrates His grace. Left to themselves and without His

covenant care, they would have been completely consumed by the surrounding nations or by their own hand. His judgment, though strict, has actually preserved them. If this is so with Israel, it is also true with you. Understand that when you receive God's chastisement, it is because you belong to Him. See Hebrews 12:7, 8.

*O Lord, I don't look forward to the times of discipline, but I know that through them, You are refining me and molding me to become more like You. Help me to learn from each correction and to refrain from repeating the same mistakes. Help me to be a competent, trustworthy child in Your household and an example to others of Your handiwork. To Your glory I pray. Amen.*

**And as Isaiah said before:**

**“Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed,  
We would have become like Sodom,  
And we would have been made like Gomorrah.”** Romans 9:29

Again, Paul cites Scripture to support the argument he is making. In verse 27, he showed that because of Israel's disobedience, only a remnant would be saved. This was promised in the law at the time of Moses in the blessings and curses. It is noted elsewhere in Scripture, both as future prophecies and as prophecies fulfilled (such as in the recorded names and numbers of the returning exiles in Ezra and Nehemiah).

Two exiles were prophesied for Israel - the Babylonian one came about prior to Paul's time; the Roman one would occur in the year AD70 at the hands of the Romans. Paul knew it was coming on the nation based on their rejection of Christ. And so, to show that God's workings were anticipated and deserved, he quotes Isaiah 1:9.

"And as Isaiah said before..." He has twice quoted Isaiah and he turns again, right to the beginning of this prophet's book to highlight that this wasn't just expected, but that it was a note of highlight. Isaiah doesn't begin with words of Israel's obedience and supremacy among the nations. Instead, he begins with their disobedience and prophesied destruction.

"Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed..." The Lord is "Jehovah;" Sabaoth is often translated as "Hosts." Thus, unless "Jehovah of Hosts" is the idea we are to understand. As noted in 9:28, "Jehovah" is the covenant keeping God who bestows the blessings and executes the curses upon the covenant people. "Hosts" is a military type of term used of an organized army. We can therefore understand this verse as, "Unless Jehovah of Heaven's Armies had left us a seed..."

What is implied by using this term is that the warriors of heaven itself have come to fight against the disobedient and unruly people. Their instructions were destruction. They were to execute their duties with full determination of purpose, with the exception of "a seed." Leaving but a seed is synonymous with sparing a remnant. A seed by itself when watered will again grow into a multitude. Here then is a picture of the "righteous remnant" saved by the Lord of Hosts for the unveiling of His glorious future plans for Israel.

But if this seed had not been spared, Isaiah says that, "We would have become like Sodom, and We would have been made like Gomorrah." The Bible's noted example of wickedness leading to destruction is Sodom and Gomorrah. Like the Flood of Noah itself, there were but a few survivors. In the case of the flood, only eight survived, out of a world of people. In Sodom, only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were spared. But even Lot's wife was lost when she turned back to view the destruction.

Paul is using examples of temporal destruction at God's hand to show that He truly is angry at sin and that the disobedient will be cast off. But he is also demonstrating that God, even in destruction, will keep His covenant promises. This is an important and often overlooked aspect of Romans 9. Unless we look back to this truth, found in the promised blessings and curses, we could come to the conclusion that God has, in fact, cast off His people Israel. But such was not the case in the first exile, and such is not the case with the second one either. Israel has been returned to the land by the covenant-keeping God. This was done to fulfill the ancient promises to this group of people.

Life application: Is God not in control? Who could honestly look at the nation of Israel today and not see that they must be there for a reason? Prior to their re-gathering, spiritualizing Old Testament prophecies could almost be regarded as acceptable, though it would still be considered far-fetched. But now, with their re-establishment in the rear-view mirror, we are without excuse when we reject what God is beginning to do through them. Have faith that God is in control and that Israel of today is not an aberration.

*Lord Jesus, though Israel as a nation hasn't yet called on You, it will happen. Both Old Testament and New show us that this is so. Who am I to fight against what You have clearly laid out in Your word? I stand with Israel - the coming recipients of Your favor when You return again. Amen.*

**What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; Romans 9:30**

"What shall we say then?" This question is introduced in order to provide a response to Paul's thoughts on verses 14-29. In essence, "How shall I sum up these things?"

Depending on how one views the concept of "total depravity" and also how we become justified before God, different views of how to handle this verse will be proposed. Those who follow Calvinism will naturally use these words, along with other verses such as Romans 3:10-18, to state that the gentiles could not seek after righteousness. This is not at all what is being said, nor is that what Romans 3:10-18 is saying (refer to those commentaries if necessary).

Rather, the word translated as "pursue" speaks of the exertion of ongoing, concentrated vigor towards something. A comparable thought would be a hunter following after game. There is nothing in this verse to state that the gentile world didn't pursue righteousness in some capacity. We can look around the world and see numerous examples of non-Christians who seek peace, the welfare of others, etc. All of these are done as deeds looking to establish some sort of righteousness.

The pursuit which Paul is speaking of here is the right-standing which leads to justification before God - the fulfillment of the law. How could the Gentiles pursue after that which they did not have? It was the nation of Israel who had the law and they pursued after it with zeal because it was what established them as a people and what offered them life and peace. It also promised them a right relationship with God. The problem for them came in how they pursued it.

The Gentiles didn't have this opportunity, until Jesus. Suddenly the floodgates of heaven were opened wide to the whole world at large, Jew and Gentile alike. The law, which was that means of being reconciled to God, was fulfilled by Him and in Him. Now, rather than pursuing wrong avenues of righteousness on one's own merits, the proper avenue could be pursued by the merits of Another - He who fulfilled the needed righteousness. Any Gentile, and the number of them started small but grew rapidly, could attain to righteousness now, "even the righteousness of faith."

This term, "the righteousness of faith" is what proves that this has nothing to do with Gentiles seeking righteousness in a limited (or wrong) way. Instead, it demonstrates that they understood, immediately upon hearing the word, that the avenue they had been pursuing (one of deeds) was wrong. The deeds merely interfered with any hoped-for relationship and attainment of righteousness. This was because they became a form of self-idolatry. "I have done these great things; God will love me."



This is fully substantiated by the coming three verses. Stay tuned as we complete chapter 9 with those thoughts.

Life application: Where is your righteousness to be found? If you state anything other than "in Christ Jesus" you have missed the mark. In and of ourselves, there is no true righteousness. Christ has done the work. Now, place your faith in Him and you will stand righteous before God, not on your own merits, but on the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

*Gracious heavenly Father, I thank You for sending Jesus to do what I could never have done. He came and fulfilled the law which stood contrary to me. Now because of His work and then His sacrifice on my behalf, I stand in His righteousness. Thank You for this glorious offer of reconciliation and thank You for all that it signifies for our eternal relationship of peace and fellowship. Amen.*

**...but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.** Romans 9:31

"But" is set as a contrast to 9:30 - "That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith."

Israel actively pursued the "law of righteousness." The same word used for "pursue" when speaking of the Gentiles in the preceding verse is used again in this one. What the Gentiles didn't pursue, they attained; the same thing was pursued by Israel and yet not attained. However, this is speaking on a national level, not on an individual one. Peter, Paul, and the other apostles, plus many early believers were all Jews. Throughout the ages, Jews have likewise come to Christ. But Israel as a whole, who had been given the law, did not attain to what they actively strived for.

The "law of righteousness" Paul speaks of here is the law given to govern them as a people. It had several components to it. The first is that it demanded perfection from its people, something unattainable. The second is that when perfection couldn't be attained, grace was found within its rituals - sacrifices and offerings, which included the Day of Atonement. But these required something more than their mere observance. The thing they required in order to be effective will be seen in the following verse, Romans 9:32.

Before evaluating that, we can contemplate an example of what was lacking directly from Jesus' words -

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:10-14

Life application: As individuals pursuing righteousness, we need to constantly evaluate what it means for us to be "righteous." If we misunderstand or ignore what God expects, we may become like the Pharisees of Jesus' time and God will not favor our life and conduct, no matter how scrupulous we are in our external observances. Pay heed to what the Bible teaches concerning God's favor and live your life in faith.

*Lord, Micah asked what was the required offering to be brought to You - burnt offering? Oil? His firstborn? What would please You? He then answers his own question - To do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before You. Lord, You have given Your best in the granting of Jesus. Help me to give my best in response - in justice, love, mercy, and humility. May my walk be pleasing to You, O God. Amen.*

**Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.** Romans 9:32

The question is, "Why has Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, not attained to the law of righteousness?" The answer is found in how they pursued the law. Leviticus 18:5 says, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Perfect obedience to the statutes was needed for life. But within the law itself, it was implied that perfect obedience wasn't possible. Where is this found? In the Day of Atonement rituals which are detailed in several locations of the law. Here in Numbers 29 is one example -

"On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. You shall present a burnt offering to the Lord as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings." Numbers 29:7-11

Even more specific details fill the entire chapter of Leviticus 16. Notice that the offerings include a "sin offering." Why is this important? Because a sin offering implies sin has been committed. Thus, the law itself demonstrates that sin is expected. But, the law says, "which if a man does, he shall live by them." Therefore, the law implicitly notes that man cannot live by observance of the law because man is unable to perfectly observe this same law.

So then how could the people continue before God? By observing another portion of the law, one based solely on faith; the Day of Atonement. Even though the rituals within the Day of Atonement were mandated by the law, they anticipated something from outside the law. The question is, did the sin offerings cover the sins of all the people? The answer is, "No." If someone stayed at home and worked (something contrary to the law) on the Day of Atonement, he was to be "cut off from his people" (Leviticus 23:29). Therefore, he had to have faith that going down to Jerusalem and fasting and praying would actually bring about what the law stated.

Likewise, could the animal sacrifices permanently take away the sins of the people? Again, "No." The New Testament tells us that it was "not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 9:4). In those sacrifices was the reminder of sins every year, but the sins continued. Thus, the law itself demonstrates that through pursuing the mere observance of the law one could never attain righteousness.

In fact, attempting to do so would only become the basis for something else, self-idolatry. By observing the law, without faith, a man became confident in himself apart from the very law he was observing. This was because the law implied sins would be committed and needed atonement. And therefore, many years after the introduction of the law, Habakkuk was able to confidently say,

"Behold the proud,  
His soul is not upright in him;  
But the just shall live by his faith." Habakkuk 2:4

This is the "stumbling stone" that Paul speaks of and which still permeates the Jewish society of today. It is also, unfortunately, a stumbling stone for people in a vast variety of denominations, sects, and cults. It is a tripping hazard leading to hell.

The Bible makes it perfectly clear that there is one way to be saved and it is by a complete dependence on the work of Christ. One must abandon self and "call on the name of the Lord." Only Jesus satisfied the demands of the law perfectly. Therefore, by faith in His work alone can we stand justified before God.

Life application: Are you being told that there are certain things you must do beyond calling on Jesus as Lord in order to be saved? If so, then maybe you haven't trusted fully in Jesus and are depending on "self." Unfortunately, "self" can only lead you to destruction. Give up on self and call on Jesus as Lord. Then, go forth and tell others of the freedom which is found in Christ.

*Lord, there is nothing more precious than my time alone with You. And yet, too often I spend it in the vain pursuit of other stuff. When I stand before You, everything I waste my time with now will be a point of shame and sadness. Help me, Lord, to direct my thoughts and heart toward You. Grant me the will to put aside those things which take my mind away from that closer walk which I desire. Amen.*

**As it is written:**

**“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,  
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”** Romans 9:33

To close out chapter 9 of this precious book, Paul returns one last time to Scripture - "As it is written." Time and again, Paul reaches into the very words which his people relied on for their establishment and continuance as a group. He does this in an attempt to open their eyes to the truth of who Jesus is. As a second purpose, it is to show the gentile people why Israel would be cast off. If he didn't do this, then it might seem as if God was being arbitrary and unreliable. But by doing so, he will also be able to demonstrate (coming in chapter 11) that He is capable and just in both re-favoring Israel and removing gentiles for disbelief.

Paul's method of arguing directly from Scripture to make his case is seen in his travels documented in Acts also. For example, in Acts 18:27, 28 we read this account -

"And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ."

The reason why he could do this, and the reason that he followed through with it, is that Jesus Christ is the center of focus and the basis for all of Scripture. Everything points to Him - His coming, His work, and His lordship. By failing to note this one great truth, people miss the mark of what God is doing in the course of redemptive history.

And so, for the closing of this chapter, we are directed to two separate quotes from Isaiah - 8:14, and 28:16. These have been combined by Paul to make his point. Verse

8:14 is speaking of the One mentioned in 8:13 - "The Lord of Hosts" or "Jehovah Sabaoth." Refer to the comments on Romans 8:29 to understand this term. What Paul is doing is showing that "Jehovah" of the Old Testament is, in fact, Jesus Christ. He is the foundation stone of Zion.

The foundation stone is the most important stone in the building because upon it everything else is supported and aligned. The Lord, through Isaiah, is saying that Jesus is the foundation of the faith and He is the establishment of God's work. Jesus, the foundation stone, will be "a stone of stumbling." One stumbles over what they don't see. The nation of Israel failed to open their eyes and evaluate God's word impartially. Because of this, they stumbled right over the very thing God was trying to show them. Jesus demonstrated this to them in John 5:39, 40 -

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

Instead of believing, Jesus became a "rock of offense." This means that what should have been to them life, faith, and practice instead became a source of scorn and derision. They were offended at His words and claims because they couldn't open their eyes to who He is. But for those who do believe, they will "not be put to shame." And so, there is a contrast. Failure to accept Jesus (meaning disbelief) causes one to trip and be offended; they will be put to shame. Understanding who He is and accepting Him (meaning the exercising of faith) will lead to God's favor.

And this explains what Paul stated in the preceding verse (9:32) which said, "... they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law."

As is consistent throughout the Bible, faith is what reconciles man to God. But misdirected faith is wasted faith. The Jews Paul speaks of had faith in themselves and in their deeds of the law, not in God's provision.

Life application: The book of Romans is a step-by-step instruction concerning God's working in redemptive history. Each step logically builds upon the preceding one in order to show us the marvelous plan He has laid out for the people of the world. When you see that God rejected Israel, it's important to understand why. With this knowledge, we can be assured that it wasn't done arbitrarily. Further, when God restores them, we can see that it is solely an act of grace. Through this select group of people, and how God has dealt with them, we can better understand how He deals with us. He is full of

grace, completely fair, and will never cast out those who properly exercise their faith in what He has done.

*Lord God, it's all right there... right in Your word. You've given us Your plan for the ages, You have shown us what You expect, You've shown us Your wisdom, grace, love, and mercy - all this and so much more. And yet, we find it more convenient to spend our time pursuing frivolous things. Help me Lord to direct my eyes to You and to seek You out now. May my life be spent rightly from this day forward. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 10

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

Romans 10:1

The NU text for this verse, upon which many translations are based, states, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." (NASB)

The intent is the same either way. It is Israel who was being spoken of in 9:27-33. Whether they were named by Paul specifically or not, this verse either implicitly or explicitly is speaking of Israel and only Israel. It's important to understand this because, time and again Paul will speak of Israel as a united group of people who are his brethren, the Jews. He never speaks of the church as Israel, nor does he speak of Israel transitioning into the church. Accepting this, verse 10:1 can only mean one thing - Paul's "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel (the Jewish people) is that they may be saved."

Salvation had come to the gentiles and those few Jews who had received their Messiah (the remnant of verse 9:27). Those Jews who had called on Jesus were not the impetus for a great movement of their people and a national salvation, but a small group from the nation. In large part, Israel had rejected their King.

Paul's "heart's desire" reflects the seat of his will, mind, and hopes. The word is *kardias* from which we derive our word cardio (heart). Though they had beaten him, mocked him, chased after him, and intended to kill him, the affection of his heart was for his brethren in the flesh. He had no room in himself to desire anything but their calling on Jesus and being saved, anticipating a great national revival.

The salvation he is speaking of is that of individual salvation, but that which would spread to individuals throughout the nation. Someday this will occur as is promised in both the Old Testament and, as we will see, in Chapter 11. But before this occurs, the tribulation period will come, and Israel will be refined as a people. When they are so broken that there is no hope left, Christ Jesus will return and rescue them. This is clearly taught in the Bible and it is so spoken by the mouth of the Lord also. And so, "all Israel will be saved."

Life application: Salvation is an individual occurrence. Each person must come to the Lord and call on Him personally. But individual occurrences can translate into national revivals. It has happened in both biblical times and in great movements since then. It is

the wise and understanding soul who would pray for his leaders and his nation when they are living contrary to the truth of the gospel. Even today, our leaders are promoting filth and wickedness, but it is right that we should pray for their hearts to turn to the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, today I pray for our nation's wayward leaders. They have promoted wickedness which must reach to the highest heavens, but You would rather that they turn from this and be saved. And so, despite their current policies and direction, I pray for my president and leaders. May their eyes be opened to the truth of the good news of Jesus and His gospel. Should they humble themselves before You, then once again I will pray for the prosperity of my country. Bless God, America. Amen.*

**For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**  
Romans 10:2

Paul begins verse 2 with "For" as he so often does. In Greek, "for" or gar will normally follow the thought such as "I bear witness, for to them..." but the conjunction comes first in our translations. "For" then joins verses 1 and 2. What he will explain comes from his direct knowledge of the situation, "I bear them witness."

What this means is that he can fully testify to the statement he will make; he is qualified to make the case. Being a Jew, Paul had a right to speak on behalf of his people, but a commoner, one lacking knowledge of the law, wouldn't be able to speak on behalf of a leader who had proper training in the written word. However, Paul could. In Philippians 3, he lists his credentials -

"If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Philippians 3:4-6

Elsewhere in Acts and in his writings, more of Paul's proven right to speak on such matters is given. Because of his ability to bear this witness, he now ties his desires for Israel in with his knowledge of Israel. "For... they have a zeal for God."

Zeal for something can be a good thing or a bad thing. Many adherents to Islam have a zeal for their belief in God, going so far as to blow themselves and others up in crowded bus stations. But this zeal is misdirected. The same is true with the Hindu zeal to make a trek to bathe in the Ganges river - "I will go wash and God will be happy with me." The Jew, likewise, had a zeal for God, but Paul explains, "not according to knowledge."



The Jew looked at the law as an end in and of itself, and thus set to establish righteousness based on adherence to the law. But even their law, as has been shown in many previous commentaries, reveals that righteousness is not of the law, but of faith. And in the end, that faith must be in the provision of the Lord. Jeremiah 23 gives an explicit rendering of where our righteousness lies -

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord,  
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;  
A King shall reign and prosper,  
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.  
In His days Judah will be saved,  
And Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this is His name by which He will be called:  
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Jeremiah 23:5, 6

However, failing to pick up on these Old Testament concepts, Israel looked to adherence of the law as the final goal. But, unfortunately, this type of zeal was "not according to knowledge." In the coming verses, Paul will explain what he means by "knowledge." But it should be noted that because of the path they took, it actually set up a division between them and those with the needed knowledge. It became such a point of difference that Jesus explained what the outcome would be -

"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me." John 16:2, 3

Being blinded to their need for Christ, Israel actually thought that their service to God was to kill those who rightly called on Him. This is documented in the book of Acts. There it relates such accounts, including the actions of a man named Saul who would later be known as Paul.

Life application: The Bible says that those who please God do so by placing their faith in the finished work of Christ. Nothing else can satisfy the righteous requirements of the law. Either Jesus is all-sufficient, or no person can be saved. Let your zeal for God be found in Christ Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, Your word says that it is my sin which separates You and I. Your word says that Jesus died for my sins so that we could be reconciled. What could I add to that? May I boast in nothing, but the cross of my Lord Jesus by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Amen.*

**For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. Romans 10:3**

"For" is again used to continue the on-going chain of thought. This time, it is directly related to Paul's previous words, speaking of the Jewish people who held to the law as a means to an end, "they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." Because of this zeal, which lacks knowledge, they were "ignorant of God's righteousness." A few thoughts on this -

This is speaking of God's means of bestowing righteousness, not God's inherent righteousness.

Paul is not attempting to excuse the Jewish people for their ignorance; he is stating it as a fact and then explaining the results of it. This goes directly to the thought that misdirected faith is wasted faith, no matter how sincere it is; ignorance is no excuse. Paul uses the same thought about himself in 1 Timothy 1:13 when speaking of the time before God's grace was bestowed upon him -

"...although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Although his words here seem to indicate that he obtained the mercy because of his ignorance, this isn't what he is saying. Rather, he received mercy because of his faith which came after his ignorance. Had he continued on in his unbelief, the mercy wouldn't have come. This is the continued state of those Paul is speaking about. Instead, they were "seeking to establish their own righteousness."

The righteousness of God for man is found in Christ Jesus. This is explicitly stated in Ephesians 3:9. Paul said there that he would - "be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." But this isn't where those he is speaking about looked. Rather than looking at Jesus as the fulfillment of the law, they used the law in an attempt to establish righteousness in themselves.

But Christ is the end of the law and they "have not submitted to the righteousness of God." To understand this, let's look at righteousness as a destination and different ways of attempting to get there:

The Island of Righteousness is in the middle of the ocean. Some may choose an airplane (representing being a philanthropist) to get there. But the destination has no airport and

so airplanes crash in the ocean; all dead, donators drowned. Some may choose a car (representing asceticism). But there is no road, and they drive off the beach, into the water, and perish. Self-denial sinks. Some get onto a hot air balloon (representing the engagement in lofty thinking). However, the winds around the island never allow for a landing. All balloon attempts end in a bad way. Philosophy fails. These are all incorrect methods of reaching Righteousness. However, there is another way.

Some understand that one can get across the ocean by boat, and so they get onto the SS Law. God built the Law and so it is certainly fit for their journey to Righteousness. As they travel on the Law, some enjoy the mode of traveling and they start to help with the maintenance of the ship. The Law has become their obsession. When Righteousness is in sight, they don't realize it because they are so busy working on the Law. The ship pulls up to Righteousness and those who understand that this is the final destination get off, putting their faith in the fact that they will be safe, even apart from the Law when it departs. The Island of Righteousness is their only hope, support, and source of life from that point on.

But there are those who never get off. They are so blinded by their obsession with SS Law that they never see what it was pointing to all along, Righteousness. Without leaving the ship, the Law goes back to the sea and sinks. It was designed for one purpose and one only, to reach Righteousness, which is apart from the Law. None of the other means of travel could ever safely get to Righteousness, and the SS Law had the purpose of getting there and then ending.

The last example is that which led to the state of the Jews who rejected Christ. They attempted to establish their own righteousness and failed to submit to the righteousness of God. They saw the law as a means to an end, never understanding that its intent and purpose (which is even described in the law itself) was to point to something greater, meaning Jesus.

Life application: The Bible tells us how to reach Righteousness. When we follow the proper path and receive Christ Jesus, we are granted His righteousness. Nothing else will satisfy God. What Christ has done is all-sufficient for us to be reconciled once again to Him. Trust in Christ, live for Christ, and keep your eyes on Christ.

*Heavenly Father, how I love all that You have done for us. You have granted us life, beauty, family, friendships, food, and so much more. But above all, You have given us Jesus. All other things are pleasing, but temporary. But Jesus is fully satisfying and eternal. Thank You for the sure and glorious hope You have set in my soul because of Him! Hallelujah and Amen.*

## **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

Romans 10:4

For the third time in only four verses, Paul begins with "For." This time, it looks back to the thought that Israel, being ignorant of God's righteousness, sought instead to establish their own righteousness. By doing so, they "have not submitted to the righteousness of God." Based on this, Paul explains, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." The law was put in place to show us of our desperately sinful state (refer to Romans 7) and to lead us to our need for Christ (see Galatians 3:21-25).

Jesus, being born without sin, was qualified to replace Adam. And living perfectly under the law without sinning, He fulfilled the law on our behalf. Now God offers us a trade. If we accept what Jesus did, believing that it was all-sufficient for us, He grants us Jesus' perfect righteousness and places our sins under His shed blood. In Him, we have peace with God. This is offered "to everyone who believes."

Nothing is said here, or at any other place in Scripture what Calvinists teach - that God first regenerates us in order to believe and then we exercise our faith. Belief is an act of the volitional will. We hear the message, we accept the premise, we believe that it is true, and God grants us Christ's righteousness. This is how it works, and this is how the Bible describes the process time and time again.

So, a question remains for consideration. "What happens to the law?" If Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, then what does that mean about the law itself? The answer is twofold. First, the law remains in full force and effect for those who fail to believe in what Christ does. They must fulfill the law perfectly in order to stand justified before God. But Paul explains in Galatians 3:10-12 (and elsewhere) that no one is justified by the law. Because of this, those who fail to accept Christ stand condemned. Secondly however, the law is over for those who have accepted Christ. It is:

Annulled (Hebrews 7:18)

Obsolete (Hebrews 8:13)

Taken away (Hebrews 10:9)

Wiped out, taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross (Colossian 2:14)

Etc. elsewhere in multiple statements, explicitly and implicitly

In other words, we are free from the constraints of the law - completely and entirely. They are not binding on us. Our righteousness is an imputed righteousness based on the work of Christ. Therefore, to re-introduce the law in any precept (mandatory Sabbath day observance, circumcision, dietary restrictions such as "no pork", etc.) is to say to

God, "I believe that what Christ did was insufficient to save me." It is a slap in the face of God.

The doctrine for our lives and conduct comes not from the law then, but from the New Testament epistles, particularly the writings of Paul who was selected to guide us during the church age.

Life application: Have faith in what Christ did, believe that what He did is all-sufficient, and be free from the requirements of the law which could never make you righteous in and of themselves.

*Oh God, I am so thankful for Jesus. You gave the law to Israel with so many commands - over 600. And then You told the people, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them." Then, after 1500 years of proving that no one could do this, You sent Jesus to do them on our behalf. Now You offer His righteous work in exchange for my failures. I believe... I receive! Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." Romans 10:5**

Paul now describes the righteousness which is of the law. In doing so, he won't make up any new concept of it in order to make a claim against it. Instead, he will go to the law itself. Before looking at that, it would be good to understand the progression of what he is saying. This will establish why he is citing this. Notice the term "for" in the following verses and see how he builds upon each new thought –

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'" Romans 10:1-5

"For" in verse 5, is explaining verse 3 (and which is built upon in verse 4). And so he says, "For Moses writes..." The law was received by Moses and within that law is a note concerning the necessity to follow the very same law in order to obtain "the righteousness which is of the law." And what is that note? It is Leviticus 18:5 -

"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord."

Or, as Paul paraphrases, "The man who does those things shall live by them."

God promised life to any who could keep the law. In fact, it was a guarantee of right-standing and a ticket to the fullness of His blessing if it could be done. But the fact is that no-one was, or even today is, capable of such a thing. More so, no one is capable of obeying even the first commandment perfectly. And with Jesus' words showing that intent is the same as execution (see Matthew 5:27, 28 for an example), we have utterly failed in any hopes of keeping any portion of the law.

The law shows that in order to be right with God, one must live in a right manner before God. And then the law turns around and shows that no one can live in a right manner before God. Because of this, blood sacrifices were needed as a form of grace to protect against the penalties of the very law they were described in. Something more was needed to be right before God, something apart from the law. This righteousness involves a Person, not a deed. This is what the law actually anticipated, and it is found in Jesus.

Life application: God is looking for faith that He is fully capable of saving us apart from our efforts. If we add in our efforts feeling they are necessary for our salvation, we are lacking faith in His provision. Have faith; stand on Christ alone.

*Lord God, today I am facing battles. Some are known only to You, but I know that You know them. Please help me to face these challenges according to Your will. Please don't allow these trials to take my eyes off of You, but instead may they be used to bring us even closer together. I need Your hand of guidance and reassurance Lord, and I know that You will provide it. Amen.*

**But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ... Romans 10:6**

To contrast the preceding verse which spoke of actively doing deeds to attain the righteousness of the law, Paul begins with "But..." One would think that by showing a contrast, he would remove himself from the law and initiate a new discourse apart from it; he doesn't. Instead, he goes right back to the very same law he just spoke of and he cites Deuteronomy 30:11-14 -

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

And so, in 10:6, he cites a portion of this passage, "But the righteousness of faith..." Literally "of-faith righteousness." He has personified righteousness and then causes it to describe itself - "The righteousness of faith speaks this way." It is an ingenious way of showing us the source of righteousness.

Far too often, we look to the distant as better than the near. The saying "The grass grows greener on the other side of the fence" shows us this. From that springboard, we look at the more distant the fence, the greener the grass. When we look for wisdom, we don't do it in our own household, but a college far away. And even better, we assume that we can travel to the Far East and attain the enlightened wisdom of those cultures. We look to Japan for business acumen, to China for better Kung-Fu, and to Tibet for spiritual enlightenment - as if they were the answer to our own failing wisdom.

Even Christian missionaries use the "far-away" logic. "I must travel across the seas to make a convert." But one's mission field can be in their own neighborhood, even in their own family. Likewise, the righteousness of faith is found right in the precepts of the law as fulfilled in Christ. Understanding this, Paul notes the way faith-based righteousness calls out, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven.'"

Moses gave Israel the law which was near to them. It was to them their righteousness and it was handed to them as a people. All they needed to do was live within its precepts. They didn't have to travel to foreign countries to find it, they didn't need to search the heavens for it. Instead, it was right there for them to pursue. And the law they were given pointed directly to the coming work of Christ. In fact, the book of Hebrews clearly demonstrates that the fulfillment of the Mosaic and Levitical pictures are found in Him. He is the "greater than" of those types and pictures.

Now, with the fulfillment of those shadows clearly seen in the light of Christ - who came through Israel, there is much less need to "ascend into heaven. (that is, to bring Christ down from above,)." Such an attitude would be a denial of the incarnation. Christ has come down from above. To search for faith-righteousness in heaven after the coming of Christ would then be to deny what He has already accomplished.

Life application: Spiritual matters don't require removing oneself to distant lands, either for education or execution. Jesus Christ is available to all by simple faith and His mission field is the entire world. One can serve Him wherever they are, and one can fellowship with Him anywhere and at any time. Such is the beauty of a personal, faith-based relationship with the Lord.

*Lord, it is so good to know that You aren't a distant God. I don't need to climb the highest mountain nor travel the widest sea in order to meet You. You are near and in You I have my being. I know that when times are tough, I need do nothing more than simply talk to You in order for Your comfort to come flooding in. Thank You for being with me always. Amen.*

**...or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).**  
Romans 10:7

"Or" is tying this question to the previous one - "Who will ascend into heaven?" The corresponding verse in Deuteronomy 30 is verse 13. However, that says, "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'" Paul wasn't changing Scripture by changing the thought from going over the sea to descending into the abyss. The intent is the same, but the point of reference is different.

The Hebrew people were in the dry wilderness, and they did not have the knowledge of the risen Lord. Moses was using an example which they could clearly understand in order to speak the language of faith. Paul is using the resurrection in the same way. The sea to the Hebrews was a great, impassable body; the death of man is being spoken of in this same manner.

However, as a connecting point between the two, the Greek word *abysson* is used for "abyss" by Paul. The same word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when referring to the sea. For example, Job 41:31 uses *abysson* for "deep" when speaking about the great sea creature Leviathan. There it says this -

"He makes the deep boil like a pot;  
He makes the sea like a pot of ointment."

The sea was perceived as the great deep in this way even at Moses' time. At the giving of the Law, the third commandment says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;..." Ex 20:4



The "water under the earth" is the sea. Passing over the sea then is comparable to descending into the abyss for all intents and purposes. And so, Paul grasps this Old Testament similarity and uses the imagery to connect it with the work of Christ in the New when speaking of the seemingly impassible void of death. Searching for the commandment by a descent "into the abyss" then is explained "to bring Christ up from the dead."

We don't need to conduct such a search to find the knowledge God provides; it is obtainable in the work of Christ. He has descended into the abyss. To search for our faith-righteousness there, after His prevailing over it, would then be a denial of what has been fulfilled in Him. He has triumphed over it for us. As a resounding note of victory in this matter, Paul states this in 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 -

"Death is swallowed up in victory.'

'O Death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?'

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Life application: Who needs to die in order to find out what is on the other side? Not the faithful Christian! Christ has already gone there, and the word tells us of our final outcome. Stand fast in your faith and trust in the work of Christ. In Him, death is swallowed up in victory.

*Glorious almighty God. I don't need to question what lies on the other side of death. Christ has already gone there in my stead. Because of His work, there is no fear here. Your word tells where I am headed, what it will be like, and the glorious eternal nature of it. Such is the wondrous power of the resurrection of Christ. I have absolute assurance of the glory which lies ahead. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):** Romans 10:8

Paul has been speaking of the righteousness of the law and how that is bestowed upon believers in Christ. To show that it is an easily accessible path, he has cited Moses from Deuteronomy 30. It isn't far away in heaven, nor is it to be found in the great abyss. Rather, the words of Moses show us that "The word is near you." It is something which is right here, right now, discernable, and readily accessible.

This is how Moses said it - "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." Deuteronomy 30:14

To show how near it is, he says it is "in your mouth." The sense of this is that just as we speak our language without difficulty, so are we aware of the message. If we sit at breakfast with an old friend and talk about the weather, we don't pull out a dictionary and a thesaurus in order to engage in conversation. Instead, what we speak is as natural as breathing. In the same manner, the righteousness of faith is this clear and this natural.

And he continues by saying, it is "in your heart." The heart from a biblical standpoint is thought of as the seat of understanding rather than emotions as we speak of it in modern times. One of many examples would be Proverbs 2:1, 2 –

"My son, if you receive my words,  
And treasure my commands within you,  
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,  
And apply your heart to understanding;"

The sense of it is that the righteousness of faith is ingrained in the doctrine of Christ - His death, burial, and resurrection. If one has this knowledge, then they don't need to ascend to the heavens to find it; He has already come down from there. And they don't need to descend into the pit to find it; He has already risen from there. If one knows this, then they have the understanding in their heart. The mental knowledge should merely turn into the exercise of their faith. It is a step into God's revealed light. And thus, the final purpose, for which the law was given, is found in His work; He is the end of the law. This isn't difficult to grasp, but is quite often ignored by those who continuously attempt to reinsert pet-favorite portions of the law into New Testament faith while ignoring countless other precepts found in the same law.

Paul then says, "that is..." He is not saying that what Moses spoke to the people was the same message that was now available, but it has the same force and effect in the message. They had the law, it was spoken to them, lived by them, and available to them. They merely had to demonstrate faith in God's provision through the law. When Christ came as the fulfillment of the law, it became the provision of God for the people.

This nearness and understanding concerning Christ is "the word of faith which we preach." In essence, the message of the prophets and apostles concerning the work of Christ - His death, burial, and resurrection in fulfillment of the law - is the word of faith.

This is what God asks us to believe and what restores us to Him, just as the law was God's provision of the past.

The term "word of faith" is used only here and could have one of the following possible intents. The first is that it is speaking of the foundation and the object of our faith. In other words, Jesus (His person and His work) is the reason for and the object of our faith. The second possibility is that it is speaking of the force behind, and the movement of, our faith. Stated plainly, "I have heard the message about Jesus and my faith-based response is to accept that message as true, calling on Him as Lord." The third is that both concepts are combined into one; it is an all-encompassing word of faith. No matter which, it is Jesus.

Unfortunately, in recent years the term "Word of Faith" has become synonymous with an aberrant form of doctrine. It teaches that by exercising faith, one can become wealthy, healthy, and prosperous. It is a distorted teaching of the gospel which certainly enriches the Word of Faith leaders, but which only waters down the message of Christ. Sound doctrine is abandoned in the pursuit of earthly gain. Be careful to not get caught up in this misdirected form of teaching.

Life application: Christ has come, and His work is complete. The message is readily available to anyone who hears and believes. It is a message of faith, not works. Stand fast on the gospel message. What Jesus has done is fully sufficient to reconcile us to God the Father.

*Glorious God! I have heard the good news! You sent Jesus to fulfill the law for me. Through Him, the demands have been met and peace with You has been restored. This is the word of faith which I accept. He is all-sufficient to reconcile us and bring me into Your family. I accept the premise; I receive the Gift. Yes, Jesus is Lord. Amen.*

**...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.** Romans 10:9

From time to time, this devotional recommends committing a verse to memory. There are a couple specific verses in chapter 10; this is one of them. By memorizing, contemplating, and understanding Romans 10:9, one can keep from muddying the waters of one's theology. It is simple, concise, and speaks to the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ.

"That" is a conjunction being used to tie together with the thought in the preceding verse, "the word of faith." This "word of faith" is explained by Paul and is what he preached. It is the means of obtaining "the righteousness of faith" mentioned in verse 6.

"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus..." Confession is more than the audible words which occur with the mouth. To "confess" is synonymous with to "profess." One can confess a lie; one only professes the truth. The word is *homologēsēs* and the concept of agreement is to be found within it. The audible confession stands because of the inward profession. This is why Paul says that "the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." It is as close to us as the air which enters and exits our mouth and fills our lungs, and it is both audible in tone and truthful to the heart.

The reason for the audible profession is obvious. No one would hide their true belief in the Lordship of Jesus. If He is in fact Lord, then He is alive. If He is alive, then He triumphed over the cross. If He did this, then He was without sin because "the wages of sin is death." If He is without sin, then He is God because "all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God."

As you can see by logically thinking this through, the incarnation of Jesus Christ - being the God/Man - is inextricably tied up in the confession of "the Lord Jesus." One cannot deny His lordship, meaning His deity, and be saved. This is the heart of what God has done in the stream of time for the redemption of mankind.

Therefore, confession "with your mouth" is the making of an open profession that Jesus is God, thus denying all other gods. This would have been particularly of note in Roman times when people within the empire were required to affirm the lordship of Caesar. For many, it was a life and death decision to call Jesus "Lord." Most translations, rather than stating "the Lord Jesus" will say "Jesus is Lord." This is to avoid confusion and to emphasize His Lordship.

Either way, one must make the confession which is a true profession as is seen in the words "and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead." Paul directly ties the resurrection to Jesus' lordship. One cannot honestly call on a dead savior and so acknowledging His resurrection returns us to the thought that He was sinless in His life and death. Peter explains this in his great discourse at Pentecost in Acts 2 -

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to

death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." (22-24)

It was "not possible" that death should hold Jesus because He was without sin, and death is the penalty for sin. To ensure we don't miss the point, immediately before and after stating this, Peter turned to Scripture and spoke of the Lord (Jehovah) in a way which implied that Jesus is Jehovah. Therefore, calling on Jesus is calling on Jehovah, but the reciprocal is not necessarily true. If one accepts the premise that Jehovah of the Old Testament is realized in Jesus of the New, then they have rightly called on the name of the Lord. But if they stubbornly refuse to see what God has done through Jesus, fulfilling the Old Testament pictures related to Jehovah which pointed to Him, then they have not called on the Lord Jesus. It is an important point which should not be missed.

And so, this belief in God's raising Jesus from the dead is the crucial key to understanding His Personhood. It is a volitional act of the free-will, which itself is a gift of God. Faith isn't something which can be earned; it is something which is received from God and then exercised by man. This doesn't mean God grants us the faith to believe and we will believe. It means that God grants us the faith to believe, and we may believe.

This is no different than God granting us the ability to accomplish mathematical skills. We may choose to use this ability or not. Maybe a better example would be the ability to swim. Swimming is possible for any normally constructed person, but it does take a step of faith to actually exercise the ability. The ability is given by God, but it doesn't mean that the choice will be exercised. Faith is not earned, it is received, and then it must be put into practice. Once the faith is properly applied, "you will be saved."

This final thought, being saved, implies that there is something to be "saved" from. Jesus explains this in John 3:18 -

"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."

Salvation is necessary to be kept from condemnation. Condemnation is the result of inherited (and later committed) sin. Sin is what separates us from God; faith in Jesus' work is what reconciles us. This is why Jesus could rightly claim that "No one comes to the Father except through me." He is the only avenue to be reconciled to our heavenly Father.

Life application: We are given a choice, believe in Jesus and be saved, or be condemned. There is no other avenue. Believe and be saved.

*O God, in Your great love and mercy for the people You created, You have given us Your Son. And You have also given us the faith to believe and the ability to exercise that faith. It has all been granted by You, and then You leave that choice up to us - believe and be saved or face You on our own merits. Me, I may not be the brightest bulb which shines along life's boardwalk, but I choose Jesus. Amen.*

**For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.** Romans 10:10

Paul connects 10:9 to 10:10 with his common conjunction "for." In 10:9 he explained what was required to be saved - 1) confession with the mouth and 2) belief in the heart. Now he explains why this is so -

(1) With the heart one believes unto righteousness - Belief is what justifies. This is a consistent and common teaching of Paul. Faith in God's provision results in the declaration of righteousness; one is found "not guilty" before the law. This occurs the moment one believes, and no further act "fulfills" this standing before God (as is supposed in the teaching of N.T. Wright). Paul speaks of this justification as immediate, complete, and assured in Ephesians 1:13, 14 -

"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."

It is immediate because faith results in sealing; no delay can be inferred. It is complete because God has sealed the believer with His Spirit. Nothing could be more comprehensive than this. And it is assured because this sealing is referred to as a "guarantee." As this is God's plan to reconcile men to Himself, it would make no sense to justify a sinner through pardoning of sin just to turn around and later "un-justify" him for a later failing.

God doesn't make mistakes and His sealing is eternal. Likewise, the plan has been given and it is one which is fully satisfactory. Because it is, no other method is necessary or provided. Justification comes through Christ and Christ alone. God will not deviate from this avenue, nor will He make exceptions along the way.

(2) With the mouth confession is made unto salvation - Belief results in righteousness and it precedes confession. As noted in the commentary on 10:9, the audible confession stands because of the inward profession. Anyone can confess a matter without believing it. We see this in our politicians daily. However, when the heart believes, the confession will be sincere. For God "who searches the hearts and minds" knowing the difference is not a difficult task. Morison states it this way, "Confession is just faith turned from its obverse side to its reverse ... When faith comes forth from its silence to announce itself, and to proclaim the glory and the grace of the Lord, its voice is confession."

Life application: No city on a hill can be hidden and no true faith will be silent. Belief will naturally result in confession. Let your words be overflowing with gratitude to the Lord who saved you despite yourself, and do not quench the Spirit with whom God has sealed you. Be bold and proclaim the Lord Jesus every chance you get.

*Precious Lord Jesus - I have heard of You, I have read about You, and I have fellowshiped with You through faith. I have seen and tasted Your goodness, and it has consumed my soul with delight. Be near, O God and guide my steps and my words that my life may be a testament to the wondrous change which has taken hold because of You. Praises belong to You! Amen.*

**For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."**

Romans 10:11

Paul again quotes Isaiah 28:16 as he did in Romans 9:33. His citation is using the Greek translation of this verse and adding the term "whoever." Along with Isaiah 28 though, Isaiah 49:23 carries a similar thought -

"Then you will know that I am the Lord,  
For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

In this verse, it is the Lord (Jehovah) speaking. Paul's use of verses in this manner, as with the other apostles, is to show that Jesus is, in fact, Jehovah. He is the physical incarnation of Jehovah of the Old Testament. How so many people miss this is hard to understand, but miss it they do and they fail to accept God at His word.

Also, in citing the Old Testament in this manner, it demonstrates, quite clearly, that salvation by faith was anticipated even under the law. Paul has just gotten done with explaining "how" to be saved and then he cites this verse from under the time of the law to say that this "how" will not lead to disappointment. The reciprocal is also true - failing to seek justification by faith alone will lead to being "put to shame."

Life application: Go back, read, and memorize Romans 10:9, 10. Then trust that what it says is true. In so doing, you also will not be put to shame. Then, go share this simple message of hope with others.

*Lord, today I confess that I have spent too much of my time in the vain pursuits of life and haven't spent enough time thinking about You, talking to You, reading Your word, and conversing with others about You. Lord, give Your servant the heart and desire to do these things as I should. Help me to bring to You the glory that You are due. This is my prayer. Amen.*

**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.** Romans 10:12

The NKJV, along with a few other translations, chose the word "distinction" for this verse. Some use "difference." Although similar in intent, the word "distinction" is probably a better choice in order to avoid confusion. Jews and Gentiles are different; the very naming of them in this verse implies a difference - one which continues throughout the New Testament. However, in both Jew and Greek concerning matters of sin and salvation, there is no distinction.

Concerning sin, Paul has clearly shown that all are bound under sin's power, control, and thus - penalty -

"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." Romans 3:9

And so, all require the same mercy and deliverance from sin.

Concerning salvation, he has shown that the law could save no one because they were unable to meet its requirements fully. As the law was meant for the Jews, then this must (and in fact is shown to) mean that both Jew and Gentile are bound under the same plan of salvation - those under the law and those who were not under the law. As Paul noted in 10:4 (roger that!) -

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Jesus Christ is relevant to both Jew and Greek in regard to salvation and none may be saved apart from Him. The consequences of sin and the ineffectiveness of the law are highlighted in Scripture to take us by the hand and lead us directly to the throne of grace where Christ Jesus sits. In Him is found the freedom which grants both pardon



from sin and justification before God for all men, "for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."

There is one plan from God which is all-inclusive, and it involves the "same Lord" for all. As is noted in 1 Corinthians 8:6 –

"yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live."

And this same "Lord over all is rich to all..." The verb "is rich" indicates wealth and is the same general thought as the adjective used in Ephesians 2:6 - "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us..." The sense is that God has a superabundance of His graces which flow to His people, "to all who call upon Him." This final portion of the verse eliminates this mercy being bestowed upon non-believers as many claim. It is an infinite source of richness, but it is limited in its directional flow.

Life application: God isn't "doing something behind the scenes" for those who have never called on Jesus. He doesn't have a secondary plan of salvation, nor does He favor one group above another. The lines are set, and they are found only in Christ. One is either "in Christ" or not "in Christ." It's an important message for the people of the world. Let's be sure to speak clearly about it. For those who call on Him, the richness of the glory of God will be an eternal delight.

*Lord God, when I'm alone with my thoughts, I can look into the recesses of my heart and know that but for Christ I would have nothing to present at my defense. When I am called to present my life's case before You, I will point to the Lamb who took my place and say, "Here is my defense. On Christ alone will I stand." Thank You for my Lord, my only hope. Amen.*

**For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."** Romans 10:13

Romans 10:13 should be a memory-verse for you. When speaking to others about the Lord, it is simple, concise, and reveals the heart of the gospel. It is an abbreviated form of Romans 10:9 which said -

"...that 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."

There is nothing lacking in Romans 10:13 when compared to Romans 10:9. Only a simpleton would call on a dead Lord. Calling on the name of the Lord implies that one is calling on the risen Savior, Jesus. And so, Paul begins with "For..." This is an explanatory phrase which should be taken in the entire context of the current paragraph. This is now the fourth time in a row Paul has used this connector -

"...that 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 the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" Romans 10:9-13

The first "for" explains the confession and belief; the second "for" explains the righteousness leading to salvation; the third "for" refers back to Paul's discourse on the Jewish state before God and then ties it in with the plan of righteousness, which is for all people; the last "for" reaffirms what was said in Romans 10:9, explaining that "whoever" truly means "whoever."

And so, we don't miss what God is doing, Paul cites Joel 2:32, an Old Testament passage which is referring to "Jehovah" -

"And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord  
Shall be saved." Joel 2:32

By citing this verse, he has made the obvious connection between "Jehovah" and "Jesus"; the two are the same. And his use of Joel 2:23 isn't without precedent. Peter cited the same verse in the same manner in Acts 2:21. The incredible aspect of this isn't that Jesus is, in fact, Jehovah. The inconceivable point is that so many deny this obvious truth. Either it is so, or the Old Testament pictures given by God were downright misleading, and the New Testament applications by the apostles are false misrepresentations of who Jesus is.

But when one grasps this premise, then the Bible fits beautifully into an amazing picture of God's love for His people -

Whoever - unlimited in scope. Any person, anywhere, any color, any language, any background.

Calls - the limiting factor for "whoever." One must actually exercise their faith, calling out from their wretched state in petition to God.

On the name - The Bible's concept of a "name" is that of identification with the person or entity. Thus, for example, when Abram and Sarai's identification changed, their names were changed to reflect what had occurred. They became Abraham and Sarah.

Of the Lord - Only when one understands who the "Lord" is from Joel 2:32 can they appreciate what Paul is stating. "Lord" in that passage is the tetragrammaton, the four-letter designation for "Jehovah." Calling on the "name of Jehovah" is then to identify with who Jehovah is. This concept is found in Proverbs 18:10 -

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower;  
The righteous run to it and are safe."

Because Paul is speaking of Jesus (verse 9), then with clarity of mind we can know that Jesus is the incarnation of "Jehovah." He is the God/Man, and we are to call on Him as Lord.

Will be saved - Going to heaven isn't the purpose of being saved. Going to heaven is a result of being saved. Being saved implies "from" something. God's wrath is upon the people of the world because of sin. Jesus came to rectify this. By fulfilling the law and shedding his blood for our atonement, salvation from God's wrath is now available to all who, by faith, call on Him as Lord.

Life application: Take time to memorize Romans 10:13. Think on it and be able to explain the "who", "what", "why", and "how" of what this verse reveals. The "when" isn't stated, but it's anytime during this walk. As we don't know our last day, it shouldn't be a delayed "when." Share the gospel with the urgency of a soldier on a battlefield.

*Heavenly Father, in the New Testament, we see the magnificent fulfillment of all of the Old Testament types and pictures. The Lord above the ladder; the Ladder, and the Stone at its base; the Commander of the Lord's Army; the Pillar of Smoke and Fire - all are realized in Jesus. What a marvelous display of wonder, beauty, and glory is seen in Him. Thank You for so revealing Your heart to us in our wonderful Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Romans 10:14**

We have just seen that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek in the need for and means of salvation. The Lord is rich to both Jew and Greek in that "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Understanding this, Paul will now demonstrate, in logical sequence, how the plan of salvation is relayed. From this chain of thought he will redirect to how Israel's unbelief is not due to a lack of the plan, but is due to a failure to acknowledge it.

The sequence of questions given by Paul can be interpreted in a couple ways. One way is that Paul is stating them as objections to his previous argument. In essence, "How can we be blamed for not responding to the call when the call hasn't been provided?" This view of these questions is held by the noted scholar Albert Barnes. As Barnes states - "... the ground of injustice which a Jew would complain of, would be, that the plan made salvation dependent on faith, when a large part of the nation had not heard the gospel, and had had no opportunity to know it."

Another way of viewing these questions is that Paul is rhetorically asking them in order to stimulate action. In essence, "You have heard that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved, but how can this come about without them hearing the message." This is the more common interpretation of these questions. Rather than being a defense at a trial they are an impetus to share the good news.

Be assured, the "defense" view is used by people all around the world, Jew and Gentile alike, to demonstrate that it is unfair to condemn people who haven't heard the gospel. And so, Barnes is right in how these questions could be used. In answer, one doesn't need the gospel in order to be condemned - all people are already condemned (see John 3:18); one needs the gospel in order to be saved. Therefore, there is no unfairness in God. The gospel message is grace. Grace, by its very nature, is undeserved. The defense view cannot stand when presented to God.

The "stimulate to action" view is also used, and rightly so, by those who understand the need to share the gospel. If the "defense view" is actually a non-starter, then it is incumbent on believers to get the word out because it is God's avenue for it to be transmitted; and so, it is. The Great Commission was stated explicitly by the Lord in several ways. These can be found in Matthew 28:19- 20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47, John 20:21, and at the ascension in Acts 1:8.

This commission then is given so that salvation may be realized in both Jew and Gentile. It is a message without favoritism, but rather one that is given for "whoever calls on the name of the Lord." But...

(1) "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" Paul's first obvious question. Man has the knowledge of God already ingrained in him. This is evident from the discussion in Romans 1 and also from such passages as Psalm 19:1-3 -

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
There is no speech nor language  
Where their voice is not heard.

However, this knowledge is natural revelation and is merely sufficient to condemn man. God's word, the message of Christ, is specific revelation. It is sufficient to bring man to salvation. But being specific, it is not universally known. It must be transmitted in order to be believed. How can man call on the Lord if they haven't believed in Him? The answer is, he cannot. And so more is needed.

(2) "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" If calling on the Lord presupposes belief ("belief" implies a heart acceptance and not just a mental assertion), then how can that belief be realized if one doesn't hear the word of faith? It cannot happen. No one can believe in the existence of a green dribackle bug because no one has ever heard of such a thing. Proper belief that such a bug exists must be grounded in a truthful message based on true evidence. And the gospel message is no different. How can someone accept the gospel if the gospel has never been presented to them? The answer is, he cannot. And so more is needed.

(3) "And how shall they hear without a preacher?" One cannot hear a message unless there is another to transmit the message. Words do not generate themselves, either in oral or in written format. They must have a source in order for them to come about. And so, the gospel cannot go forth without someone to share it. This rhetorical question then needs to be taken to heart by every saved person who cares about the lost. In the ultimate sense, each person who speaks the gospel is a preacher and someone must preach in order for the message to be heard. But there is also a truth that not everyone is actually a preacher. The next verse will deal with that then.

Life application: No one will have a sound defense at their trial of condemnation, but those who call on the Lord have a certain hope; a pardon for their offenses against the holy God. How can we turn a blind eye to those who so desperately need to hear the Good News found in Jesus Christ?

*Heavenly Father, if the message of Jesus is true (and it certainly is!), then it is life, peace, and pardon for those who receive it. Likewise, there can only be heartfelt sadness for those who either don't hear it or who reject it. Break my heart Lord; break my heart for those who so desperately need to hear this perfect message of peace and reconciliation. Use me in all that I am to be a minister of the word of life - the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:  
"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,  
Who bring glad tidings of good things!" Romans 10:15**

Paul's progression of thought concerning the transmission of the gospel continues with, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" Everyone who is a saved believer should be a voice and a witness for the good news. However, the truth is that just as not everyone has plumbing skills, not everyone has sound communication skills. Because of this, certain people are more effective at relaying the message than others. Even though this is so, there is also the axiom that "You can preach with your person or you can preach with your purse."

Everyone who believes the truth of the gospel certainly has some ability to promote the gospel, even the poor widow who can give but two mites. A preacher can't preach unless he is sent, and someone has to be willing to send him. It is difficult to comprehend those who attend church, week after week, and who don't support their preacher and the ministry. They are benefitting from his schooling, preparation, and lifeblood and yet they take without giving. Missions cannot go forward without missionary funding. Teachers who teach should be supported for their time and effort. These are obvious truths which are often simply disregarded.

In today's world, there are means of spreading instruction to even wider audiences - Websites, email, You Tube, Facebook, etc. are all means of sharing and receiving instruction. How many sit and absorb volumes of information by these avenues and yet never return with a gift of gratitude to the one who put forth the effort, time, and expense of preparation and transmission?

Paul notes the needed care for teachers several times. In Galatians 6:6, he states, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." In 1 Timothy 5:18, while citing the law, he repeats, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." And Jesus, using the same thought, said this to the disciples He had sent out, "...a worker is worthy of his food." Matthew 10:10

One final thought on being "sent." There must be a divine commission on the sender. There are many preachers and teachers and yet their doctrine doesn't correspond with, or properly handle, God's word. A divine commission will be seen for what it is when it rightly divides the word of truth. It must be centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ and it must cling to and boast in His cross. The cross is the central point of the faith and yet it is often dismissed in an attempt to not offend. But the resurrection wasn't possible without His death. When evaluating preachers and teachers, never fail to evaluate them based on the message of the cross.

After communicating the need for preachers to be sent, and in support of this thought, Paul cites Isaiah 52:7 (and which is also a verse found in Nahum 1:15). "As it is written" shows that what he is saying finds its support within the Hebrew Scriptures and will now find its fulfillment in the New Testament church. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace..."

Paul equates Isaiah's words directly to the good news of the gospel. Isaiah was speaking of the affliction and bondage of the people during their times of captivity. But he spoke of a time of release from those things, a time when the Lord would comfort His people. After his introduction, Isaiah moved into His "suffering Servant" passage which spans 52:13 - 53:12. These verses detail the coming abasement and exaltation of the Lord Jesus, the good news.

It is those feet which proclaim this wondrous message which are termed "beautiful." It is the faithful preacher of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord who truly brings "glad tidings of good things!" It should be noted that a bearer of news in his day would have traveled long distances carrying his message. For example, if he were at a battle line, he would be instructed to run to the king or to the high priest with how things were going.

Such a herald would wear the lightest shoes possible, probably open sandals. He may even run barefoot if his feet were calloused enough. By the time he reached the one he was heading for, the herald's feet would be filthy. They would bear the dust and possibly even the open wounds of the run. But the beauty of the feet was in the

message, not the feet themselves. The feet which labored so vigorously would be considered as lovely as a spring flower to the one who received the good news.

And such is the case with the preachers and missionaries who rightly profess the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Their feet would appear as precious as the finest gold, and even more so.

Life application: A showy message by a fashionably dressed orator is worthless when placed side by side with a herald of the gospel who is dressed in old clothes and worn-out shoes. Be sure to tend to those who instruct you with gifts and notes of appreciation. The Word of God is the most precious treasure we have; don't withhold your gratitude for those who transmit it.

*Glorious Lord, today I want to thank You for those who give me instruction into Your word. Please provide them with Your peace and with Your hand of comfort as they work, preparing sermons, studies, and classes which then are provided to me. Thank You for raising up such men of God and directing their ways for the benefit of those they instruct. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace! Amen.*

**But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?”** Romans 10:16

Paul began chapter 10 with his comments concerning Israel and salvation (verses 1-4); they have a zeal for God, but without proper knowledge. They pursued the law as a means to an end, but Christ is the endpoint, purpose, and fulfillment of the law. After that introduction, he supported this by citing Scripture, directly from the law, to demonstrate that the law showed this (verses 5-8). Then he cited the means of salvation (verses 9-13). In verses 14 and 15 he took the time to explain how this message is transmitted; by preaching and through the support of those who have believed.

"But" is Paul's contrasting re-introduction of the reason for Israel's missing the ship of salvation. If belief in Christ's work is the end of the law, as he clearly details, then those who don't believe have wrongly pursued salvation. And this is just the case because, "they have not all obeyed the gospel." This is the tie back to verses 1-4. "Obeying the gospel" is belief in the work of Christ, as he sums up in verse 4, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

And to show that this has been a problem of the past with Israel, and a prophecy of the future concerning both them and the gentiles, he now turns to the question asked in Isaiah 53:1, “Lord, who has believed our report?”



Isaiah's question is particularly directed to the Jew who had received all of the advanced notifications of the coming of Messiah. Detailed descriptions of His life and work are found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. And yet, they were not believed. Those same details are now available in every library and bookstore in the world. They are found on the internet, heard on the radio, seen on TV and yet "who has believed" the report?

Isaiah's question implies that what he is about to describe will be rejected. He is clear, but he will still be misunderstood. And the answer to why is found right in those same ensuing verses of Isaiah 53. Albert Barnes sums it up nicely -

"It would be because he was a root out of a dry ground; because he was a man of sorrows. etc. And this actually took place. Because he did not come with splendor and pomp, as a temporal prince, he was rejected, and put to death."

The world looks for might, flash, glamour, wealth, etc. in their leaders. But this isn't how God entered the stream of humanity. Instead, the Creator united with human flesh, was born in a manger, led an obscure existence until the time of His ministry, offended the leaders of the nation, was crucified, and was buried. And all of this was done without any flash, pomp, display of earthly power, or show of wealth. This was, as far as they could see, a failure - now dead and buried.

The report was given, it was detailed and precise, and it should not have been missed, but it was. The gospel wasn't obeyed in His life and it isn't obeyed in His death and resurrection. Belief in God's provision was and still is rejected for the sake of zeal without knowledge. The pursuit of pleasing God through self has taken precedence over pleasing God through Christ in both Jew and Gentile.

Life application: Obeying the gospel is synonymous with belief. The good news is that the work is accomplished and complete in Christ. Believe and share this good news!

*Heavenly Father, Isaiah asked, "Who has believed our report?" The message of Messiah is detailed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures - who, what, where, when, and why are all given in advance of His coming. But so many have missed the message. O God, open eyes in both Jew and Gentile, that in the Lord there is complete pardon and full redemption. May Your Son be glorified in all the earth. Amen.*

**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17**

Romans 10:17 is another verse which should be committed to memory. It is simple, concise, and carries with it a most important message.

"So then" is a summary statement. In essence, "These things can be summed up as follows..." For a complete perspective on this verse, it would be wise to take a moment to go back and read Romans 10:1-16. By doing so it will help in understanding this important point Paul will now state.

"Faith comes by hearing..." Faith, in this context, is speaking of the properly directed faith of the gospel message. Many have faith, but not all have the right faith. People hear the words of Buddha and have faith in those words, but this isn't the true faith that Paul speaks of. Such is the case with countless misdirected belief systems which have been instituted by man. People exercise faith all the time and they do so without considering the error of the message. Even within supposed Christian denominations, error abounds. Bowing to a statue of Mary is contrary to the truthful message of God.

Even more to the point is that when the message is correct, it may not be received as such. Faith does come by hearing, but this doesn't imply that faith will come by hearing. Rather, it means that faith can only come by hearing. Many hear; not all accept. This is the intent and meaning of Jesus' parable concerning the sower and the seeds in Matthew 13:1-9. The correct message has been given by the Sower, but it may not be received as such, or it may be understood, but not sink in to become heart knowledge. Thus, any accompanying confession is not a true profession.

When the proper message is given, when it is received, and when it is believed - then it is the "faith" Paul speaks of here. In what is one of the most egregious errors of understanding the process of exercising faith, we read this almost bizarre analysis of it from *Tabletalk* magazine's daily devotional dated 17 September 2013 - "Dr. RC Sproul has said that the biblical doctrine of salvation can be summed up effectively in three words: regeneration precedes faith."

This is so out of line with what the Bible teaches that it is almost unimaginable to consider how it was ever introduced into the doctrine of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). In fact, salvation can be summed up in a single sentence, but it has nothing to do with "regeneration preceding faith." It is explicitly stated in Jonah 2:9 in only two Hebrew words - *yeshuatah Y'hovah*, "Salvation is of the Lord." From this thought, Paul explains that this means faith in the Lord, meaning an acceptance of His provision.

Faith in the Lord brings salvation; faith in the Lord comes by hearing about the Lord; and hearing about the Lord comes "by the word of God." Jonah learned this in the belly of the great fish. The very nature of the process indicates that this is a volitional act of the free-will. Inserting "regeneration" prior to "faith" as is noted above, is inserting a concept foreign to the clearly presented message of the Bible. Man must hear and then

man must respond. To be "regenerated" prior to faith would imply that man is saved before he is saved, and it would be universal in its scope. If not universal, then God's regenerative process would be ineffective for some. This particular teaching is taught in seminaries under the course subject "Convoluting Theology 101."

Rather, for there to be a recipient of a message, there must be a source of what is relayed. The term "word of God" is used approximately 50 times in the Bible to describe its contents. It is the word which issues directly from God and which is breathed out to men of God (2 Timothy 3:16) as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). This message, which Jesus argued over even to a single word - such as in John 10:35, is the complete, accurate, and fully sufficient source of bringing faith to the individual.

It is this "word of God" which when heard will bring faith to the one who accepts it for what it is. Jesus explains the process in Luke 11:28 -

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Neither Jesus here, nor the apostles later, ever state that we are regenerated in order to obey or believe the word. It is, as noted, a volitional act of the free-will.

Life application: Go back, read, and memorize Romans 10:17 and then accept it at face value. Such simple and concise statements need nothing inserted for clarification. Read the word, and then exercise your faith in that same word.

*Lord, if the thoughts of my head at night cause me to lose sleep, I want them to be thoughts meditating on Your word. If I am troubled in my soul, O God, let it be troubled hopes of understanding Your word more fully. And should I hunger, may my hunger be to know Your word more. Then Lord, sort my thoughts out aright, clarify my understanding, and fill my soul to overflowing with my desired knowledge of Your word. Amen.*

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

**"Their sound has gone out to all the earth,  
And their words to the ends of the world." Romans 10:18**

Verses 14 and 15 showed the burden of getting the message of salvation out; the transmission of the gospel and the responsibility of the messenger was highlighted. Verses 16 and 17 transitioned from the message and messenger to the receiver. Now verse 18 places that burden on the receiver. "But I say..." is the contrasting thought. "Have they not heard?" This is a rhetorical question. The means of spreading the gospel has been explained and the fact that it was not received by the hearer was noted. But

some may say, "Well this isn't fair, I never heard the message." Paul contradicts such a notion. "In fact, it has been sent out."

"Yes indeed" is Paul's declaration. In order to substantiate this, he cites the general thought of Psalm 19:4. This psalm, penned by David, begins with his observations about the universality of the knowledge of God which is evident in creation -

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
There is no speech nor language  
Where their voice is not heard.  
Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world. Psalm 19:1-4

If David, a man born and raised as a shepherd, and who had no theological training at all, could discern these things, then no one else could claim otherwise. His thoughts thus substantiate that all have heard the voice of God. All have God's general revelation clearly presented to them. This knowledge is sufficient for man to know that God exists and thus man is responsible to Him. But instead of pursuing Him, acknowledging Him, and rightly honoring Him, they seek out their own devices. This then is tied into Paul's thoughts in Romans 1:18-21; man is without excuse.

Now, with the gospel proclaimed, there is an even greater burden on the people to believe. And so, Paul equates David's knowledge of general revelation to the now provided and superior knowledge of the gospel - God's specific revelation. By citing the psalm in this way, he is making a wide-ranging statement about the gospel's transmission. This doesn't mean every person had heard the gospel, but that the message had gone out to the inhabited world. This is the same thought (and the same word for "world" is used) as the statement made in Acts 17:6 -

"But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.'"

And so, this "sound" which is the gospel message "has gone out to all the earth." The word "sound" is *phthoggos*. It is used for a musical tone like when an instrument plays or a voice sings. The gospel is this beautiful voice. The "earth" is speaking of the physical earth. This voice has been transmitted on the planet "and their words to the ends of the

world." The word for "words" is *rhemata*. This signifies the matter which is being relayed. This subject, the gospel, is what has gone to the "ends of the world." The "world" here being the inhabited world as noted in Acts 17:6 above.

In other words, by using different words for "earth" and "world" Paul demonstrates that the message has been carried over the physical earth and has been relayed to the inhabitants of the earth. It's obvious that even today many haven't actually heard. But the gospel is being transmitted actively and continuously. Those who have heard should have accepted the message. If they did, then the obvious next step would be to pass it on. If they didn't, then they have disobeyed the gospel, first by not believing and then by not passing it on (because they didn't believe.) This goes right back to verse 16, "...they have not all obeyed the gospel."

Life application: All people have heard God's voice through general revelation. This is plainly declared in Scripture. And the message of God's special revelation, the gospel, has gone out and continues to go out through the world and to the people of the world. But it is incumbent on the people to obey the gospel by believing what is heard. If one believes the message, then he will obey Jesus' words to share the good news. The question is, even if you have obeyed by believing, have you obeyed by sharing? It is time to demonstrate your belief through getting the message out.

*Heavenly Father, what a treat it is to walk at night and behold the stars You have placed in the sky. The vastness of the universe shows the magnificence of Your wisdom and power. And yet, You have directed Your attention towards one such as me. Because of Your great love, with which You have loved us, You sent Your Son to bring us back to You, and this includes me... I am humbled by the thought. Thank You for noticing even me. Amen.*

**But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:**

**"I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation." Romans 10:19**

From a general statement about the universality of the going forth of the gospel, Paul now speaks only of Israel. "But I say, did Israel not know?" The question for us to consider is, "Did they not know what?" And so, we are directed back to verses 16 and 17-

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

The answer to the question then is two-fold. First, it is speaking of the going forth of the gospel, which was then to be heard and accepted. Did Israel not know that the gospel would go forth and thus what the consequences of rejecting it would be? Secondly, it is a question which demands an affirmative answer. "Yes, they knew." And they knew it from their own lawgiver, Moses.

"First Moses says" indicates that the very basis of who they were as a people, the Torah which was received and then passed on to them by Moses, hints at the truth of the situation. In support of this, Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:21 -

"They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God;  
They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.  
But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation;  
I will move them to anger by a foolish nation."

Israel had provoked the Lord by what is "not God" and therefore, He would provoke them by what is a "no-people." And so, it is. The message of Jesus Christ cannot be claimed by a single group of people. No nation has authority over it, nor does (despite frequent claims to the contrary) any single denomination, sect, or cult have authority over it. The gospel is found anywhere and in any person who will honor the true God through Jesus Christ.

Through this no-nation, which is in fact a collective group under a single Headship, God will provoke Israel to jealousy. And he will move them to anger "by a foolish nation." The word "fool" is used in various ways to indicate a lack of understanding, but also one who denies God (see Psalm 14:1) or one that refuses sound instruction or is morally corrupt, such as in the Proverbs. In this context, it is being spoken of as a nation of people who had no revelation or perceptive knowledge of the true God.

From this no-people, completely inferior in the understanding of God, would come Israel's provocation to jealousy and movement to anger. Peter speaks of such a nation in his first epistle -

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" 1 Peter 2:9

The reason for this provocation and movement is obvious. It is not to shame them into condemnation, but to spur them towards salvation. Paul will continue to cite this line of thought concerning Israel's disobedience throughout the coming verses. Then he will

show that the intended effect of God will eventually be realized in Israel. As this hasn't happened to Israel as a nation yet, then it must be (despite preterist claims to the contrary) future to us now.

Israel will behold the splendor of the Lord, call on Him, and become the nation to whom Christ will return some wondrous day in the future.

Life application: Does Israel of today merit God's blessing? No. But God has returned them for His reasons, and they are being worked out despite their failing to acknowledge Him. When one fights against Israel, they fight against God's plans for Israel and thus they fight against God. Think that one through and then determine to stand with, support, and pray for Israel.

*Lord Jesus, the people exiled for so long have returned; the language which was dead for millennia is again spoken; the land which lay waste is now fruitful - the desert blooms and the springs of water flow; and the scrolls hidden in a cave for eons were found, proving the ancient oracles You spoke. How can I deny the wonder of Your hand upon Israel. Though they haven't yet called on You as a nation, I stand with Israel. Amen.*

**But Isaiah is very bold and says:**

**"I was found by those who did not seek Me;**

**I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me."** Romans 10:20

"But" is given to contrast the preceding verse. He was speaking of Israel and God's need to provoke them to jealousy and to move them to anger. These actions would be affected by those who were "not a nation" and by a "foolish nation." Unlike Israel, who would reject Him, Paul cites Isaiah 65:1 to show directly from Scripture that in the process of doing this, the gentiles would actually come to find the Lord that the Jews had rejected.

To show the force of this, he says "Isaiah is very bold" using the Greek word *apolutoma*; a word used only here in the New Testament. It has the intent of someone who dares another. His statement was one which could arouse his readers to anger, but he stated it anyway and he states it with bold confidence. Now, in his citation of Isaiah, Paul switches the order of the verse. In Isaiah it says –

"I was sought by those who did not ask for Me;

I was found by those who did not seek Me."

The reason for this change must certainly be the nature of the gospel message. It is given to people who aren't seeking God and they suddenly become aware of who He is; they find Him without having sought Him. When they find Him, He is made manifest to them, even though they didn't ask for Him. This is sure because the term "I was sought" is replaced with "I was made manifest." Also, the term "I was found" was written by Isaiah in the present tense - "I am sought." However, Paul is writing it as a completed action - "I was found."

Isaiah looked forward to the time when the gospel would be given to and accepted by the gentile people. Now Paul shows that the time had arrived. In both cases, from Isaiah and from Paul, this would have been an offensive message to the Jews. But despite this, they both boldly proclaimed the gospel.

Life application: The message of Jesus is offensive. John 14:6 is a statement which shows the harsh reality of rejecting Him. No person can be reconciled to God apart from Him. John 3:18, likewise is offensive - all people are "condemned already." Are you willing to be as bold as Isaiah and proclaim a message which is so unpopular? If so, God will be pleased with your stand. His word takes precedence over the hurt feelings of others.

*Lord God, if I knew there were a thousand grains of gold on my walk to the mailbox, I'd surely seek out each one, knowing how precious they are. But even more precious than all the gold in the world is the human soul. Have I shown the same concern for them as I have for specks of golden metal? I think not. Forgive me for the appalling way I have prioritized what is most valuable. Give me a true heart for others Lord. Amen.*

**But to Israel he says:  
"All day long I have stretched out My hands  
To a disobedient and contrary people." Romans 10:21**

Paul closes chapter 10 with a quote from Isaiah 65:2. "But" shows the contrast to the preceding verse -

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

This is the "no-nation" to whom the Lord was made manifest; the gentile people who weren't even a part of the covenant community. In contrast to them Israel is now highlighted. God had "stretched out" His hands "all day long" to them. They had His laws, the temple, the covenant care and protection, and the history which they could



look back on as evidence of God's hand of care upon them. And yet they were a "disobedient and contrary people."

Even from the earliest moments after the giving of the law, they were in rebellion against Him. They had seen the miraculous - having been delivered from Egypt by the ten plagues. Then they saw it again in the pillar and the cloud and the parting of the sea. A short time later, they beheld the glory of the Lord at Mount Sinai and they received the law. And yet, during the entire time, they complained. Soon enough, they were in gross violation of the law they were given when they set up and worshipped a golden calf.

And the record of disobedience continues throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Occasionally a good judge or king would come along and set them on a good path, but in a short span, they would again turn away from the Lord. "All day long," is a way of saying, "through the duration" or "without ceasing" God "stretched out" His hands to them. This is a term which gives a sense of almost begging. "Please pay heed. Return to Me and I will return to you." Rather than responding, they remained rebellious, disobedient, and contrary to what He expected of them.

This last verse then shows why their rejection came and explains why the message of salvation through Christ was thus turned to, and accepted by, the gentiles as is noted in the previous verses. What was offered as a gift of grace was shunned by the same people who had, for so many centuries shunned Him. Is this the end of the story for Israel then? Did they turn so far from God that they would never again receive His favor? Chapter 11 will continue on with Paul's thoughts on his beloved people, meaning his countrymen according to the flesh.

Life application: God is merciful and longsuffering, but there is a point when He knows it is no longer of use to stretch out His hands to those who turn from Him or shun Him. And this is certainly true even with saved believers who fail to walk in a manner worthy of His greatness. We need to evaluate our walk with the Lord continuously and ensure that we are living in accord with His precepts.

*Heavenly Father, how can I expect Your blessings or mercy when I ignore You constantly? And how can I ask You to bless my nation when we fail to acknowledge Your greatness? Rather, help me to first set You as my highest delight and my constant joy. And help those in my country to exalt You above all else. In so doing, I know that the blessings will come, and the mercy will flow forth. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 11

**I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. Romans 11:1**

Throughout the church age, there have been differing views on the state of the Jewish people. There was an expectancy of the Jews turning to God, but in AD70, the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were dispersed. As time went on, it seemed more and more unlikely that Israel would ever be a people again. The land fell in and out of enemy hands, but for the most part, it was a barren wilderness, unsuitable to support life in any real sense. This continued through the 1800's as was well-documented by Mark Twain in the account of his travels, *Innocents Abroad*, which can be read right on-line from numerous sources.

Around the world, the Jews were here and there in little pockets, but they were doing their own thing, and no one could have guessed that they would ever reunite as a group of people. The many promises of the Old Testament, which are very specific and certainly "earthly" promises to Israel, were spiritualized and the church was inserted into these passages. The reason for this is obvious - "If this is God's word, and God is truthful, then these things must belong to the church - Israel is a goner." It was believed to be the only obvious conclusion.

But ancient pictures and prophecies clearly showed that Israel the people would be returned to Israel the land. This is seen from Genesis to Malachi and some prophecies, such as in Ezekiel 4, actually pinpoint the dating of this occurrence. In the late 1800s, this became so obvious to Bible scholars, that in advance of Israel's reestablishment, it was understood that it was coming. The 19th century scholar E.W. Bullinger actually noted the number of years until this would come about. The only thing he lacked was what the starting date of his calculation should be.

The world was being prepared, both physically and spiritually, for the return of the people Israel to Israel the land. The Zionist movement, the re-establishment of the ancient language, the events of World War I and World War II, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls - on and on, the miraculous time was at hand. And then, on 14 May 1948 it came - Israel was reestablished. Nineteen years later, on 7 June 1967, Jerusalem once again came under Jewish control.

These things are obvious now, but at Paul's time, and for the next 2000 years, difficult questions were asked. *Misunderstanding Romans 11* - although inexcusable from a

biblical standpoint, is almost understandable from a historical standpoint. The fact is that few people had access to a Bible and those that did were mostly focused on other things. When the publication of the Bible took off and people really started digging into its contents, suddenly things started to become clear.

Now that Israel is back in the land, one would think that everyone would agree on her role... well, at least everyone who was a Bible believer. But such isn't the case. To this day, one's early training in the issue of Israel will normally stand. If they are taught from the old school mindset, then that is what will be believed. One must actually put aside presuppositions and allow the word to be mixed with the reality around us. Israel is home and it isn't an aberration. God is working towards the fulfillment of all of the promises previously made to them. The world is being prepared for the return of Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom Age.

Paul gives us hints into this in Romans 11. He begins chapter 11 with an obvious question, one based on the closing quotes from chapter 10. "I say then..." is his way of getting us to think through what will be asked. In essence, "If this is so, then what about....?" He is acting as if a defendant in a trial concerning Israel's stubborn rejection of God's provision found in Christ. The question is, "Has God cast away His people?"

"His people" is speaking of Israel. This is obvious from the preceding verses and from the defense he will make in the coming verses. Has God cast them away? The word for "cast" is *apostato*: away (from)/thrust, hence "to thrust away." Has Israel been pushed out of the biblical scene, never to return? Paul's emphatic answer, "Certainly not!" To support this, he speaks of himself.

"For I also am an Israelite." He is one of the people that he just asked about. Has he been cast away? No. If he is an Israelite and he hasn't been cast away, then Israel hasn't been cast away. One obvious conclusion from this is that Israel isn't the church and Jews are not gentiles. Paul couldn't say the words he is saying, even thus far in Romans 11, if the church had replaced Israel, or if there were no difference between Jew and Gentile.

He is of the physical descent of a physical group of people. Any believer in the church is considered a "spiritual descendant" of Abraham by faith (see Galatians 3). But this concept is never repeated in either Isaac or Jacob. The reason for this is that Abraham's declaration of faith came prior to the mark of circumcision. The circumcision was an outward sign of his already-possessed faith. On the other hand, Isaac and Jacob were circumcised prior to any faith; they were members of the covenant people.

Only after noting that he is an Israelite does he say that he is "of the seed of Abraham." This shows us that he was not only an Israelite by descent, but a true member of the faith. He would be, as termed in Galatians 6:16, of "the Israel of God"; one not only of national descent, but also of faith in God's provision.

After stating his national lineage, and then his spiritual heritage, he returns to the national identity and defines what portion of that group he belongs to - "of the tribe of Benjamin." This is a high honor indeed. Israel's first king, Saul, was of the tribe of Benjamin. Further, the tribe was almost annihilated due to a case of disobedience leading to war against them by the other tribes. They were reduced to a mere 600 men (see Judges 20). Members of this tribe also sided with David during his pre-ruling years. They actually supported him in opposition to the king who belonged to their own tribe (see 1 Chronicles 12). These, along with other noted accounts, could be considered a point of boasting.

In the chapter ahead, Paul will continue to speak about the state of national Israel. As stated above, one may need to put aside their presuppositions about Israel in order to understand what God has been doing and what He will do with them in the future. Israel is back home once again and unless this is just a magnificent mistake, then we need to make sure and support them, lest we be found to be fighting against God.

Life application: Diligently study the issue of Israel by diligently studying your Bible. If God has planted them again in their land for His purposes, then be sure to acknowledge that, maybe by witnessing to Jewish people or maybe by some other show of support for what He is doing.

*Lord God, today I come before You in regard to the nation of Israel. Open my eyes to know if their return is simply by chance, or if it was directed by You and for Your future purposes. Help me to be informed on them as a nation and as a people. May my actions and prayers for them be in line with Your intent for them. My desire is to be pleasing to You in this matter. Amen.*

**God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, Romans 11:2**

Paul continues to explain his emphatic response from verse 1 which answered the question, "Has God cast away His people?" That response was, "Certainly not!" To make sure we understand this, he turns around and rephrases the question as a statement - "God has not cast away His people whom he foreknew."

In using the term "foreknew" he isn't indicating what God has foreseen so much as what God has purposed. God purposed that Israel would be His people. During their times of obedience, they are in His favor and receive His blessings. When disobedient, they receive His wrath and judgment. These are the responsibilities, honors, and consequences of bearing the name Israel - "He struggles with God." When they are right with Him, they struggle with Him for Him. When they are not right with Him, they struggle with Him against Him. But either way, Israel struggles with God.

The name Israel itself is a mystery. It is an honor and a burden at the same time. A detailed evaluation of the name Israel by Abarim sounds quite awry at first, but it does reveal what we see in history and what the Bible continues to reveal concerning them, even into the future. This evaluation is based upon the bestowal of the name at the time of the wrestling match between the unidentified Man and Jacob by the Jabbok River (Genesis 32). This match was a picture and a pattern of not just Jacob, who is Israel, but a picture and a pattern of Israel, the people descended from Jacob -

"We can not say with certainty what the name Israel is supposed to mean, although it seems to reflect a certain inability of the Almighty God, namely the not being able to defeat a man like Jacob. We can be sure that God doesn't lack the physical strength to eradicate any human being, so we must conclude that the destruction of Jacob would go against the very nature of God. Perhaps the name Israel denotes God's continuous effort to keep Jacob going, even though Jacob continues to fight God."

This insightful evaluation is borne out throughout the rest of Scripture. It would go against the nature of God to destroy the people of Israel; they have been brought under God's covenant protection and have been given eternal promises. Israel's destruction would be a failure of God to uphold these promises; something which is impossible. Though salvation is an individual tenet, the burden of which lies with man, the preservation of national Israel is an eternal grant, the burden of which lies with God.

To support this, Paul returns to the words of Scripture, "Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah...?" Paul's language here indicates that the account of Elijah, which is found in 1 Kings 19:11-18, relates the concept of what he will say. It isn't a complete quote of the account, but a description of it which will include a quote. In his thoughts, he begins with, "...how he pleads with God against Israel..."

The word translated here as "pleads" is the Greek word *entynchanei*. It is used five times in the New Testament. It was seen in Romans 8:26 and will be seen in Hebrews 7:25 -

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

It is a petition on behalf or against a person or party. In the case of Elijah, he was petitioning "against Israel." The reason Paul is going to this account will become evident in the coming verses, but logically, he is preparing the answer to meet a similar petition which he has been addressing, "Has God cast away His people?" He has already answered the question and now will come his defense of the answer.

Life application: Israel - He struggles with God. That struggle is between God and Israel. Our duty is to accept that God can handle it and that He will do so for Israel's continuance and for His glory. Those who fight against Israel are assuming a role which puts them at enmity with His protective plans. This doesn't mean they aren't a part of His overall plans, but that their role is a negative role, even if it is used for His positive purposes (such as chastening Israel to effect repentance). This was seen with the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Both accomplished God's plans for Israel, but both came under God's judgment. Think this one through and then determine to support Israel. God will wake them up as much through your support as He will through the wrath of other nations; witness to the Jews and pray for Israel.

*Glorious God, sometimes it's difficult to see what Your plans are and how they are being worked out. I see trouble and disaster in the world around me, but I know that You are in control. Help me to reconcile the two and to have faith that all will come out as it should. You have a good plan and purpose for those who are Yours, and because of Jesus, I know that includes me. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**"Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? Romans 11:3**

This quote is taken from 1 Kings 19:10. However, Paul amends it somewhat to meet his purposes for our instruction. Here is the exact quote of that verse -

"So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'"

Paul leaves out "forsaken Your covenant." It is now the time of the New Covenant. He has been speaking of the Jews whose adherence to the Law of Moses became an end in and of itself (see Romans 10:3, 4).

He also switches the order of "torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets." It's possible that he did this to highlight "prophets" in order to make his point about a remnant remaining (see 11:5). The altar at Elijah's time was where one first went to sacrifice a sin offering. Only after that could a person have fellowship with God. As Jesus is the fulfillment of such sacrifices, the prophet (the one who transmits the message) is thus highlighted. This follows with the theme of Romans 10:14-17.

The term for "torn down" is the Greek *kateskapsan*. It means to "dig down" or "dig under." It is used only two times in the New Testament, the other being Acts 15:16. The altars of the Old Testament were to be made of earth and un-hewn stone (Exodus 20:24-35). In order to destroy such an altar, it would be easiest to dig into or under it and cause it to collapse. This is the reason for Paul's use of this particular word.

The next thing he quotes is Elijah's belief that "I alone am left, and they seek my life." Elijah felt completely alone in his ministry. At a previous point, 100 prophets of the Lord had been kept alive by a man named Obadiah, having kept them safe in a cave. However, it's possible that even they had been killed by the wicked queen, Jezebel. With this occurrence, Elijah thought he was the last of the faithful people of God.

The sad state of despair weighed heavily on him and so he fled to Mount Horeb and there spoke to the Lord about it. The coming verses will continue to show us, however, that God had a faithful remnant then, and He had such at Paul's time as well.

Life application: The Lord's faithful believers have always come under attack. In today's world, it is an on-going occurrence. Daily, many are martyred for their faith, and even in places where Christians are safe to worship, they are coming under increased pressure to be silent about their belief. Pray for those who are facing life and death choices concerning the gospel and also pray for strength to boldly proclaim Christ where you are.

*Lord, grant me boldness to speak about my faith, wisdom to do so without confrontation, and the zeal to show others that what I speak is intended to glorify You. Should I face persecution for the name of Jesus, I will consider it an honor and I will rejoice that I have been counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Thank You for that Name above all names - Jesus! Amen.*

**But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Romans 11:4**

In response to Elijah concerning his plea against Israel, God returns an answer - not through the strong wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but through a still small voice. And the divine response was - "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal..."

Paul's use of the term "divine response" is the Greek word *chrēmatismos*. This is its only use in the New Testament and is indicating the response itself, not the manner in which it was relayed. The word is spoken - "I have reserved for Myself..." The Hebrew of this verse actually states, "I will leave." However, Paul's quote says, "I have reserved." The Geneva Bible explains the thought this way -

"He speaks of remnants and reserved people who were chosen from everlasting, and not of remnants that should be chosen afterwards: for they are not chosen, because they were not idolaters: but rather they were not idolaters, because they were chosen and elect."

God foreknew that these would be the elect. He presented Himself to Israel and these are those who accepted the message. The honor belongs to God, not to them; they merely acknowledged His way and all others rejected it. Thus, the dishonor belongs to those who rejected it.

Of those reserved, God states He has "seven thousand." The number seven is the number of divine perfection and completeness. Understanding this use of the number in Scripture, it is possible that it is reflective of a complete number and not exactly seven thousand. They are those who make up the fullness of the faithful in the northern ten tribes; all others having apostatized.

Regardless of whether the number is exactly 7000 or a close approximation, it would be miniscule in comparison to the vast number in the land. Truly, only a remnant was faithful to the Lord. These few souls were those who had "not bowed the knee to Baal." Baal is a word which simply means "master" or "lord" in Hebrew, but it was used as the name of one of the idol-gods of the Phoenicians and Canaanites. Elsewhere, such as in Assyria and Babylonia, the comparable name of Bel was used in the same manner.

To represent Baal, a bull or similar animal like a calf would have been constructed, but Baal was actually referring to the sun, or possibly at times the moon. In Paul's use of this word, he uses a feminine article instead of the masculine which was used in the Greek Old Testament. It's uncertain why he did this, but Vincent's Word Studies offers the following options -



"...some supposing an ellipsis, the image of Baal; others that the deity was conceived as bisexual; others that the feminine article represents the feminine noun ἡ αἰσχύνη shame Heb., *bosheth*, which was used as a substitute for Baal when this name became odious to the Israelites."

The last seems probable because, as noted above, *baal* otherwise simply means "master" or "lord." In order to show the disgraceful nature of the act, Paul states it in the feminine form.

Life application: Again, it's good to consider that even if the world is slipping into a completely degenerate state, God does have faithful believers set aside for His glory. When we see churches taking down crosses, eliminating certain terms because they may sound offensive, and weakening doctrine in order to increase audience size, we don't need to think all is lost. There are faithful pockets of people still holding on to the truth of the message of the cross.

*Lord, too often my prayers are requests. Not today! Today I want to give You praise - Praise for Your goodness; praise for Your grace; praise for Your love; praise for Your mercy. Your kind hand has been upon me and Your many blessings have rained down to me from heaven. I thank You; I praise You - glory to You in the highest! Hallelujah and Amen...*

**Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.** Romans 11:5

"Even so then..." is Paul's note of comparison between what he has just said and what he will aver concerning his countrymen. As God had reserved for Himself "seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" at Elijah's time, so He "at this present time" has likewise reserved a remnant.

"This present time" is speaking of the time of Paul, but it is certainly inclusive of the entire church age, because his writings are so intended for that purpose - Paul being the "apostle to the gentiles." During this age, God has not failed to retain a portion of Jewish people within the governance of His redemptive workings. This is according to His promises of the Old Testament to them as a nation. The People's New Testament states it this way -

"The idea is that Israel was the elected (chosen people), and out of it God had always preserved a remnant by his grace. The election of individuals is not referred to, but the election of a remnant to represent the race."

As a sort of proof of this, the Jewish convert to Christianity, Zola Levitt, while still alive would travel around the nation speaking to churches about his ministry. At each church, he'd ask "How many of Jewish descent are in the congregation?" The answer normally came back with a small number of hands coming up. Regardless of the denomination, this would be the case. They, representing the Jewish nation, are a testament to God's continued grace upon them as well as the gentiles.

It should be noted that the main reason for the continuance of a remnant is yet future to us now. It is a prophetic acknowledgment that they are still a people and will continue on after the rapture of the church, through the tribulation period, and come out as the people to whom Christ will return when they call Him as a nation. This is evident throughout Scripture, but a good specific reference would be Zechariah 12:6-14.

Until that time, there is this continued "remnant according to the election of grace." This small number in relation to the whole are saved in the same manner as the vast number of gentiles who have been saved - by grace through faith. The offer has been made and accepted by them and they are included in the number of the redeemed of the Lord.

Life application: The nation of Israel was returned to the land of Israel in 1948. In 1967, Jerusalem again became a possession of the Jewish people. As these changes have taken place, another sort of change has taken place. In 1973, "Jews for Jesus" was founded and the modern Messianic movement among Jewish believers has skyrocketed. As you look at the state of the spiritual rebirth of Israel, note that there is a long way to go. Pray for eyes to be opened and hearts to be changed. Time is marching on and Israel plays a significant role in the present and into the future.

*Lord God, the splendor of what You have created is but a mere reflection of the glory You possess. The intricacy of life is astonishing, but how much more marvelous than is the Giver of life? The wisdom in the placement of the heavenly bodies causes us to marvel, and yet they are only there because of Your surpassing wisdom. Great are You, O God, and ever-so worthy of praise. Amen.*

**And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. Romans 11:6**

Paul has just stated that a remnant of Jews had been reserved "according to the election of grace." The conclusion, because this is written by Paul who is the apostle to the gentiles, is that this must be something that wasn't unique to his time alone, but for the entire time to which his letters apply - meaning the church age. It would be contrary to

the nature of his prescriptive writings for this to not be the case, just as it would be contrary to have any portion of his writings suddenly not apply during this dispensation.

The church age prescription for salvation is found in what Paul states in Romans and elsewhere and that is quite clear. For example, Ephesians 2:8, 9 gives it explicitly -

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The doctrine is set, and it is unchanging - for Jew or Gentile. God has breathed out His word through Paul for church age instruction. And so, speaking of these Jews who have been reserved, he makes his case. "And if by grace..." meaning the means in which one is saved, then it cannot be based on something other than grace. Personal merit, of any kind, is excluded. This includes adherence to the precepts of the law. There is no merit before God in our salvation in abstaining from pork (1 Corinthians 10), and there is no merit in our salvation in observing the Passover feast or a Sabbath Day (Colossians 2), etc.

The observance of such rituals as a basis for our right-standing with God, all fulfilled by the Lord, is contrary to the nature of what grace is. Because we are saved by grace, "then it is no longer of works." How clear Paul is, and yet we continuously muddy the waters, reinstating precepts which Christ died to free us from! This must be true, "otherwise grace is no longer grace." But the doctrine is written, the precepts are defined, and the expectancy of our belief in what Christ has done is requested.

The reason is obvious - grace is grace. "But if it is of works, it is no longer grace." We are saved by grace through faith. Anything other than that means that some type of work is involved. If some type of work is involved, then it is no longer grace. Either one is saved, or they aren't saved. If they are saved, then what can they add to it? Nothing. And therefore, salvation - both in the immediate and the continuance of it, must be by grace and not the law. It is truly tragic how many people simply dismiss the obvious nature of Paul's words.

But even if grace is grace - both for initial and continued salvation, what does that mean concerning choice? This is as important as understanding what "work" actually is because some will claim that "belief" then is a work. Is this correct? Is one first "regenerated in order to believe" so that belief is grace and not a work? This is a common sentiment and needs to be viewed according to the standard which Paul uses as our example for righteousness - Abraham.

Genesis 15:6 says, "And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Paul uses this to show us how salvation occurs. He does so because Abraham was declared righteous prior to the introduction of the law and even prior to the sign of his righteousness, circumcision (see Genesis 17).

This is our New Testament example as given by Paul in Galatians 3 (and confirmed throughout his writings). Because it is, then the process for Abraham must be the same for us. If Abraham was "regenerated in order to believe" then Scripture would clearly - either explicitly or implicitly - show us that this occurred. But it doesn't. At no point in the 1189 chapters of the Bible is this tenet demonstrated. Therefore, it must be an unscriptural tenet which has been invented by man. Belief is not a "work" and therefore God's grace is granted based on our belief.

If belief were a work, and we know that Abraham was declared righteous because of his belief (as Scripture explicitly demonstrates) then the grace bestowed upon Abraham wouldn't have been grace. Instead, it would be work. His salvation would have been of works and no longer grace; "otherwise work is no longer work." Stated another way by using the word "belief" in place of "work" the result of Romans 11:6 would be, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of belief; otherwise, grace is no longer grace. But if it is of belief, it is no longer of grace; otherwise, belief is no longer belief." One must re-define the biblical meaning of "belief" in order to come to the conclusion that belief from man's free-will is a work.

Life application: God has granted you freewill to believe. Don't muddy the waters; simply believe that this is true.

*Lord Jesus, You have asked us to have faith in You and to set aside ourselves, trusting that Your righteousness is sufficient to reconcile us to Your Father. And so, I do... I trust that You were born without sin, lived without sin, and then gave Your life on the cross to pay my sin-debt. I can trust this is true because You were victorious over death! You have proved to me that Your work is all-sufficient. I trust You alone to reconcile me to Your Father! Amen.*

**What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.** Romans 11:7

The previous verses were speaking of grace being grace - unmerited favor apart from works. This is the state of the remnant Jews who are a part of God's election. Based on this, Paul now asks, "What then?" What is the result for the rest of the Jews who are not a part of this process of election? For an answer, Paul now cites them as "Israel." In

other words, the majority is spoken of as the whole. "Israel has not obtained what it seeks."

The nation has failed to attain the very thing for which it was continuously noted. In the world of the Roman empire, the majority of the people groups sought after power and wealth. Although this was certainly the case with many individual Jews, the overall aim of the nation wasn't power or wealth, but righteousness. However, in their search for attaining righteousness, they became blinded to the only One who could make them righteous.

We could ask, "Whose fault was this?" Directly from Scripture, we can see that it was a national, self-inflicted wound because there were individuals who in fact did recognize Christ's coming. Zachariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, heard and believed. Simeon and Anna who saw the Child when He was brought to the temple recognized Him.

From this springboard came the apostles and disciples and others noted in the gospel record. After the resurrection, 3000 were saved on the day of Pentecost. These and others recorded in the gospels and Acts show that even though Israel failed in this regard, a portion of the nation obtained the favored status of God's election; they became the elect. But if the remnant is the elect, then there is an opposite side to the coin. Paul explains that "the rest were blinded."

The word used for "were blinded" is the Greek word *epōrōthēsan*. It comes from a word which was applied to bony formations on joints, a callus or a spur. The thought then is something that is petrified or covered with a callous. In the New Testament, it is used only five times, each in a figurative sense. John 12:40 uses it when citing Isaiah -

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,  
Lest they should see with their eyes,  
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,  
So that I should heal them." John 12:40

Here we have a question to consider then. "How were they hardened?" The Bible doesn't tell us. In the case of the elect, it says that they have obtained that status "according to the election of grace" (v. 6). Thus, it was of God. However, in the case of those who were hardened, the Bible only notes that it is so, but without designating the source.

Those who recognized the Messiah were given grace; those who rejected Him were hardened. What can be inferred then is that the action is passive on the part of God concerning their hardening. To understand this, think of a group of people stuck in a large pit in the ground. In the pit are the instructions to get out of the pit, but they lack the skills to fully comply with the instructions. In the instructions though, it tells that a way will be made available by the author who wrote the instructions for them to get out of the pit.

Eventually, the author of the instructions lowers a line down for the people. Those who recognize that this is the pre-mentioned way of getting out of the pit take hold of the rope and are pulled out. Despite this, there are those who stubbornly set about and continue to work on the instructions, never realizing that those instructions, though complete, are incapable of getting the people out of the pit, not because the instructions were faulty, but because the skills needed to comply with them were lacking. Only what the instructions promise - the rope - could do it. They become so obsessed with following the instructions, that they actually miss the grace of the rope. Eventually, the pit consumes them. What they sought they did not find, and it was solely their own fault for failing to lift their eyes and see that a way had been prepared for them. The hardening was passive - "Ok, have it your way..."

Life application: The instructions from God, in fact, point to the proper means of being reconciled to God. The law was intended to lead the people to understand their need for Christ, but in their zeal for the law, they missed its purpose. This still happens today. People fail to see Christ as the fulfillment and the end of the law and attempt to reinsert the law where it doesn't belong, thus condemning themselves. Christ is the end of the law for all who believe; therefore, believe and be saved.

*Heavenly Father, what good is the law unless the law has an end. Shall I spend eternity attempting to do what is impossible? Can I ever be free from this bondage? The answer is "Yes!" In Christ, I am free. The law is fulfilled in Him and He is the fulfillment of it! I thank You for His work on my behalf. I receive the work of Christ, the Author and Finisher of my faith! Amen.*

**Just as it is written:**

**"God has given them a spirit of stupor,  
Eyes that they should not see  
And ears that they should not hear,  
To this very day." Romans 11:8**

The previous verse noted that the elect had obtained what the majority had missed because they were blinded. To support this, Paul reaches again to Scripture which prophesied these things in advance. He begins with, "Just as it is written..." Though this is not a direct quote, it holds the same intent and sentiment of his citations. These are from the following verses found in Deuteronomy and Isaiah -

"Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day." Deuteronomy 29:4

"For the Lord has poured out on you  
The spirit of deep sleep,  
And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets;  
And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers." Isaiah 29:10

Understanding these references, Paul states that "God has given them..." It is God who is both in control of all things and who knows the end from the beginning. He knows the wickedness of the heart of man and their propensity for turning from Him. Saying, "God has given them" doesn't necessarily mean God actively did this, but that the action could have occurred passively. God gives the law; the people ignorantly turn from the law on their own accord because they find it offensive; God said it would happen and therefore it can be stated "God has given them."

A perfect example of this today is the complete turning away from God's fixed and unchanging laws in the church. Homosexual marriage, for example, has now been condoned in many major denominations and others are running toward the same pulpit of perversion to join in the debauchery. They have been given what they desired by their own wicked inclinations. They hear, but they don't understand, and they see but they don't perceive. Jesus speaks this way about Israel in Matthew 13:10-17.

The state which God has given them is first called "a spirit of stupor." Here is the only use of the word *katanyxeōs* in the New Testament. The word specifically indicates a violent strike; the figurative intent then is the stunned bewilderment which happens after such a strike, as if "seeing stars." The word of God is direct and poignant. It relates absolute truth and often it is so directed at the sins of those who read it that it cuts to the deepest seat of emotion.

When this happens, it can affect a great change in the soul who so desperately wants to be free of the addiction or perversion which is pointed out. But the opposite is also true. Some who are confronted with the direct and unwavering truth of Scripture mentally cut off the assault as if it were a ridiculous lie. When this happens, the one so assailed

will attempt to diminish the truth of what was read by downplaying the divine source of the words; making personal exceptions for what is stated; outright rejection of God because of what they feel is "unfair"; etc. Instead, a "spirit of stupor" sets in.

Along with this come "eyes that they should not see." A spirit of stupor will immediately cloud one's vision of what is right. A sad example of this is still seen in the people of Israel today. They have twice been exiled for disobedience. During the second dispersion, which began in AD70, there were 2000 years of calamity. Whose fault was this? If one reads and accepts the words of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, then there can only be one acceptable answer - the wounds were self-inflicted. But their eyes will not allow the message to reach into the heart. Instead of acceptance, there is projection of the fault in outward directions.

Even when told by others that God's word is true and is to be taken at face value, there is no understanding because they have also been given "ears that they should not hear." The stupor blocks out the information. There is a stubborn refusal to acknowledge personal guilt and personal responsibility. And this has been going on, according to Scripture, for 3500 years. Moses told them of their attitude, Isaiah and the other prophets repeated it, and the New Testament continues on as a witness to it, even "to this very day."

Only when a person is willing to remove the blinders and acknowledge that they are part of the problem and not a part of the solution will they see Scripture for what it truly is - God's word. It is truthful, predictive, unchanging, and mixed with warnings of wrath for disobedience and favor for obedience. God is God, we are humans. Until we accept Him at His word, there will only be resistance leading to a spirit of stupor.

Life application: Though Paul is speaking of Israel's spirit of stupor, blindness, and deafness, this same state applies to any who look at God's word and then dismiss a portion or all of it as unreliable. A perfect example of this is the ordination of women to become pastors. Scripture prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). However, this is rejected, not based on any reasonable defense, but because of a spirit of stupor. Whatever the word says has been given by God. He is God, we are humans. We must accept His word, lest we be found to fight against Him.

*Lord God, if I were to take Your word, in context and at face value, would I be in compliance with it today? My hope, desire, and aim are to be pleasing to You, but how can I be unless I am obedient to what You state? Help me Lord, from this day forward, to learn and then properly apply Your word to my life. Take away the spirit of stupor and open my eyes to the absolute truth and surety of Your word. To Your glory I pray. Amen.*



**And David says:**

**“Let their table become a snare and a trap,  
A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Romans 11:9**

Verse 9 is an amended quote from Psalm 69:22 -

"Let their table become a snare before them,  
And their well-being a trap."

"And David says," is no different here than saying, "Scripture says" or "God has said." This is the wondrous nature of the Word of God. What is spoken by a man is actually a thought breathed out by God through that man. There is a harmonious blending of God's word with the uniqueness of the person relaying that word, in style, in emotion, and in thought.

This psalm is used on several occasions in the New Testament as pointing to Christ. The verse just prior to this one, verse 21, is certainly Messianic in nature -

"They also gave me gall for my food,  
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Matthew 27:34 shows its fulfillment in the offering of sour wine mixed with gall to Christ at the crucifixion. Understanding this context, we can see that Paul's citing of it is not intended as an imprecation by him toward the Jews, but rather as prior predictions which would come about on them. Because of their rejection of Jesus, the One who fulfilled their Scriptures which are the written basis of what established them as a people, the result would be that God would "let their table become a snare and a trap."

The table is the place where one partakes in God's blessing in the most personal manner. It is a place of sharing in the abundance the Lord provides, relaxing while enjoying it, and fellowshiping with those who unwind at the same table. The symbolism of it is seen in a most notable way in the 23rd Psalm -

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies..."

David's table was set "in the presence of" his enemies. In other words, he could relax and enjoy God's abundance without fear. His enemies were subdued and so nothing would disturb his moment of ease, fellowship, and nourishment. In contrast to this, the Jews who had rejected Christ were now Christ's enemies. In this special place where

they would look for peace, blessing, and abundance, instead they would find a "snare" and a "trap."

The snare is the Greek word *pagida*. It carries the notion of "making fast." An anchor, for example, is called a *pagis*; it makes fast the ship. This implement then is used figuratively in a moral sense to steal away the spiritual blessings that the Lord would otherwise provide. Each time this word is used in the New Testament it follows along with this figurative sense.

The "trap" is the Greek word *theran*, literally "a hunting." This is its only use in the Bible, but the sense of it is possibly that of a net. The snare holds the prey, the net or trap is used to capture it for the kill. From this point, the words move on to say that the table will become "a stumbling block" and a "recompense." The stumbling block is what one trips over. It is the sin that ends in ruin. Citing this indicates that the sin of rejecting Christ will first snare and entrap them and this will lead to their downfall. And in this downfall is found their "recompense" which is their just retribution.

The sequence of these words is logical, one following the other to show the inevitable result of rejecting Christ. In a lesser way, it is the natural course of any sin. If one steals, the very thing they thought would enrich them first becomes a snare; they are lured in and held fast. Then they are hunted and trapped because of their action. What they had hoped would be for their benefit is what caused them to fall, and the result of their fall is arrest and imprisonment. If this is the natural course for sin, how stern must be the ultimate sin of rejecting God's offering of His Son?

Life application: Sin bears consequences - for our life, our health, our peace, our family, our future. Of all sin, the rejection of Jesus is one that, if not corrected before death, will lead to the punishment of every other sin and eternal condemnation. This message needs to be explained, sometimes more than once, to those around us. There is pardon of all sin in Christ; there is the eternal punishment of all sin without Christ.

*A pardon bearing my name... O God, I remember the day I heard the good news of peace and reconciliation between You and me - the forgiveness of sins because of the shed blood of Christ. Your word told of His coming in detail, assuring us that the message was true. And when He came, He proved it just as Your word proclaims. Christ is risen, the pardon is offered, I accept His work. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see,  
And bow down their back always.** Romans 11:10

Here we have a continuation of the quote from verse 9 which is found in the 69th Psalm-

"Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;  
And make their loins shake continually." Psalm 69:23

Like the previous verse, these words are not an imprecation by Paul, but rather are declarations of what will come about because of the Jewish rejection of Christ. And they have certainly been fulfilled literally in the past 2000 years. In a direct quote, the first half of the verse states, "Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see." This isn't speaking of literal blindness, but the spiritual blindness which shows a complete lack of discernment about the issue of Jesus.

This blindness is a self-inflicted wound. They rejected Jesus and sent Him to the cross, but they still had a chance to repent of their ways and acknowledge His lordship, proven by the resurrection. Instead, they willingly kept the matter under wraps. Matthew 28:11-15 shows us the beginning of this deception -

"Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day."

The blindness was there before the crucifixion and it remains even now. Jesus stated the reason for this by His own mouth -

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19

The people would rather be blind and live in darkness than see and be in the light. What they desired, they received. Thus, the declaration of the psalm is fulfilled in a self-inflicted manner, once again showing that condemnation is both a choice and yet is deserved by all. One must willingly choose the light by accepting Christ as Scripture reveals Him. Faith then is a step into light, not a blind leap within the darkness.

The second half of the quote diverts from the Hebrew which states, "make their loins shake continuously." Instead, Paul says, "bow down their back always." The sense is

actually the same. When one is given a heavy burden to carry, their loins will shake from the strain of the load. The result of that strain is to be bowed down. The Greek word means "to bend together." The idea is that because of the heavy load, they will bend completely in half.

This picture is one of servitude and bondage. The master directs the load; the slave carries it. This load has been the continued burden of both the law and all of the additions which have been added to it. The burden of the observant Jew is simply overwhelming, so much so that many Jews have simply turned and become completely secular. Rather than the freedom which is found in Christ, there is the self-inflicted bondage of the law. Again, this is certain because Jesus specifically offered a better way-

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

Life application: Christ is the fulfillment and end of the law for all who believe. For those who reject Him, there is only bondage, disillusionment, and blindness. Be sure to tell those who haven't heard the good news that in Him there is an easy yoke with a light burden.

*Lord God, I simply refuse to carry the cumbersome yoke and the heavy burden any longer. Too long I tried to be pleasing to You in my own right, but for every deed, there was the question, "Is it enough?" In Christ, I don't need to ask. His work is all that I need - a righteousness which is given to me by faith in His work. This is what You ask of me, and this is what I accept... I trust Jesus alone. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.** Romans 11:11

Paul asks an obvious question based on verses 7-10 and words it in the form of an objection, "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?" He has already demonstrated that God has not cast away His people by showing that there was a faithful remnant at this time. What about the future? When this remnant generation has passed, what then?

To "stumble that they should fall" implies that eventually they will hit the ground and not be able to get back up. This isn't the case at all. It is neither absolute nor is it permanent. It isn't absolute because there was and continues to be a remnant. It isn't

permanent because the Old Testament promises were to national Israel, not the church. They can only find their fulfillment in the land of Israel and in the people of Israel.

Yes, they have stumbled, but they will be able to stand aright once again; they have not fallen entirely. As an emphatic way of demonstrating this, he exclaims, "Certainly not!" Other versions state this widely translated term, "God forbid!" or "May it never be!" etc. And the reason, as amazing as it may seem, is given, that "...through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles."

God's promises to national Israel are not transferable. They are unconditional in the sense that they will be fulfilled, but they are conditional in the sense that they will not be fulfilled until Israel is found to be in a state of obedience. This goes back to the promises and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. And so, in His infinite wisdom, God determined to use the salvation of the Gentiles as a point of provocation to Israel, to bring them to national repentance.

As clear as Paul's statement is here, it's astonishing to see how many people can't see this and instead come up with an endless stream of excuses and ideologies which attempt to show how Israel has, in fact, fallen entirely. But what is written is clear - "through their fall" meaning the Jews, "salvation has come to the Gentiles." The term gentile is applied to anyone on earth other than a Jew. To all people groups, salvation is now offered. This salvation is apart from the law which Christ fulfilled. Now salvation is applied to any who place their faith in Him.

And this marvelous gift has been granted in order "to provoke" the Jews to jealousy. It's been a long 2000-year period and throughout it some have been provoked, thus making up the remnant God has faithfully preserved. At some point in the future, this remnant will turn into a national movement and "all Israel will be saved."

Life application: A day is coming when Christ will return and rule in the midst of His people, national Israel. Today, they haven't called on Him, but yet He has returned them in preparation for that wondrous time. Remember to pray for and support Israel. The times are coming to their fulfillment as is evidenced by the return of this wayward group to their ancient homeland.

*Lord God, it seems like every day there are things which take up my time, divert my eyes from You, and lead me down paths that I wish I hadn't taken. And yet, when I look back, I can see how things actually turned out better than what I originally expected. And so, I know that You are there, working through my faults for my good and Your glory. You are simply wonderful. Amen.*

**Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! Romans 11:12**

Again, Paul's words to us in this verse show brightly and clearly, even to the doubter, that there was a plan for the return of the Jewish people - as a collective whole - to a right standing with the Lord. He just got done telling the gentiles (to whom he is the apostle) that Israel certainly hadn't stumbled to a permanent fall. Instead, their stumbling is what allowed the gentiles to be a part of God's plan of salvation. And in turn, the gentile's salvation would "provoke them to jealousy."

This obviously hasn't happened yet, and the state of such a national conversion even now seems unlikely. So, what is it that would bring an entire nation to such a point? A good guess would be the rapture of the church. This is an event which is very precisely laid out by Paul in his writings, and which is actually prefigured in the Old Testament. If this occurs, the mindset of Israel may quickly change. A host of gentiles and a remnant of Jewish Christians suddenly disappearing would certainly be a strong impetus for self-reflection.

Regardless of whether this is what happens or not, something will awaken Israel to the truth of their long-rejected Messiah. When they turned their back on Him, it resulted in a fall which has meant "riches for the world." Their loss meant Gentile gain in two ways. First, as God's plan of salvation moved from them to the church, the abundant blessings of Christ have been lavishly poured out upon a people who were not a people.

Secondly, while the land of Israel lay in ruins, the Jews have been scattered about the world. Those nations who received them and tended to them certainly were lavished with God's blessing in accordance with the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those who blessed them, in turn have been blessed.

In both earthly and spiritual matters, their fall has certainly meant riches for the world. It has truly received wealth and abundance during this dispensation. But it is, in fact, only a dispensation, not a permanent arrangement. This is seen in Paul's next words, "...and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" Two contrasting words are used. The first, "failure" is the word *hēttēma*. It indicates a diminishing or a degradation; a removal of their special privileged status. And "fullness" is the word *pleroma*. This is a filling, such as a cup.

What is being relayed is that the current arrangement is temporary. Regardless of how the church perceives itself, there is currently a lack in what should be without the state of Israel being in favor with God. Thus, without them, the cup isn't full. Albert Barnes

(1798-1870) lived long before the re-establishment of Israel, but he took this passage at face value. Not knowing what God would do after his lifetime, his comments on this verse state, "In what way, or when, this shall be, we know not. But it is easy to see, that if the Jewish people should be converted to the Christian faith, they would have facilities for spreading the truth, which the church has never had without them."

After this, he listed four major reasons why this is so. With relatively few changes in his thoughts, the truth of his comments still holds true. His insights, without realizing there would be a re-gathering of the people to Israel, are worth noting:

"(1) they are scattered in all nations, and have access to all people.

(2) their conversion, after so long unbelief, would have all the power and influence of a miracle performed in view of all nations. It would be seen why they had been preserved, and their conversion would be a most striking fulfillment of the prophecies.

(3) they are familiar with the languages of the world, and their conversion would at once establish many Christian missionaries in the heart of all the kingdoms of the world. It would be kindling at once a thousand lights in all the dark parts of the earth.

(4) the Jews have shown that they are eminently suited to spread the true religion. It was by Jews converted to Christianity, that the gospel was first spread. Each of the apostles was a Jew; and they have lost none of the ardor, enterprise, and zeal that always characterized their nation. Their conversion would be, therefore, to give to the church a host of missionaries prepared for their work, familiar with all customs, languages, and climes, and already in the heart of all kingdoms, and with facilities for their work in advance, which others must gain only by the slow toil of many years."

Life application: If great scholars of the past could anticipate the Jewish conversion to the true faith of Christ, how much more should we who now see the marvel of the re-established nation? Ezekiel 37 shows that Israel would first become a united people again and only after that would they receive the Spirit (verses 11-14). Have faith that God is readying this select group for spiritual re-birth. Pray for them - to see what for so long they have been blinded to.

*Heavenly Father, it's true that You have established the nations. You build them up and tear them down according to Your purposes. For those who honor You, there is the expectation of blessing and abundance. But for those who turn away, there is the expectation of wrath and judgment. I sense that it is the time to pray for my nation; we have certainly turned from You. Help us to turn back before it's too late. Amen.*

**For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ... Romans 11:13**

The context of what is being said in Romans 11:13 is important. Paul has been speaking about the Jewish nation's rejection of Christ which resulted in the message going to gentiles. They in turn readily accepted it. Paul's ministry to the gentiles is a ministry for their benefit, but which is ultimately intended to lead back to the conversion of Jews.

In other words, his work should be taken as an interim ministry (albeit of unknown duration). The church has its role during this dispensation, but it is not the end of the story concerning God's kingdom on earth; the restoration of Israel will initiate that. Only when Israel as a nation calls on the Lord will the kingdom age come. This was explained in some detail in the Romans 1:1 commentary.

Paul here first notes his ministry to the gentiles, "I speak to you Gentiles..." He was personally commissioned by Jesus in Acts 9:15. This ministry was to bear the name of Jesus "before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." In his usual custom, when he arrived at a new city, he would first go to the synagogues and speak to the Jewish believers. However, his ministry was unique in that it was intended for gentile instruction. He explicitly states it here... "inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles." This same thought is conveyed time and again in the New Testament, such as in Acts 15:12, Galatians 1:16, Galatians 2:7-8, Ephesians 3:8, 1 Timothy 1:7, 2 Timothy 1:11 and elsewhere.

All of his personal letters are written to gentile churches and gentile peoples - Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Hebrews, which is unnamed, is an explanatory and transitional letter between Paul's church-age letters and those to follow. Its title, "Hebrews", shows that it is intended for a Jewish audience. It is intended to wake them up and show them that the Old Testament is only pointing to the greater work of Christ. The letters by James and Peter, are directed specifically to Jewish believers. John's letters, like his gospel and Revelation, follow a unique path which combines a message to both Jews and Gentiles. Jude follows the example of John.

By noting the structure and layout of the New Testament, Paul's statement becomes quite clear. The message went first to the Jews. After that, Paul was introduced to transition the message to the gentiles, but his writings have the final intent of leading back to the Jews (as will be noted in the coming verses). Because of this astonishing pattern which is beautifully laid out in the structure of the Bible and lived out through Paul, he states, "I magnify my ministry."



His ministry is a turning point in redemptive history which ushered in (so far) 2000 years of gentile conversions. And yet, his writings are intended to have a profound effect on the Jewish people as well, turning their hearts to the knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. How is that possible when what he writes is directed to the gentiles? Because eventually it will be understood that the gentiles had it right. How and when the nation of Israel will realize this is yet unknown, but as noted in the Romans 11:12 commentary, it may be the rapture of the church, a tenet taught by Paul. Whatever it is, when it occurs, Israel will finally open their eyes concerning their Messiah, Jesus.

Life application: Paul magnified his ministry, not himself. Everyone has something which can be done for the Lord, but it shouldn't become a point of boasting except in how it glorifies Him.

*Glorious Lord, surely every child's face is unique and is a reflection of Your work. Every sunrise is a constantly changing painting which adorns the sky with color and beauty. The stars are aligned by Your wisdom and the motion of the universe is timed in perfection. Everything I see around me tells me that You are wise, loving, and awesome. How I love to ponder Your majesty. Amen.*

**...if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. Romans 11:14**

The process of how salvation occurs is debated over and strange views have arisen throughout the years concerning it. In Genesis 5 it says, "So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." This verse says little about the process which elicited this favored status, but what it does say is sufficient, "Enoch walked with God." It is apparent that this was a volitional act of his free will.

Likewise, in the very next chapter the Bible says, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This was a voluntary turning away from God and it is highlighted by the contrasting fact that "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God." Noah voluntarily chose the right path.

Here in Romans 11:14, we see this concept fully supported by Paul's zeal for his own people, his "countrymen according to the flesh." He just stated in the previous verse that as the apostle to the Gentiles, he magnified his ministry. This was so that, "if by any means" he might "provoke to jealousy those who are" of the Jewish race. Paul's efforts would be utterly futile if free-will wasn't a consideration in our salvation, but it is.

What would be the point of God directing the salvation of people, as the Bible records, if free-will is excluded from the process? If free-will is excluded, why have prophets continuously called out for repentance year after year for millennia? Why meticulously record the generations of humanity, the dispensations of time, and the covenants made between God and man? Why would the prophetic word be issued that a Messiah was coming and then provide countless pictures and patterns for us to study so that we could be sure of who He was when He arrived? And why send apostles and prophets after His coming who then called out and begged for people to hear and receive the truth if God is going to exclude free-will in the process? Not only does it make no sense, it makes the entire process out to be a sham. It would be the most ineffective manner one could think of.

If God excludes man's free will, none of this would have been necessary. But man bears God's image, and he has been given a choice to accept or reject the good news which God has prepared in the sending of His Son. For Paul's broken heart, his people, Israel, had all but rejected this good news and so he was selected by the Lord to be the apostle to the gentiles. The message would continue on and the banner would be passed from Israel to the gentile nations. Paul knew this, but he also knew that his message could still have an effect on his people. It could provoke them to jealousy "and save some of them."

The free will of man isn't excluded in the process of salvation; it is highlighted. The fact that there is a Bible at all shows us that this is so. God hasn't wasted His time. Instead, He has used the most effective way of all to call His creatures back to Himself. It serves the greatest good for the greatest number and it demonstrates wisdom and love for the creatures who have voluntarily turned from Him and whom He desires to voluntarily turn back to Him.

Life application: Salvation is an offer from God and a choice by each person. After salvation, the choices don't stop. Will we choose to grow in Christ or stagnate? Will we worship God at church or sit at home and watch football? Will we read our Bible or play on the computer? Use your post-salvation choices wisely; heavenly rewards and losses await.

*O God, there was a moment in my life when I received Jesus, but since that time, I've not honored that choice as I could have. I've spent less time in Your word than I have at my computer. I've skipped my times of worship in order to watch sports. I've turned down offers to help others in order to do the things I like to do. Lord, today I ask for a new direction and a new heart; a greater desire to honor You. Help me to honor that precious moment when I received Jesus. Amen.*

**For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? Romans 11:15**

The introductory conjunction "for" is given to tie verse 15 back to verses 11 and 12 which spoke of the fall and then the fullness of the Jewish people. Verses 13 and 14 were related to Paul's ministry to the gentiles which carries with it the secondary purpose of provoking Israel to jealousy. When this is affected, there will be great things in store for the world.

Paul says, "if their being cast away..." this is their "fall." The nation of Israel failed to believe in Christ's work and so they rejected Him. Because they rejected Him, God rejected them. Their fall though is what meant "reconciling of the world." This ties directly back to verse 12 - "their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles." Paul is restating these things, after the explanation of the purpose and intent of his ministry (that dual-purpose noted above) to demonstrate that something even greater is anticipated in the future.

Here is the thought -

1. Israel was cast away for disobedience; a tragic occurrence.
2. Because of Israel's fall, the greater good would be served by bringing reconciliation between the gentile world and God. The word "reconciling" is the Greek word *katallege*. This word in Romans 5:11 is translated as "atonement" by many translators. The atonement of Christ's shed blood was made possible because the Jews rejected Him. If they had accepted Him, the obvious result would have been the immediate initiation of the Kingdom Age. The Church Age would never have occurred.
3. Therefore, if the fall was tragic, but it led to something wonderful, how much more wonderful will it be when they are restored! What is offered as a question by Paul in some translations is meant as an exclamation.

When Israel finally accepts their long-rejected Messiah, there will be life from the dead. This is taken in two ways by scholars. The first is that it is speaking of the spiritual revitalization of national Israel. They are already once again a people, but they are spiritually dead to the things of God found in Christ. However, a time is prophesied (in numerous Old Testament passages) that they will again be quickened to this spiritual vigor. One key passage is found in Ezekiel 37:11-14 -

"Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it," says the Lord.'"

Based on the surrounding context in this passage from Ezekiel, this is certainly speaking of a spiritual awakening, not a literal resurrection. The banner of all spiritual matters will be passed back to them from the church which had carried it during their time of rejection. However, this is certainly not the only "life from the dead" that Paul is speaking of. Paul's letter is being written to "spiritually alive" people. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit and have the assurance (the guarantee - Ephesians 1:13, 14) of eternal life. If this is true, then Paul's words must have more than just a "national Israel" fulfillment or they would be worded differently.

The truth is that there is a point in prophetic history which will bring about "life from the dead" in a literal sense. It isn't just one single moment, but rather an epoch of time. At first there will be the rapture of the church. This is explained, in detail, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. This is physical life from dead bodies; a resurrection.

At some point, probably due to the rapture, Israel will wake up from their slumber and realize who Jesus really is. This will bring about their spiritual revival - life from the dead. After this, at the ending of the seven-year tribulation, there will be another resurrection from the dead. This is noted in several Old Testament passages and in Revelation. Daniel 12:1-3 speaks of it -

"At that time Michael shall stand up,  
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;  
And there shall be a time of trouble,  
Such as never was since there was a nation,  
Even to that time.  
And at that time your people shall be delivered,  
Every one who is found written in the book.  
And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,  
Some to everlasting life,

Some to shame and everlasting contempt.  
Those who are wise shall shine  
Like the brightness of the firmament,  
And those who turn many to righteousness  
Like the stars forever and ever."

Isaiah 26:19 hints at this time as well -

"Your dead shall live;  
Together with my dead body they shall arise.  
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;  
For your dew is like the dew of herbs,  
And the earth shall cast out the dead."

And in the New Testament, John writes of it in Revelation 20:4-6 -

"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

This amazing epoch of time is coming, and probably soon. The graves of Ezekiel 37 have been opened and there is a great standing army in Israel. The ancient prophets noted that only after that happened would they be given the Spirit. It could never have happened before, and it hasn't happened yet, so we are at the cusp of amazing events in world history.

Life application: Though the rapture of the church is dismissed by many theologians, it is explicitly taught in Scripture. One must over-spiritualize much of the Bible to reject what is so carefully recorded for our learning. Israel is back in the land and so these amazing events are coming... may they be soon.

*Glorious God Almighty! Your word says that Israel's acceptance of the gospel will initiate a time of wonder on earth - the Kingdom Age. Around that same time, other great and marvelous events are prophesied. Israel is back in the land and the times are coming to*

*their fulfillment. I am grateful to live in such a wondrous age of hope... Christ is coming again! Amen.*

**For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.** Romans 11:16

Firstfruit... lump... root... branches? Paul was just talking about Israel's being cast away and then returned to favor. What is the connection?

"For" - This is a different conjunction than verse 15. It is actually two words which carry the idea of "if moreover." He is adding to his previous thought and expanding on it. The imagery he will use is meant to show, with all certainty, that even though Israel was cast away, their return is assured; they are not utterly rejected.

And so, in order to substantiate this in a metaphorical way, Paul goes directly to the law which established Israel in the first place, and he pulls out examples which actually verify that this is how God works. First, he says, "if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy." The concept of the firstfruit is a portion of something, such as grain or fruit, being offered to God. This portion then represents the whole. In the case of "the lump" a portion of the first dough which was made into bread after the harvest was cut off and offered to God. This is found in Numbers 15:18-21 -

"When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations."

This "heave offering" is comparable to the "firstfruits." If a portion of the lump is cut off and offered to God, which is then accepted as "holy," then the whole offering becomes sanctified and is holy as well; the sacred portion makes the whole sacred. Bread is bread, but when a portion of a lump is deemed holy, then the whole lump is holy.

The second thought from Paul is that "if the root is holy, so are the branches." Again, he has gone to the law to use a real precept to make a connection in how things work in spiritual matters. In Leviticus 19:23-25, the following is found -

"When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as

uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the Lord. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the Lord your God."

A sapling may be planted anytime by anybody and in any location and it is just a sapling like any other. But in the land of Israel, a sapling is made holy when it is dedicated to God. If it is holy in its roots, which receive the water and nutrients from God's land and His provision, then it is holy in its trunk, in its branches, in its sap, and in its fruit. The holiness permeates the plant.

In these two examples, which follow directly after his note concerning Israel, the intent is to tell us that the Jewish people, as a whole, have been set apart to God. If a portion of them has been sanctified as holy, then the whole is holy. This does not in any way imply that they are all saved, as he will note in the coming verses, but that the people, as a whole, are used for God's purposes.

In support of this, Paul will use Jeremiah 11:6 as a basis for verses 16-24 -

"The Lord called your name,  
Green Olive Tree, Lovely and of Good Fruit.  
With the noise of a great tumult  
He has kindled fire on it,  
And its branches are broken."

The dough and the tree are that which is holy. Each received its holiness from God. When a portion was deemed holy, the whole became holy. Psalm 105:6-15 shows this process. Abraham was selected and set apart by God. From him, that line went through Isaac and then to Jacob. From Jacob, all twelve sons received the sanctification; a collective group of people set apart by God for His service. As Christ is the fulfillment of the promises through this line, then those who are brought into Christ by faith are thus sanctified and made holy also.

Life application: 1 Corinthians 6:11 says that, in Christ you were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. If you are thus made holy, it is incumbent on you to act in a manner worthy of this sacred calling and state.

*Heavenly Father, I cherish Your word because it is the gift You have given to instruct me on who You are and what You have done for us. Without it, I would be a ship tossed about on scary waters, but with it I know that I have a sure foundation in my knowledge*

*of and obedience to Your wondrous Son. As Your child, I desire to be pleasing to You and so I'll keep my nose in Your word and my eyes on Jesus. Amen.*

**And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, ... Romans 11:17**

From the symbolism of this verse, if from nothing else, it should be evident that the church has not replaced Israel. The tree is symbolizing the faith of Abraham and the spiritual covenant blessings associated with that. If individual branches are individual believers but which represent the whole, as must be the case here, then these spiritual blessings can be given to different types of branches on the same tree.

The Bible makes it clear that there is now no distinction between Jew and gentile when in Christ. This is speaking of the benefit of being in Christ, not the individual who is in Christ. In other words, the terms "Jew" and "Gentile" indicate a difference in individual. Likewise, different types of branches indicate a difference in nature.

Paul uses this symbolism to show us that "some of the branches were broken off." From the surrounding context, this is certainly speaking of the disbelieving Jews. They failed to accept the work of God in Christ, and they were cast off as rejected branches. This has opened space for the gentiles. Paul, speaking to the gentiles in this portion of his letter, says "you." This is only speaking of gentiles who, "being a wild olive tree" are not the same as the Jew (in individual nature, not spiritual benefit - as will be seen).

The gentile converts are not a part of the holy tree by nature. They are distinct and separate from it. However, nature when combined with wisdom in gardening allows something to occur apart from the natural order of things. Wild branches can be grafted into cultivated trees. The reason for grafting, as was discovered many millennia ago, is that certain trees are hardier than other trees. They can withstand harsher climates, defend against bugs, produce a variety of tastes within the same fruit type, etc.

The hardy spiritual tree - that of the spiritual blessings which came through Abraham, has "natural branches" from the line of promise: Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Israel. However, at select times prior to Christ's coming, such as the Moabite Ruth, and more especially since Christ's advent, something unusual and wonderful has happened. Wild branches have been "grafted in among them."

Any believing gentiles, by faith in the promises of Christ, "became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree." So there, on the one tree of spiritual nourishment, are



branches of different types which will produce a variety of traits while being sustained by the same life-giving sap. Again, as noted above, this doesn't show a "replacement" but an "addition." The gentiles are grafted into the commonwealth of Israel's spiritual blessings because these blessings flow from the holy root, not because the gentiles have replaced Israel.

Life application: Through faith in God's provision, all are one in the Messiah. Let us thank God for the immense blessing and honor of eternal life, granted because of the work of our Lord Jesus.

*Lord God, I know what mercy truly is when I think about the conduct of my life. How many times have I fallen short of Your holy standard? But despite my ways, You haven't just snuffed me out. Instead, You have allowed me to continue... waiting patiently for me to turn and call on You. And since the day I did, I've continued to err in what You would expect of an obedient child. Thank You for Your patient mercy on me. Amen.*

**...do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.** Romans 11:18

It's common for us to actually rejoice over the fall of others, especially when we have enmity towards them for whatever reason. When our political party wins, we often take as much pleasure in the loss of the other party or candidate as we do in the win we participate in. Seeing a rival sports team get smacked is a pleasure to many, even if that team is playing someone other than the team they support. It is a perverse side of humanity to revel in the downfall of others, but it is a common occurrence.

Paul had a concern that the gentiles would "boast against the branches" which were the Jews who had fallen; the branches that were "broken off" in the previous verse. They may feel justified because it was the Jews who had rejected their Lord and participated in His crucifixion. The question "How could they be so stupid?" must have been a common sentiment at the time. "We figured it out and we don't even have your law or heritage!"

But Paul has already shown that "through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles." How could one boast over such a thing? Rather, they should have remorse and work to evangelize the very people who were now out of favor. Even more, such boasting was something that showed a complete lack of thought concerning the state of those broken off Jews as well as their own personal state. To demonstrate this, Paul reminded them that, "if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

The root is the spiritual heritage which established both the Jews as well as the gentiles. There is one continuous tree by which salvation is derived. The gentiles have been grafted into this tree while the Jews were derived directly from it. Understanding this, and the fact that salvation is dependent on the spiritual heritage found in the tree, he will make the point in the coming verse that boasting is not a well thought through approach to the situation. In fact, it is contrary to sound reason.

Life application: In the church, we may feel that we are superior to the Jews who sit in their synagogues and ignore the Lord who came from them and who is the fulfillment of their Scriptures. We aren't superior. Rather, we recognized what they missed, and we received it by grace through faith. We may have access to the truth, but we are no better than they are. Instead of sitting smugly and boasting over the lost, we need to evangelize them in hopes of opening their eyes. In the case of the Jews, we should make a double effort. As the natural branches of the olive tree, their conversion to Christ can have a most important impact on the continuance of the spreading of the gospel.

*Glorious Lord God, in my struggle to be a pleasing child to You, I take comfort that I am still beloved because of Jesus - even when I fail to adhere to the expectations You have laid out in Your word for me. I know that nothing can separate us again and that You will carry me through to Your heavenly throne. Forgive me when I trip or stray, and please restore me to a proper walk on the right path when I do. Amen.*

**You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."**

Romans 11:19

Paul just told the audience not to boast against the branches and he gave the reason for it - because they are supported by the same root that the broken off branches were supported by. But in the typical way of not clearly thinking an issue through, they may propose that they are somehow better, or more favored, than the branches which had been broken off. And so, Paul preempts such thinking, "You will say then..."

His introduction of this statement shows that he understands and anticipates this type of dialogue. He was trained in rabbinical studies which would have included the study in argumentation for and against a matter. One method would be to introduce a thought prior to the opponent and then to dismantle it. This would leave the thought harder to defend. Politicians are often good at such pre-emptive strikes. This is Paul's approach here.

The argument: "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." In essence, "I have replaced that which was removed from the support of the root; therefore, they must

not be worthy of that support, but I am." This type of thinking hasn't looked at the entire scenario. God is working in and through humanity and only He sees the end from the beginning. With the Bible complete, we have the overall plan, but we still don't see the details. As time unfolds, the details come with it and we can more clearly see what is actually happening.

Paul, however, has been trained by the Lord (Galatians 1:15-17) and knows much of the plan in advance. Therefore, he can rightly argue against faulty views and he can instruct the church more appropriately in matters related to faith.

Life application: We have the general overview of what God intends in redemptive history, but the details are often lacking. As history reveals these details, we may need to reconsider our viewpoint. This is something that is very hard to do for several reasons, but pride of opinion is generally the root of each of them. When history caught up with the plans of the Bible and Israel was restored to her land, the thinking of the church should have changed to accommodate what had occurred, but for many there is an unwillingness to see the truth of the matter. What is coming does include Israel and therefore we need to not fight against God in the process.

*O Wonderful Lord! Here comes the sun to start another day for us. There are so many possibilities ahead. Help me to live rightly in the hours to come and to set my eyes, my heart, and my focus on the eternal. Today could be my last... so let me not waste it in vain pursuit, but rather let it be used to Your glory. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.** Romans 11:20

Paul's pre-emptive argumentation (and what could possibly be based on the spoken sentiments of that time by some counted among the faithful) continues in this verse. He noted that some of the branches of the olive tree were broken off, thus allowing the gentiles to be grafted in. Surely, they must be more favored than the broken off branches, right? But Paul dismisses such a notion.

"Well said" is an adverb meaning "rightly" or "true." In essence, "Yes, they were broken off and you were grafted in; that is correct." He is being extremely tact in his wording, granting a portion of their logic. "The thought is true, and I grant you that, but..." He will thereby make a deflection from their own thought in order to bolster the true intent of the matter. And so, he continues - it was "because of unbelief they were broken off."

These natural branches, which were born into the main root of the tree, were broken off because they failed to accept and believe in God's provision. Having viewed these verses concerning the "branches" thus far, it needs to be questioned whether what is being discussed is concerning the process of election and salvation of individuals or rather the calling to salvation of select groups, meaning "Jew" or "Gentile." Based on the entirety of what has been given by Paul, it must be speaking of the second view - the calling of salvation to these larger categories.

Why is this important to know? It bears heavily on the doctrine of "replacement theology," a concept held among older denominations and also held among cults. Older denominations believe that they have replaced Israel and are thus entitled to the entire scope of blessings and promises which were given to Old Testament Israel. Another example is the cult known as the "Jehovah's Witnesses" who claim that a certain portion of their members are the "144,000" mentioned in the book of Revelation. However, in Revelation this group is divided by the names of the tribes of Israel.

If the type of salvation Paul is speaking of is individual rather than by group, how could they be re-grafted back into the tree (as is noted in verses 23 and 24) if the intended process of restoration is something that will come about at an unknown and distant point in the future (as is noted in verses 25 and 26)? Replacement theology overall, and the mindset of such lesser cults and sects, makes no sense when looked at in the larger context of Paul's words here.

Using the "Jehovah's Witnesses" for example, how could they make such a claim about being the 144,000 if they were broken off branches? They wouldn't be a people now if the promises were future. The same is true with other replacement theology ideas. How could they claim to be a part of the "currently saved" if they were claiming to be the very branches that were broken off. Either the branches are national Israel, or they aren't. If they are, then God has an intention for national Israel in the future. If those branches aren't national Israel, then there is no group now in God's favor according to the gospel because the people who claim to be Israel are the broken off branches. There is no soundness in reason concerning this passage when replacement theology is the consideration.

Rather, the gentiles, who are currently grafted in, have been so grafted because they "stand by faith." We cannot claim superiority over the Jews. They were cast off for disbelief; we are grafted in by faith. The playing field is level, and we all stand or fall by faith alone. And so, Paul gives his warning to those who feel so elevated, "Do not be haughty, but fear." He is telling us to not be smug or over-confident, but to accept our

position with humility. We have been saved by God's grace and there is nothing to boast of concerning this favor. Paul will explain this further in the verses ahead.

Life application: How were you saved? By deeds that made God happy? No. Rather, you came to God through Jesus Christ with empty hands and a rent heart. Don't forget the mercy which was lavished upon you. Remember your salvation with humility and gratitude.

*Heavenly Father, when I read the pages of Your word, I tremble at the beauty and majesty of Your plan. When all seemed hopeless, You sent Jesus. Through Him, I don't need to know if I am "good enough" or have "done enough" to be pleasing to You. Instead, He stands in heaven's court on my behalf - "This one is mine." What a wonderful feeling, I am defended by Jesus! Amen.*

**For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.**

Romans 11:21

The olive tree symbolizes much about Israel. It remains green throughout the year which pictures God's eternal and enduring faithfulness to His covenant promises. Its fatness can be interpreted as the great privileges and honors of being Israel. No other nation has ever been so blessed; no other people have endured and prospered as they have. When cut down, the olive tree will sprout again out of the stump, just as Israel has been cut down and re-sprouted on several occasions. The symbolism of the olive and of Israel goes on in many other ways, all showing us the tie between God and this select group of people.

They are termed by Paul "the natural branches." This is an indication that they are the select and cherished group of people who are God's "special treasure" (Deuteronomy 7:6). Through them God displayed His glory in the parting of the sea. Through them came the Law, given at Sinai. To them was given God's special and chosen portion of land. Through them came the oracles of God, and through Israel came the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. With all of this history, heritage, privilege, and honor one would think that Israel would be safe from judgment. But such isn't the case. Their failures and rejections of God and His word and of His Son, led to them being broken off branches.

Because God looked upon this special group of natural branches and deemed that they were to be broken off, Paul warns the gentiles, "He may not spare you either." If the natural branches can go, how much more easily can the unnatural branches be broken off? Paul hands the gentiles a sobering reminder of their tenuous position. We have been grafted in and we can be cut off again.

Unless one dismisses the doctrine of "eternal salvation," the only logical conclusion is that these verses (as noted in the Romans 11:22 commentary) are speaking of Israel as a group, not as individuals. Not all Jews had or have been cut off. Rather, the majority which speaks of the whole were broken off. In like manner, Paul must be speaking then about the majority, not the individual, concerning gentiles. In other words, the term "He may not spare you" is not speaking of a loss of salvation, but a loss of overall status - the primacy of the gentiles during this dispensation.

Life application: We stand in Christ because of the work of Christ. Let us not forget that He did all the work so that we may receive the many blessings of God in Christ. Be ever thankful for the greatness of the work of Jesus!

*With empty hands and a grateful heart, I come before You O God. There is nothing that I have done which has allowed me to enter into Your presence. I know that only the work of my Lord brought me here. Thank You for Jesus, thank You for the cross, and thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. I will sing Your praises for all eternity for the wonderful goodness You have bestowed upon me. Hallelujah and amen!*

**Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. Romans 11:22**

"Therefore" asks us to go back and consider the preceding verses. Paul spoke of branches being broken off and branches being grafted in. These things were explained so that we could understand what has happened and what could happen based on whether God's people continue in Him or apart from Him. Based on his words, he states "Therefore...."

"Consider the goodness and severity of God." We are asked to reflect on how God deals with man. He is good in His very being and longs to bestow that goodness upon us if we will but receive it. When we do, and when we continue in that goodness, then we are the objects of His favor and the recipients of His many graces. This is how it should be and how God would have it at all times. However, there is a contrast; it is the "severity of God."

When we fail to remain in God's goodness, then the opposite of His goodness is the result. This does not indicate any change in God who is unchanging in His being. Rather, this indicates a positional movement on our part. Imagine a fixed column. If we are in God's good graces because of obedience we will be on one side of the column. If we fail to remain in that state, we move positionally to the other side of the fixed column. Thus,

without change in God, we receive His severity because of our choice of failing to comply.

This is what was prophesied to Israel concerning obedience and disobedience, and this is what resulted from those states. Paul says now that we are no different. Though the spiritual banner has passed to the gentiles, can we expect different treatment from the God who does not change? Of course not! Instead, we can only expect the same treatment.

This is what we need to learn from Paul's introduction - "Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God..." At the same time, God's attributes will be viewed differently by the different groups. During Israel's time of punishment Paul explains, "on those who fell, severity." They have received His judgment because they didn't remain in God's goodness. Contrasting that, he next speaks of what occurred toward the gentiles, "but toward you, goodness."

Israel's fall meant "riches for the world." God's goodness has been lavished upon the gentile peoples. His favor has been directed to a people who are not a people. But there is a caveat concerning our favored status which is "if you continue in His goodness." Israel didn't and they were cut off. The same then, based on the unchanging nature of God, must be true. Speaking to the gentiles, he notes that if they continue in His goodness, they will receive His goodness, "otherwise you will be cut off."

If God's chosen and beloved nation was cut off, especially considering that they are natural branches, then what should the wild branches expect? The same severity: an abrupt change in the situation as they are cut off from His goodness.

Having seen this train of thought, as summed up in this "therefore," it should be evident now that this verse cannot be speaking of individual salvation. In other words, it is speaking on a "group" level, not an "individual" level. This is not a verse which is acceptable to support the erroneous view that one can lose their salvation. Everything must be taken in context or it is a pretext. Disregard any commentary which points to this verse as substantiation for the loss of salvation. If you are in Christ, you are saved - past, present, and future.

Life application: Always check the context of a verse carefully. Who is the thought being addressed to? What do the surrounding verses teach? What is the overall message which is being conveyed? Can this verse stand alone or is it dependent on other verses to make a point? Etc. Keep these things in mind and may your doctrine be pure and undefiled.

*Lord, You have given Your word to us, breathed out by Your Holy Spirit, to guide us, teach us, and testify to us the message of who You are, what You have done for us, and what is to come. I stand on Your word as the ultimate guide for my life, knowing that apart from it come the misguided devices of man. Thank You that I don't have to guess what path to follow, but I have what I need as given by You. Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. Romans 11:23**

Paul is in essence repeating himself in this verse. So far in verses 1 & 2, 11 & 12, and 15 he has indicated that Israel is not completely cut off. He is building on each thought and adding to it so that we can see what has happened and why. Paul repeats the "why" of verse 20. The Jews as a whole (not all individuals) were broken off because of unbelief. Now we are told that this state of unbelief does not have to be final. "If they do not continue in unbelief..."

It has already been hinted that they won't so continue (verse 12) and it will be explicitly stated in verses 25 through 27.

- Being a part of the Olive tree is conditional on belief
- The Jewish people as a whole failed to believe and were broken off
- If they do not continue in unbelief (as is indicated that they won't), they will be grafted in
- Therefore, God will graft them in again because
- God is able to graft them in again

This current state of unbelief is because of their pursuing the law as a means to the end. They will realize this as a faulty approach in the future. Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 3. Pursuing the law leaves a veil over the eyes of those who so pursue it, but "the veil is taken away in Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:14). Such is the work of the Spirit. It is life from the dead; even the long-dead branches which were broken off. God is able to bring them back to life and graft them again into His holy tree.

Life application: Nobody is so far from God that they cannot be brought to spiritual life. And a large part of our work here should be geared towards that premise. Prayer is something we can all participate in. Find the person that you dislike the most in your heart, if there is such a person, and make a concerted effort to pray for them. Christ died for them too.



*Lord, You know that in the recesses of my heart there is bitterness towards some people. I don't like them for my own petty reasons and I'm happy when they're not around me, but yet I am convicted by this. I was once far from You and You drew me near. So, Lord, today, I am praying for those that I am at odds with - for peace, for reconciliation, and for their coming to know Jesus. Thank You for hearing my prayers for them. Amen.*

**For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? Romans 11:24**

Here, we see an explanatory statement of the previous verse - "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." Paul will now expand on this, giving insights into why this is so.

"For" will reveal how God is able to graft the Jews again into the spiritual root, and not only that, but that it is a more likely event than one might expect. Speaking to the gentiles, Paul says, "If you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature..." The natural way of grafting is exactly the opposite. Normally one takes a cultivated branch and grafts it into a wild root. The wild root will already be acclimated to its surroundings. It will be able to withstand the climatic conditions, any indigenous bugs and pests, etc. However, its fruit will be of a lesser quality, possibly of no value at all.

And so, in order to have a tree which can withstand the contrary conditions and yet produce yummy fruit, the cultivated grafts are placed into the wild roots. Hence, you have the hardiness of the life-support and the yummysity of the cultivated graft. The graft remains unchanged, despite its new surroundings. As Paul says, what occurred with the gentiles is that they "were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree..."

The wild graft, with its lesser-quality fruit, is grafted into the higher quality root! This is a humbling thought when rightly considered. It is the Jew who originally...

Has the higher-quality root  
Who also bears the yummiest fruit

So much for boasting on the part of the gentiles! Because of their more noble origins and their ability to more readily accept their own root, "how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"

Paul is asking the gentiles to reflect on what occurred and how it was contrary to what they knew from nature. It is they, not the Jews, who were grafted in this contrary manner. If we readily understood and accepted the message and the spiritual nourishment of Christ, how much more will the Jews when God grafts them in!

This doesn't mean, please understand, that God actively breaks off and grafts. God knows all things in advance, including the coming return of Israel to the life-giving root, but his foreknowledge isn't necessarily causative in nature. He simply knows in advance what will occur and tells us of it before it comes about, asking us to pay attention to both the prophecy and then its fulfillment.

This is why it becomes so important for the church to open their eyes to the return of Israel to their homeland; to their reestablishment as a united people; and to the blossoming Messianic movement among the Jews. God's plans are coming to their fulfillment and Israel, His natural branches, are being grafted into His holy root. At some point, it will become a national movement and a cry for the return of the Lord. What the impetus for this will be is yet uncertain, but it is coming, and it will usher in a time of unmatched wonder on earth. Coming soon to a millennial kingdom near you.

*Life application:* Israel! Pray for Israel and be willing to speak to the Jewish people about the wonder of Christ and how they are actually closer to Him than they realize. Read and know your Old Testament because it is the tie which you can use to connect them to the One who is its fulfillment.

*Lord, I remember the first time I understood the message of Jesus in my heart. I remember that someone took the time to share this wondrous news with me and how it changed my life forever. If that person had stayed home and snacked on popcorn while watching TV, I might never have come to know You. Don't I now need to follow suit? Help me to open my mouth and never shut it again concerning Jesus! Amen.*

**For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Romans 11:25**

Once again Paul introduces his thought with "For..." This will be given to expand on what he said early about "how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" The "natural branches" are the Jewish people. Verse 24 hinted that they will be brought back into the spiritual graces of God; verse 25 shows us this explicitly.

In order to convey this notion, he is going to use several key words to highlight the important nature of what is being relayed - "ignorant," "mystery," "wise," "blindness," and "fullness." And so, he begins with "For I do not desire..." this is an introduction to tell us that what he is about to say is important. He states it in the negative to highlight what he in fact does desire.

"Brethren" is declared to show us that this is a matter which is directed to the body of believers. It is this group, his "brethren" which he desires to impart this important knowledge to. As this is an epistle intended for the duration of the church age, Paul's use of "brethren" then includes us, even to this day. It is not something which is fulfilled yet.

"That you should be ignorant" is a particular phrase that Paul uses to stress the importance of knowing, comprehending, and accepting a particular point. To see other such matters which Paul deems likewise important, refer to Romans 1:13; 1 Corinthians 10:1 & 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:8; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13. In this case, we are asked to not be ignorant of a particular "mystery."

In the New Testament, a "mystery" is something which was hidden in ages past, but is now revealed. Explaining a mystery doesn't necessarily mean that it is yet fulfilled, such as in the case of this verse, but that it is disclosed to now understand what will someday come about. The rapture is an excellent example of such a mystery (see 1 Corinthians 15:51). Concerning the Jews, the Gentiles, the Church Age, and the Kingdom Age, Paul will now reveal this mystery.

Next, he states the reason for the mystery's disclosure - "lest you (meaning the gentiles) should be wise in your own opinion." This is referring back to the overall thought of verses 19-24. We are not to be haughty over the Jews because we are wild branches grafted into the holy tree. They are natural branches. We can easily be broken off again; they can easily be grafted in again. Etc. Because of these things, we are not to be wise in our own opinion.

And the explanation for this is because "blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." It is a lot of information, but the key word here is "until." There is something future to the time of Paul's writings, and even future to us now (as explained above concerning epistles intended for the church age) which is relevant to his discourse on the state of Jewish believers. "Blindness in part" shows us that it is only a portion of the whole. Be it a large portion or a small portion, there are exemptions. "Has happened..." explains that the blindness pertains to Israel in part and

that it was in effect at the time of Paul's letter, a time very early in the church age and even prior to the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the Jews.

"Until" shows us that this blindness will continue unabated for a specific amount of time. When that time is reached, then the partial blindness of Israel will end. And that will come about when "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." The fullness of the gentiles is speaking of a set duration of time and a set number of people.

God is building a temple, with people as "living stones" in that temple. An architect plans the construction of a building to the minutest detail: dimensions, number of materials, placement of things, time until completion, etc. God, who is infinitely wise, has every aspect of His temple contemplated. When the set portion of gentiles are brought into the fold, there will be a removal of the blinders from the Jewish people.

The "fullness of the Gentiles" is not the same as the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) although there is an overlapping of the two. The times of the Gentiles began when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, razed the temple, and exiled the Jews to Babylon. Since then, foreign powers have ruled over Jerusalem. This has continued until today. Even though Jerusalem is under Jewish control, the Temple Mount remains under the authority of the Muslims. And though a temple will again be built on the Temple Mount which will exist through the Tribulation Period (Revelation 11:1, 2), there will still be a defiling Gentile element to it. This is probably referring to the Al Aqsa Mosque which is there now, and which may continue to stand side-by-side with the temple.

In contrast, the "fullness of the Gentiles" is speaking of the Church Age and the grafting in of Gentile believers. Although this technically began at Pentecost as is recorded in Acts 2, it actually started in Acts 8 with the Holy Spirit coming upon those in Samaria and in Acts 10 with the conversion of the household of Cornelius. It really picked up steam at the calling of Paul and with the introduction of His ministry. These key passages in Acts show the transition of the focus from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Life application: No, prophecy isn't fulfilled, and the church hasn't replaced Israel.

*Heavenly Father, I am so excited about the prospect of spending eternity with You. When I read the news, it's usually bad. At times, I wake up feeling crummy. When I get tired, I get cranky. Yes, there is also fun, times when I feel great, and even good news once in a while, but I cannot wait for the day when there is just wonder and delight from moment to moment as I behold Your glory for all eternity. I just can't wait for that day. Amen.*

**And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:  
"The Deliverer will come out of Zion,  
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ... Romans 11:26**

Care and context need to be taken when considering Romans 11:26; care in interpretation of the word "all" in particular, and context as derived from the preceding verses. Without this, many have gone ahead making unfounded assumptions and claims. Paul has just revealed a mystery; a point which was not known until it was disclosed by him. That mystery was "that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."

This is known to us now because Paul revealed it. Because we know this, and because we have 2000 years of church history behind us, we can make unfounded assumptions such as inserting the church, or a sect of the church, into this verse. But the context demands that Paul is speaking about the broken off branches which are Israel, the Jewish people.

Secondly, "all" does not always mean "all" in the ultimate sense. One of countless such examples is found in Mark 1:5 -

"Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins."

Twice in this verse, it says "all." All from Judea and Jerusalem went out and were baptized by John the Baptist. Just imagine the lines! But in Luke 7:30 it says this -

"But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."

So, not "all" were really baptized by John the Baptist. "All" meant something other than "every single person." Instead, it was intended as hyperbole. It was given to show the magnificent number of people who heard and responded; the lines were long, but not everyone was in them. This type of wording is to be found throughout the Bible and on numerous occasions. Even with such words as "all" and "every" there must be a consideration of intent and of context.

Therefore, when Paul says, "And so all Israel will be saved..." it must be taken in such a light. He has already shown that "branches were broken off." This state has continued for 2000 years. None of the broken off branches are saved. Nor are any which remain separated from the holy root at this time. Nor will those branches be saved which

haven't been re-grafted in during the tribulation period. "All Israel" is speaking of a specific time in the future. And Paul shows us when this will be in his citing of Isaiah 59:20 -

"The Redeemer will come to Zion,  
And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,'  
Says the Lord."

After the time of the "fullness of the Gentiles" and upon completion of the "times of the Gentiles" Jesus will return to Israel and deliver them. Zechariah 12 details this and it is only speaking of Israel the people in Israel the land. The church was still a mystery at the time of Zechariah's writings; a mystery not fully understood even at the time of the ascension of Christ. At that momentous event, we see the following discourse between the apostles and Jesus -

"Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'"  
Acts 1:6, 7

Even after their forty days of instruction from the Lord, the apostles were still thinking of and expecting the Kingdom Age when Christ would rule from Zion. This is a specific time which is detailed throughout the Old Testament, but is highlighted, for example, in passages such as Isaiah 2:2-4 -

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days  
That the mountain of the Lord's house  
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,  
And shall be exalted above the hills;  
And all nations shall flow to it.  
Many people shall come and say,  
'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
He will teach us His ways,  
And we shall walk in His paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
And rebuke many people;  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,

And their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war anymore."

Jesus didn't tell the apostles that they had misinterpreted those verses. Nor did He tell them that the church now assumed this role. They expected Israel to be the head of the nations and the law to go forth from her and Jesus didn't correct them on this; it remained an unchanged tenet of their belief system. Instead of correcting them, Jesus merely told them to get about the business of spreading the gospel and leave times and dates to the Father.

The New Covenant, promised to Israel in Jeremiah 31:31, will be realized on a national scale at some point in the future, but there are still seven years allocated to Israel (see Daniel 9:24-27) before this occurs where they will live under law. All Israel will be saved in the sense that the nation will be delivered at Christ's second coming. They will triumph over their enemies and the world will enter a new age and a new dispensation (see Revelation 19 for the exciting details).

Life application: When reading the Bible, context and intent must be considered. Proper application of these and other principles will ensure a right understanding of what God is doing in human history. Running ahead without such care can only lead to confusion and even heresy.

*Lord God, what You speak stems from Your very being. There is no confusion between the two and there is nothing less important about what Your word says concerning You than there is about who You are. May my doctrine be pure, and may I never fail to handle Your word with the minutest care and the awesome fear that it deserves. Thank You for Your word. Amen.*

**For this is My covenant with them,  
When I take away their sins. Romans 11:27**

As with the preceding verse, this one needs to be taken in context. It is tied directly to the thought of verse 26 and should be read as a whole -

"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:  
'The Deliverer will come out of Zion,  
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;  
For this is My covenant with them,  
When I take away their sins.'"

More than just a quote tied to another quote from a different passage of Scripture as Paul often does, the citing of verse 27 follows directly after the previous quote from Isaiah 59 which was used in verse 26. Here is the entire original citation from that chapter -

"The Redeemer will come to Zion,

And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,'

Says the Lord.

'As for Me,' says the Lord, 'this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants,' says the Lord, 'from this time and forevermore.'"

Isaiah 59:20, 21

Paul is stating that what was spoken to Isaiah was future to Isaiah's time. But even more, it was future to Paul's time as well. As Paul is the apostle to the gentiles and because his epistles are doctrine for the church age, then "when I take away their sins" must be yet future to us even now. National Israel will be delivered, according to God's "covenant with them."

If one reads commentaries from great scholars of the 17th - 19th centuries, it is evident that they, long before Israel was re-established as a national entity, felt that this was speaking of a future time of Jewish acceptance of Christ. Albert Barnes felt that "God will doubtless convert the Jews, as he does the Gentiles, by human means, and in connection with the prayers of his people..." He couldn't foresee this as an actual return to the land, nor an actual return of Jesus to them, but he understood that the Jews would be converted in a massive way in the future.

Adam Clarke said that, "It may not be amiss to subjoin here a collection of those texts in the Old Testament that seem to point out a restoration of the Jewish commonwealth to a higher degree of excellence than it has yet attained." After stating this, he cites 32 Old Testament passages which he says specifically applied to national Israel and which will be enjoyed by them in the future. He understood, because the Bible teaches, that these promises were never intended for the church.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown states the following concerning this: "Those who believe that there are no predictions regarding the literal Israel in the Old Testament, that stretch beyond the end of the Jewish economy, are obliged to view these quotations by the apostle as mere adaptations of Old Testament language to express his own predictions [Alexander on Isaiah, &c.]. But how forced this is, we shall presently see." These scholars



clearly understood that replacement theology is "forced" and unnatural. It is a contrivance of man and not of God.

The list of such scholars continues on with the common element among them that they believed in a literal interpretation of these passages. The main principle concerning such interpretation is, "If a passage can be taken literally then it should be taken literally, unless there is a compelling reason for it not to be so taken." Unfortunately, though this is a principal element of biblical interpretation, and even though there is no "compelling reason" for dismissing a literal interpretation of Romans 11:26 & 27, far too many people simply dismiss the passage as "spiritual."

And this, inexcusably, continues on even after the miraculous return of Israel the people to Israel the land. Their current state of disobedience is irrelevant. The covenant was from God and therefore it is inviolable. He is working in the world, preparing them in advance, for the fulfillment of these sure promises.

Life application: Romans 11 is to be literally interpreted. Accept and believe.

*Alone in a sea of trouble and turmoil - Israel is becoming more and more isolated as each new day dawns. I fear that even the president of her strongest ally can be counted among those who are working against her for evil. But through Jesus I am Your child, O God. As Your child I pray for Israel, I support Israel, and I petition You on behalf of Israel. Thank You for hearing my prayer for them. Amen.*

**Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.** Romans 11:28

"Concerning the gospel..." Because of their rejection of the good news (meaning Israel as is evident from the preceding verses), it is determined that the 'they' "are enemies for your sake."

As Paul is writing to the gentiles, this tells us that the bond of fraternal love found in Christ is severed towards those who reject Him, including those from His select and special group of people. Their selection is noted, for example, in Deuteronomy 7:6 -

"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."

However, on another level, that of "election," Paul goes on to say that "they are beloved for the sake of the fathers." The "fathers" are those to whom the promises were made. They include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Israel. If one considers Paul's use of "fathers" as the same concept as the "patriarchs," then this would also include David who is, along with the others, termed a patriarch in Acts 7:8.

This verse seems internally contradictory, but "enemies" is being used in opposition to "beloved" to show a distinction between the two which is reflected on different levels. They are cut off from the holy tree for the purpose of corporate blessing, and yet they are still viewed with an end-purpose in mind. God will continue to keep them as a people as He covenanted with them -

"Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God." Leviticus 26:44

The context of Leviticus 26:14-43 shows that God in no way approves of their conduct during their time of exile, but the covenant bond (26:44) is stronger than the consequences of their disobedience, extreme as those consequences may be. To be sure, God does not possess changing human emotions as we do. Rather, these terms are applied to Him who is unchanging to show exactly that; His character doesn't vacillate as we move in relation to Him.

Regardless of whether the church is now in God's favor and Israel is currently an "enemy" for the sake of the gospel, it is unthinkable that those promises made to His chosen people should ever be revoked, fail, or be replaced by another group. What He has promised to Israel must stand, and in fact it will stand.

Life application: When you called on Jesus, the Bible says that you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Just as God will never reject His people, even when disobedient, He will never reject you, even if you fall from whatever position of obedience to His word that you once held. In the end, rewards and losses will result based on your conduct, but your salvation will never again come into question.

*Heavenly Father, I truly know what mercy is. Before meeting Jesus, I had a large debt written to my account, and yet You cancelled it in Christ. Since that day, I have failed You more times than there are stars in the sky... and yet because of Christ, I remain Your child. How marvelous to have such a relationship with my Creator. Surely mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Romans 11:29**

In context, this verse is speaking of Israel's national election, not individual matters concerning God's people. The word for "gifts" here, charisma, is also applied to individual gifts throughout the New Testament. Such gifts include the spiritual gifts given by God to his children for the benefit of the church - ministry, wisdom, healing, etc. The term "calling" is likewise used elsewhere when speaking of the calling of individuals; the invitation extended to come and partake of His gift of salvation.

It is true that such gifts and calling may be irrevocable towards the individual, however, this is not the context of Romans 11:29 and so the context should be maintained. It would be a stretch to use this verse as a stand-alone to justify eternal salvation of the believer or the surety of maintaining the gifts which have been bestowed. Rather, such concepts must be found elsewhere to support those tenets. Only if such is the case (and it is) can the wording of Romans 11:29 be applied to individual matters.

Paul has been speaking of the covenantal promises made to Israel. In this, God has spoken and therefore the thing He has promised, He will fulfill. He will never entirely cut Israel off from being a people or from receiving His graces. They have been called and therefore the calling stands, regardless of their conduct.

Life application: Like Israel who continuously failed to live out their calling and yet has never been cast off, we will also at times fail to live out our own calling. However, the Bible fully supports the notion of eternal salvation. Truly, like national Israel, the individual gifts and calling are irrevocable when we are in Christ.

*Lord God, the surety I have in Christ is the single most comforting part of my existence. While the world around me is falling apart, when friends turn away from me, as politicians continuously renege on the promises they made - Lord, for everything that is contrary to happiness in my life, I have the joy of being in Christ. He is steadfast, faithful, always true, and fully capable to save me to the end. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ... Romans 11:30**

Romans 11:30-32 are "mercy verses." Four times in three verses the concept of God's mercy is revealed in His dealings with man. The section begins with "for" which means that it cannot be separated from the previous thought, but instead explains it. We have been shown the state of the Jewish people in relation to the gentiles concerning both the gospel and election; they are enemies of God in one respect, but beloved by Him in

another. The reason for this is that regardless of their state of obedience, they are "beloved for the sake of the fathers."

In the United States, there is a law - the US Constitution. The office of President is defined in this law. If a president adheres to the precepts of that office, then he is a "friend" of that law. If he fails to adhere to it, he is an "enemy" of that same law. The law hasn't changed, but he has changed in relation to it. This however doesn't mean that all presidents will be enemies of the law. There is a process for electing presidents, removing presidents, etc. For the sake of the presidency, the office of the president is "beloved" of the constitution even if the current president is its enemy.

This is somewhat like what is going on with Israel and this is what the "for" in Romans 11:30 is explaining. "For you were once disobedient to God..." is speaking of the gentiles. There was nothing to draw them close to God. They had inherited their first father's sin and there was no covenant to bring them into a binding relationship. Only Israel had such a mark of distinction. Outside of them, God in "bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16).

However, because of Christ, the gentiles could be brought near to God in a new way. We "were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience." The Jewish people as a whole were disobedient to the New Covenant found in Christ, desiring to remain under the Old (see Luke 5:36-39). But the Old only pointed to the New and so by rejecting the New, the curses of the Old came upon them. During this time of disobedience, those who were once far off (the gentiles) have been brought near. We have obtained the mercy of Christ which would otherwise have gone directly to Israel, thus ushering in the Kingdom Age. But God, knowing they would reject Jesus, ordained an entirely separate dispensation during their time of being cast off, the Church Age. This is why Paul says that "through their disobedience" we have obtained mercy.

And yet, at the same time, the Old Covenant guaranteed that they (as a collective whole) would remain beloved of God regardless of their obedience or disobedience. This was because of the promises made to the fathers, which is actually recorded in their covenant.

When America has a disobedient president, there are provisions for impeachment and removal of that individual, but these don't affect the status of the office itself. When Israel is collectively disobedient, there are provisions for punishment (Leviticus 26/Deuteronomy 28), but these don't affect the status of the promises made to the fathers. Again, just as the Constitution is fixed and unchanging (not an "organic"

document), even when the president changes in relation to it, so is it with Israel and the promises of God. The promises don't change, but the people may change in relation to them.

Understanding this concept should keep the church from error, but the church has failed to grasp it and, in many denominations, she still fails to grasp it. What is written of Israel is binding and it is unchanging. Unlike the US Constitution which can be amended, God's word is eternal. We err when we ascribe the change which has taken place in Israel to the covenant. When we do so, several things happen -

- We misinterpret God's plans for the nation of Israel
- We misunderstand the church's place in redemptive history
- We ascribe (whether we admit it or not) fault to God's covenant instead of where it rightly belongs. And by doing so,
- We call into question God's integrity by indicating that His covenant isn't reliable

Paul is showing us this sequence of events for a reason and asking us to pay heed to it. If God isn't reliable toward His beloved but disobedient people Israel, then He won't be reliable to His objects of mercy during this point in history either. God forbid that this would ever be true!

Life application: God doesn't change. God's word is a reflection of who He is. God's word is unchanging and reliable. Stand firm in your faith and in the surety of the words of Scripture.

*Lord God, Your word is a reflection of who You are. If I quote it to establish a point of my faith, then it assumes that all of it is truth. If I claim that it isn't absolutely authoritative, then I have no right to quote it at all. And so, I stand on the entirety of Your word. Because I do, now is the time to work on proper doctrine that You will be glorified in my conduct and adherence to what You have stated. Be with me during this process, O Lord. Amen.*

**...even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. Romans 11:31**

The reciprocal of verse 30 is now given. Placing both verses side by side will provide clarity -

"For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy."

The disobedience of the Jews led to mercy upon the gentiles (verse 30). However, this isn't the end of the story as so many in the church seem to believe. Instead, Paul says "even so..." The Greek word for "even so" indicates "in this manner." And so, in the same way as verse 30 was explained concerning the gentiles, it can now be shown true with the Jews.

"These also have now been disobedient..." In the ages past, God's mercy was shown on the Jews, calling them, and giving them His covenant and its associated care, protection, and blessings. During this time, the gentiles were mostly excluded from that favored status. However, the covenant contained stern warnings for disobedience. There was a first exile which was intended as chastisement for correction. This was a 70-year exile to Babylon. However, disobedience followed again after restoration; Christ was rejected and crucified. And even after the resurrection, the ultimate proof of His Messiahship, He was rejected. A second time of punishment would come.

How long would this punishment last? The Bible tells us specifically. In Ezekiel 4, the times of punishment are spelled out in detail by using the prophet as an object lesson. He was told to lay on his side. Once he was to lay on his left side for 390 days (Israel's punishment). Then he was told to lay on his right side for 40 days (Judah's punishment). This is a total of 430 days. He was told each day equated to 1 year. Therefore, Israel (the combined nation) could expect 430 years of exile. The Bible and history record the Babylonian exile which lasted 70 years. That left 360 years of exile for continued disobedience.

However, there is a caveat found in the curses of Leviticus 26. In verse 18, it says –

"And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."

If the first exile didn't have its intended effect, the second term would be multiplied by 7. Therefore, 360 years multiplied by 7 comes to a total of 2520 years. From the dating of the original exile (God's mercy is evidenced in the times of punishment running concurrently) until 14 May of 1948 (Israel's reestablishment) it was, as history records, 2520 biblical years. A biblical year (also called a "prophetic year") is 360 days, not 365 days. Exactly as God determined in ages past, Israel was reestablished as a nation

907,200 days after its original date of exile - perfection in the details of Scripture which match what occurred in history.

This doesn't mean that Israel is again in a state of obedience, but that God was faithful in that "through mercy shown to you they may obtain mercy." The Church Age has been a time of God's mercy upon the gentiles during Israel's time of rejection. Now, the Church Age is nearing its end and God is readying Israel to take its rightful place in redemptive history; the Kingdom Age anticipated by the apostles in Acts 1:6 is just ahead of us. Israel of today is not an aberration, but a part of God's perfectly detailed and perfectly executed plan for the people of the world.

Life application: We don't need to guess or speculate about fulfilled matters of redemptive history. They are exactingly and precisely detailed in God's word. What we need to do is keep our noses in that word and draw out what He has so meticulously conveyed to us... read your Bible!

*Glorious God! Your word is so perfectly detailed. It is so meticulous and exact in all its records. The more I read it, the more amazed I am at the marvelous perfection it displays. Open my eyes to see wonderful things in Your word, and also lead me each day to a fuller understanding of it. This I ask that You will be glorified, and I will be edified. Thank You for Your word, O God. Amen!*

**For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.**  
Romans 11:32

Again, Paul uses his common conjunction "for" in order to explain the previous two "mercy verses" with this concluding thought before he moves on to his stirring doxology. "For God has committed them all to disobedience" refers to the previous disobedience of the gentiles who now have obtained mercy and the currently disobedient Jews who will obtain that same mercy.

The word for "has committed" is one which gives the thought of imprisonment. A comparable concept would be fish caught up in a net. God has thus bound both categories of men, Jew and Gentile, so "that He might have mercy on all." In essence, He imprisons so that He may set free; He binds so that He may release; He confines so that He may lead to broad spaces.

All who come to Christ were first found to be in Adam; all who are forgiven were first under sin; all who are adopted as sons were once orphans. Because of this, each will

understand the freedom and privilege which they have been granted. It is through contrast that we learn to discern the differences.

In this thought of committing all to disobedience, it cannot be inferred that this was actively done by God. Rather, from Adam's free-will choice, all came under condemnation and so all were bound under sin. From that, God had mercy on a select group of people and called them to Himself. Their eventual rejection of Christ was voluntary. At the same time, the gentiles voluntarily streamed to the gospel. Thus, the committing of the Jews to disobedience was a self-inflicted imprisonment while at the same time the voluntary choice of the gentile people brought us to God's mercy.

When an offense is committed, the judge is right in sentencing the criminal, the jailer is right in executing his duties of imprisoning the offender, and the executioner is not guilty when he flips the switch on "Old Sparky" to put those who commit capital crimes to death. In the same manner, God is not to blame when His instructions, which were plain and clear, are violated or ignored.

Moreover, He provides sufficient data for what He expects so that all who are so bound are without excuse when the evidence is presented. One cannot stand before God and use the claim that their sentence is unfair. Not knowing about Jesus doesn't condemn a person. Being a human being, born of Adam condemns a person. Being presented with Jesus and rejecting Jesus only increases condemnation. And being presented with Jesus and accepting Him frees Adam's seed from condemnation. Therefore, all are bound under disobedience that God might (not will) have mercy on all.

Life application: A common question, and what is often used as an indictment against God's fairness, involves those who have never heard the news about Jesus. How can God condemn such a person? Be ready to answer this. Man is "already condemned" according to John 3:18. We need nothing to be separated from God; that already is the case. In His mercy, God sent Jesus. The choice is ours to accept or reject the offer. Ensure they know to choose wisely.

*Heavenly Father, how rich and wonderful are the blessings found in Christ. There is freedom from the law, freedom from sin, freedom as a child in Your house. Instead of attempting to please You by my own work, I stand by faith in the work of Christ. I know that in Him, I shall be accepted on that great Day which all men are destined for. Thank You for the freedom only He can provide. Amen.*



**Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! Romans 11:33**

For the third time in this epistle, Paul enters into an open expression of worship of God. In chapters 1-8, he gave instruction on doctrinal matters and finished that with a praise concerning the relationship which has been established between God and man because of the work of Christ. In chapters 9-11, Paul has conducted a lesson into dispensational matters - the church age and the relationship between Jews and Gentiles during that age. Showing that God is in complete control of what is happening and what will come about, He finished this section with his "mercy verses."

Now with a resounding note of praise, adoration, and awe he breaks into a doxology which shows finite man's inability to comprehend the magnificence and greatness of God. He begins with an interjection which is the Greek letter "Omega." This translates directly to "O!" It is as if he looked at the previous discussion and was unable to grasp what just flowed from his pen - the immensity of understanding the grafting in of the gentiles, the rejection of the Jews, and yet the return of the Jews to their high position at some point in the future - all of this suddenly dawning on him. "Oh! The depth of the riches..."

He speaks of the riches of God being poured out upon undeserving man. God's treasure trove of goodness is unlimited and eternal. There is no end to the blessings which can come from Him and there is, for those who are the objects of His favor, no end to the blessings that will come from Him. God is pleased to bestow these riches upon His creatures so that they may in turn glorify Him. Because God is eternal, the stream of these riches will proceed ceaselessly and endlessly to those who are His called, chosen, and elect.

Paul then turns to "both the wisdom and the knowledge of God." There is debate on the reading here. Two options are:

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" or  
"Oh, the depth of the riches and of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!"

It is either "depth" describing "riches" and then "riches" describing "the wisdom and the knowledge," or each is an individual tenet. The difference isn't small, and one should contemplate both options because both fill the mind with a different type of wonder at what Paul is saying.

"The wisdom" of God and the "knowledge" of God are introduced separately because they reflect different characteristics which are too often incorrectly mixed together in our thoughts. "Wisdom" is the proper application of the will in order to meet a good end. In the context of Romans 9-11, it is speaking of that use of God's will which will bring about the "mercy" on all people. This was seen in the preceding verses. The plan of redemption is so wise that it is beyond our ability to fully grasp. We can read the words, understand their meaning, but never come to fully understand how God has or will continue to exercise His will, while at the same time allowing man the free will he has been given.

The knowledge of God is certainly speaking on several levels - His intelligence, which is infinite; and His foreknowledge, which is timeless. Because He knows all things, both immediately and intuitively, God is able to anticipate every possibility that could occur in every part of His creation. There is nothing which could surprise Him and nothing which could break down in what He has constructed. From the minutest atom to the grandest galaxy, all things are working harmoniously because of the intellect which created and sustains these things.

Because of the depth of these tenets of God - the riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge, Paul's pen issues ink into words which are insufficient to relate the concept he is trying to convey, which is in turn insufficient to relate what that thought is trying to grasp. "How unsearchable are His judgments!" Here he uses a term found nowhere else in Scripture, *anexeraunēta*, to describe God's judgments.

The word means to search out or investigate, but it begins with a negative. His judgments cannot be searched out; they are beyond the ability of man to even locate. What He has determined can be studied, contemplated, charted, graphed, argued over, and communicated, and yet none of this is or could be sufficient to fully explain them. In the end, there will always be questions which, even if answered, will only lead to more questions. The finite mind will never fully search out what has been determined in the execution of His infinite plan.

"And His ways past finding out" brings in another term which begins with a negative, *anexichniastoi*. It is used only one other time in Scripture. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, uses it concerning the work of God in Christ -

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ..."  
Ephesians 3:8

This word, similar to the preceding one, means to "trace out" or to "track." We can search high and low, near and far, and never fully understand the ways of God. Isaiah speaks of this wisdom when quoting the Lord –

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord.  
'For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.'" Isaiah 55:8, 9

In the end, redeemed man will eternally be in the presence of God, beholding His splendor and marveling at what He has done. We will forever contemplate, but never fully grasp, the magnificence of the glory of God. Eternity itself will reveal that we will need eternity to pursue this glorious Creator.

Life application: What will we do in heaven? How can we live forever without getting bored? Don't worry about that! The infinite glory of God will be ceaselessly revealed to us. There will be no end to the discovery of His majesty. Eternity itself will be needed to search out the depths of our eternal God.

*Heavenly Father, because You are infinite in Your wisdom and knowledge, I will need eternity to search out Your glory. I thank You that because of Jesus, the eternal life that I need to contemplate You is available. I look forward to an endless, ceaseless procession of Your wisdom, knowledge, and goodness. Thank You for Christ in me, the hope of glory! Amen.*

**For who has known the mind of the Lord?**

**Or who has become His counselor?** Romans 11:34

Paul cites a verse from Isaiah 40. Taken with its surrounding verses, we get a glimpse at the "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." There Isaiah records the Lord's majesty to Israel -

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,  
Measured heaven with a span  
And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?  
Weighed the mountains in scales  
And the hills in a balance?  
Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,  
Or as His counselor has taught Him?"

With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,  
And taught Him in the path of justice?  
Who taught Him knowledge,  
And showed Him the way of understanding?" Isaiah 40:12-14

Unlike human rulers - kings, dictators, presidents, emperors, etc., the Lord needs no counselor, nor is there anything that He lacks in wisdom or knowledge. If someone were to attempt to advise the Lord, that attempt would be futile. All things were created by Him and so all knowledge to be discerned from within creation by a created being is already known to Him. His mind is infinitely higher than the individual knowledge of man as well as the sum of the accumulated knowledge of man. In fact, if the storehouse of man's knowledge were to be maintained and updated for all eternity, it would still be infinitely less than the knowledge of the infinite Creator; a finite can never attain to the infinite.

Because of this, there is none who can advise God on what to do. Our prayers which attempt to "help God along" in His decision process are futile. And our prayers which attempt to "mandate" or "claim" something from God border on blasphemy. He sees the end, we don't. Therefore, to make a claim from God in essence assumes that the claim is in line with His future intentions; something we cannot know. If we claim prosperity or healing and God intended that we are to be poor or sick, then we have essentially usurped His divine will through our prayer.

And this avenue follows through with the subject matter of Romans 9-11. Whether we agree with Israel's return; whether we accept God's mercy upon Israel or not; and whether we like or don't like the people of Israel - none of that matters. God has shown us in His word the state of the nation, the extent of His mercy, and the love He has for His disobedient people. For us to work against these things, or to pray against them, is only a sign of our own rebellion against Him. God is working out an immensely detailed and marvelous plan. Let us be found in accord with it, not striving against it!

Life application: In your prayers, don't "advise" God on what He should do. And, in your prayers, don't "mandate" to God what is right. Rather, petition the Lord for that which You desire and be ready to accept His answer - be it yes or be it no. He is God; the answer belongs to Him alone.

*Lord, today I realize that not all things are centered around me. In fact, I don't know if I will be alive tomorrow. Because of this, I see that I am wholly dependent on You for all things and that I have no right to claim anything from You. Forgive me for my*

*presumptuous prayers of the past. In the future, I will ask and wait on Your answer, knowing that You have the best plan in mind for me. Amen.*

**"Or who has first given to Him**

**And it shall be repaid to him?"** Romans 11:35

Here we have Paul's final Old Testament quote of chapter 11. He reaches back to Job and the Lord's words there -

"Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him?  
Everything under heaven is Mine." Job 41:11

The question that the Lord is asking of Job is "Who has paid me first (preceded Me), that I should (re)pay him?"

Paul uses this quote as if he is asking each of us in order to consider it. The answer is obvious. God is the Creator and thus the Source of all things. There is nothing that we possess before He possessed it and therefore, there is nothing that isn't His. And this isn't only speaking of tangible things like gold and silver, but of all things that come from the material creation and which are found in man - grace, mercy, love, devotion, etc.

When God constructed us, He did so in a way which allows us to participate in His creation in a cognitive way. We have understanding and reason, we have emotions and desires, etc. But all of these came from the same Source. This is why John can state, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We can't even claim that our love preceded His. He is eternal in nature and love is one of His many attributes. Therefore, His love is. It doesn't increase or decrease. He is love and this love has always been. We have been the object of His love in His eternal mind before creation itself stood firm.

No matter what we offer to Him, it came as a result of His creative effort and therefore there is nothing which needs to be repaid by Him. From this spoken word to Job, the Lord follows with the statement, "Everything under heaven is mine." He is God, the Source and Possessor of all things.

Life application: At times, we may feel we've done something great for the Lord. And from a human perspective it may be so. But our deeds can never precede the Lord and therefore we are owed nothing. This shows us the immense grace of the judgment seat of Christ where "rewards" will be handed out for our faithful acts (see 1 Corinthians 3:9-15). Despite not owing us a thing, He still has reserved rewards for our faithfulness. What a great God!

*Lord, I'm told in Your word that there will be heavenly rewards for my faithful deeds. This is a point of excitement and anticipation. And yet, to see Your face is the greatest reward of all because You are the Source of all things. My greatest hope, my deepest longing, and my eternal desire is but to behold Your beauty for all eternity. With this, my cup will always be full. Amen.*

**For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36**

Three Greek prepositions are used in this last verse of Romans 11 - *ek*, *dia*, and *eis* - "of," "through," and "to." It is an all-encompassing statement concerning God, His creation, and all that creation holds. It is God, not a "big bang," which created the universe. In fact, a big bang is a logical contradiction. For the universe to "bang" into existence means that it would have to have existed before it existed because nothing cannot create something. The universe is not a self-existent entity, and therefore if there was nothing, there would still be - for all eternity - nothing.

But there is a self-existent God who is the Source of all things. And despite the constant assault against Him and against His authority, He owes nothing to man. Though we argue against His goodness, claim that we deserve His favor, and act as if He isn't even there until we get into a bad patch, none of our actions changes His sovereign rule.

"For of Him" indicates that He is the Creator and the Source of everything. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." If there was a beginning, and there was (thanking Einstein for demonstrating this), then there must have been a beginner. For of Him are all things.

For "through Him" indicates that God is the Sustainer of all things. He is the unseen agency of our continued existence. "And \*he\* is before all, and all things subsist together by him" Colossians 1:17 (Darby). He is the One who holds all things together. But even more, He is the One who allows all things to continue from moment to moment. This is why Jesus, speaking to the leaders of Israel, was able to make this statement -

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.'" John 5:17

God's creative effort ended on the sixth day, but His sustaining effort does (and must) continue on without ceasing. Without this continued sustaining power, all things would simply cease to exist. For through Him are all things.

For "to Him" shows that He is the end-purpose and goal of all things. He is the final and ultimate reason of every created thing. As the Source and Sustainer, this can be the only logical conclusion. Because He created time, He is therefore outside of time - eternally before and after. All things find their conclusion in Him. And, amazingly, because he participated in His creation by entering the stream of humanity, all things are directed toward their completion in the Person of Jesus. Hebrews 1:2, speaking of Christ Jesus, says that He is "appointed heir of all things." Christ is the recipient of all power, rule, and authority; a state which will exist as long as God exists, which is eternally. For to Him are all things.

"To Him be glory forever" can be analyzed and spoken of until words run out and yet there will be more to say. The praises shall never end, the marvel shall never cease, the awe at beholding the incomprehensible greatness of God will never get old. From Him flows an eternal stream of delight and majesty. In the new heavens and the new earth, we shall behold this with our eyes and the praises of God will know no end. And it was all made possible by His own wisdom and splendor, displayed in the most amazing way of all –

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Colossians 1:15-20

Life application: If you are planning on boasting, do so in the cross of Jesus Christ.

*From Your wisdom came the universe and all it contains. By Your skill, You created man in Your image. With Your approval, we exercised our free will against You. In Your mercy, You withheld our demise. In Your goodness, You entered into Your creation. And with the greatest display of love, You went to the cross to redeem us. May I boast in nothing but the cross of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 12

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**

Romans 12:1

Paul spoke of doctrine in chapters 1-8. Next, he moved to the concept of the dispensational nature of God's redemptive working in chapters 9-11. Now in his final section, chapters 12-16, he will speak of our devotional responsibilities; what our duties are and how to perform them. And so, he begins with his plea to those in Rome, "I beseech you therefore..."

"Therefore" is given based on the awe-inspiring doxology he just presented at the end of chapter 11. God's glory is incomprehensible, His wisdom is infinite, and His judgments are beyond finding out. Because of this surpassing greatness, Paul implores the "brethren." In Greek, the term "brethren" is used anytime at least one male was addressed. This in no way is diminishing to women, but is how the language is structured. Those at Rome were all being addressed, including women, as is indicated in chapter 16.

"By the mercies of God" takes us back to the mercy verses (11:30-32) which just preceded the doxology. As God has determined to have mercy on both Jew and Gentile, Paul states that those objects of God's mercy should "present your bodies a living sacrifice." On the surface, this seems like an oxymoron. A sacrifice, by nature, is something that dies. And yet, Paul asks us to be "living sacrifices." However, to Paul there was nothing contradictory in his words. In his first letter to the Corinthians he says, "I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." 1 Corinthians 15:31

A sacrifice was offered to God for various reasons - atonement, fellowship, thanks, etc. These offerings were sometimes entirely given over to God in the fire, such as a sin offering. Other offerings were shared in by the one who offered, such as in the fellowship offering. Either way though, the entire sacrifice was consumed. This is the idea that Paul is conveying to them (and thus to us). We are to be completely consumed in our offering to God - not in literal death, but in death to unrighteousness, death to sin, death to immorality, etc.

This "living" sacrifice is to be a part of our very nature as we continue on in our earthly tents, awaiting that day when we are called home - either through death or the rapture.



Until that time, our every act and thought are to be a devotion and an offering to God; a living sacrifice. As he says in the conclusion of the verse, such a sacrifice is to be "holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

"Holy" is undefiled and without mar or blemish. It is to be set apart and sanctified to God. "Acceptable to God" involves the thought that we are His, we were bought at a price and are to be effective bondservants of Christ, not slack in our duties or our devotions. We are to honor God with our every fiber, bringing every thought into captivity so that our service will be complete, undefiled, and honorable to Him. Such is our reasonable service, and such is the expectation of God who sent Jesus to give us the pattern and the model which we are to emulate.

Life application: Let us truly be "living sacrifices" to God, wholly pleasing to Him in all ways. We are His and it is only right that we acknowledge this in our lives and conduct.

*Heavenly Father, You have asked me to be a "living sacrifice" to You. And yet I know that I fail You from day to day and even from thought to thought. Help me to live for You, not by my own power or spirit, but by the power of Your Spirit, living in me. I desire to be an offering which is pleasing, holy, and acceptable to You. On my own, I know I will fail, but through You, I know I will prevail. Thank You for directing me. Amen.*

**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

Romans 12:2

In Romans 12:1, Paul spoke of our "reasonable service." This daily walk in Christ is a volitional act of the will. It is prescribed, but not enforced. If we fail to walk properly, we won't be cast into a prison or sent a fine in the mail. And yet, it is what our rewards and losses will be based on when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We are asked to think soberly on our calling and to fix our eyes on the prize, not settle for mediocrity. In order to accomplish this, Paul tells us to "not be conformed to this world."

Being conformed to this world is to walk in a manner which is at enmity with God (see Romans 8:7). The Greek word indicates accepting the form or appearance of another. It could include anything which would align oneself with another - habit, mannerisms, style of clothing, form of living, etc. We are not to be conformed, or fashioned, to the world in such a way. However, there are fashions and mannerisms that cannot be avoided. Further, this becomes problematic because one person could disapprove of a particular style which is a natural appearance to another person.

If the thought of "conforming" isn't carefully considered, one could find fault with anything - men's hair reaching to the collar, beards, a tattoo, high heeled shoes, women wearing pants, bikinis at the beach, etc. The list could be (and often is) never-ending with the judgmental type.

The idea isn't concerning things to wear that can be bought at the store, nor is it that we cannot be a part of the customs of the culture in which we live. Rather, it is not to be conformed to the worldly lifestyle where it becomes our priority. We are to focus on Christ, think about Christ, talk to Christ, to live in and live for Christ. The beautiful part of Paul's instruction is that which was noted above - what is our "reasonable service." When we understand that these things are prescribed but not enforced it should help us to properly evaluate when someone is over-conformed to the world and under-conformed to Christ.

And this is explained in the next thought, which is preceded by "but." This word (in Greek *alla*) is given to contrast the first thought. Instead of being "conformed to this world" it says to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind." It is the mind, and the attitude which stems from it, which is being focused on rather than the externals. Remember this when Frank and Fran Finger-pointer find fault in your fashion. To be transformed is to have a complete mental change in who we are from who we once were.

The Greek word is *metamorphoó*. If you notice, it is the root of our word "metamorphosis." Just as a caterpillar is changed into a butterfly, we are to be changed from an earthly mindset to a heavenly one; from our view of a temporary existence to an eternal one; from a system of living for pleasure, to one of living for Christ's honor. This word is used only three other times in the New Testament - in Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2, and 2 Corinthians 3:18. The first two are speaking of the transfiguration of Christ; the third is this verse from Paul's hand -

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

At the transfiguration, God's glory showed through Jesus, not upon Him. He was literally changed before their eyes to reveal and shine-forth the glory of God. This is what Paul is telling the believer should occur in their lives as well. The Spirit within is to shine out, not be hidden away. But again, this is accomplished by our voluntary actions. Thus, when someone sees us, they should be seeing the changed person revealing the glory of God, albeit in a fallen body.

This is the error of charismatic churches where "signs" and "gifts" are displayed at worship services. The change isn't to be "in church on Sunday morning." It is to be the state of life at all times. The change isn't merely seen in external demonstrations meant to convince others of a "Spirit-filled life." The change is in the internal person which is to then radiate outward.

And the reason for this "renewing of the mind" is explained by Paul in a clear and concise manner - "That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." He uses a term for "prove" which is linked to the testing of metals. If one wants to "prove" gold for purity, they will take a sample of it and see if it is pure or not. The same is true with whatever metal or alloy is being tested. Such proof will ensure strength, purity, hardness, pliability, etc. The same is to be true with us.

We are to be so transformed that the proof is in the testing of us - a scale which can only be measured against God's word in this life and by the Lord at our judgment. "The good and acceptable will of God" is our goal and the standard of our testing. We cannot get this from "the inner Christ" but only by adhering to the Word of God and allowing it to change us to the conformity of the Holy Spirit. The Bible shows that being "filled with the Spirit" is a passive action, not an active one. As we comply, He fills. As we fail to comply, there is no room for filling. The believer can never get more of the Spirit, but the Spirit can always get more of the believer.

Life application: The renewing of the mind must come about by adherence to God's word. Without it, we become the arbiters of what is and isn't acceptable. Stay close to the word, know the word, and live out the word. Allow the Holy Spirit to fill you through obedient conformity to God's word.

*Lord God, Your word says that I have been sealed with Your Spirit by my faith in Jesus. The deal is done. Now Lord, please help me to live out that high calling by my obedient adherence to Your word. I truly long to live my life for You and I know that all of the instructions are to be found there. Lead me to proper teachers who will soundly instruct me in the right and holy way. This to Your glory. Amen.*

**For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Romans 12:3**

In this verse, Paul makes a word play for us from the idea of "thought." Four times in the Greek the word *phronein* is used in one form or another. Each is given to have us stop and mentally consider (to think) on the thought he wants us to think about...

"For" is given to build on verses 1 & 2. He spoke of our responsibility to the Lord to be as "living sacrifices" and to not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed. If we are living sacrifices and are being transformed to correspond to the will of God, then what he will now write should follow naturally. But rather than immediately stating what this is, he interjects a point of humility concerning himself.

"For I say, through the grace given to me..." He is speaking about his apostleship (see Romans 1:5) which is preeminently one directed to the Gentiles. Despite this exalted position, it was given "through grace." In other words, Paul has excluded boasting from his position and therefore, when he pens his coming words, boasting or feelings of superiority should be excluded. In the end, if our position came by grace, then the playing field is level. Having shown this up front, he continues with "...to everyone who is among you."

Each recipient of his letter, which includes even those of us today who peruse the words of Romans, is "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Whatever our position is, we shouldn't allow it to go to our heads. Pastors are often placed on high pedestals. This only increases as the size of the church increases - swollen heads overshadow large pulpits. Eventually, they are treated, and they accept the treatment, as superstars. Elders in churches will often have their heads burst forth with thoughts of control and power. They didn't have to do the hard work in seminary, but they still get control of the flock.

Those who have a strong grasp of the word, taking it in context and understanding the nuances of the original languages, can lord this over others, acting as if they hold the keys to deep insights and wisdom, doling it out with a teaspoon. Musicians are often exalted (and act) as if they are greats of the faith, simply because they sing songs with deep-seated theological lyrics. And the list could go on...

But Paul warns against this and we should heed the warning, even taking time to memorize these twelve words, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." As soon as pride steps in, the devil gains a foothold into the life of the believer. If the Creator can come in human flesh, walk among us, and wash the dirty feet of His apostles - the highest designation in the Church Age, then we have nothing to consider ourselves more worthy than any other person in this body. After all, Paul has already shown that apostleship is given by grace. He has preempted boasting at any other level.

Instead, Paul says that we are to "think soberly" using the term *sōphronein*. This word is used to indicate being sober-minded or to think clearly while exercising self-control. It is formed by two words which translate as "safe" and "what regulates life." The second

word is the root of our word "diaphragm." Helps Word Studies gives the example of an opera singer who controls the length or quality of his tones by the diaphragm. This then controls the ability to breathe and to moderate heartbeat. This in turn regulates or "brings safety" to the body, keeping it properly controlled. This physical example translates well into what Paul asks of us in our mental state.

And the reason we are to "think soberly" is because it all comes back to God in the end. It is He who "has dealt to each one a measure of faith." Even if faith is an exercise of the free-will, which it is, that free-will was granted by God, and the opportunity to exercise it was also granted by God. To understand this, think of two people with exactly the same free-will and looking to exercise it in exactly the same way -

Seeker 1 is in his store in Sarasota, Florida when two guys come in and talk to him about the Bible, about Jesus, and about salvation. He accepts the premise, exercises his faith, and receives Christ.

Seeker 2 is in Wang-Chung China. He knows there's a God and wants to know Him. Mission budgets were cut for Wang-Chung though and nobody is sent to evangelize the lost there. He never hears the saving message of Christ.

Did Seeker 1 deserve his opportunity to hear the word? Did Seeker 2 somehow not measure up? No. By grace alone did Seeker 1 hear and receive the message.

Now apply this to any state of any believer. One person may have the financial ability to go to seminary and another may lack it. The first becomes a pastor, the second cleans church bathrooms. The first cannot presume he is better than the second. He merely was granted a grace the first lacked. However, the toilet-cleaner may have a much deeper and more pleasing-to-God faith than the pastor. In the end, none should think more highly of himself than he ought to think. Rather, he needs to consider his position soberly, whatever it is, and understand that it was granted by God alone.

Life application: The universe doesn't center around any of us. Be humble and exalt the Lord.

*O God, just when life seems to be great and everything is going well, something comes along which reminds me that I am completely dependent on You. I get thinking I have it all under control and You remind me it is otherwise. Every beat of my heart is at Your will and every victory or trial is granted by You. Thank You for the victories, help me through the trials, and never let me forget that You have it all under control. Amen.*

**For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, Romans 12:4**

Using the human body as representative of the different offices of the church, Paul will draw out a comparison for us to more readily accept our station within the body. He begins with "for" and so shows that this verse is tied to, not separate from, the preceding verse. In that verse, he spoke of the grace he received and the grace each member of the church has also received "as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

Based on this, he notes now that just "as we have many members in one body..." so does the church. Paul will use this same thought several times in his writings, such as in Ephesians 4 and 5, but he will use it in the most expressive and telling way in 1 Corinthians 12. To get a fuller picture of Paul's thoughts here in Romans, take time to read that passage and see how he speaks about the body there. He has surprising insights for those who might "think of himself more highly than he ought to think."

Within the church, like within the human body, no two parts are the same, although some may have the same function. For example, the left-hand functions with basically the same role as the right hand, but each is used to perform that function individually in order to meet the needs of the body. Eyes, feet, and elbows likewise mirror each other, but we're given more than one in order to meet the body's needs. Then there are the greater distinctions. There are external organs and internal organs. There is the skeletal system and the epidermis. The list goes on and on. Each part of the body, selected by God to meet a particular need and to perform a particular function. As Paul says, "not all have the same function."

If you are a foot and not a hand, do you feel less important than the hand? Again, take time to read 1 Corinthians 12 today and you may find that being a foot isn't so bad after all.

Life application: The pastor of a church will only be as effective as the other members of the church. If the person who cleans the bathroom does a crummy job, it will reflect on the pastor. If the pastor does a crummy job in his preaching, there won't be any members coming around to use the bathroom. The church is structured like the body and each part needs to properly perform its task, not with boasting, but with humility. With Christ as our Head, let us exalt the Head.

*Lord, I know the church with the cleanest, shiniest bathrooms in town. They're kept that way by one person. Thank You for those who honor You without boasting or*

*showmanship, but by performing a needed job that others might think is below them. But You don't feel that way - You washed the dirty feet of the apostles. The water You washed them with had hardly dried as they were nailing You to the cross. Thank You for those with Your servant's heart. Amen.*

**...so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Romans 12:5**

Using the previous verse as a reference, Paul says, "so we..." Just as there are many members in one body, and just as the members have their own unique function which differs from the others, so it is with all those in Christ. There are many in Christ and yet each has a unique role. We could argue that there are lots of pastors, but each pastor has a specific flock. Or even if the pastors are in the same congregation, they will minister at different times and to different individuals for different reasons. There may be many door greeters, but each door greeter greets different people and does so in a unique way.

No matter what the member does, all are members of "one body in Christ." In Ephesians 1:22, 23 we are told that Christ is the Head. This doesn't mean He is literally the head as if one is looking at a person's head. Rather, "head" is speaking of His leadership and preeminence. With Christ in this position, every member (many) comprises the body in an individual role which is uniquely united to all others; we are "members of one another."

In Christ, the saying is true that "No man is an island." We are bound to each other under the headship of Christ and have importance and value. However, far too many allow their role to be more like a fingernail than a finger, finding it sufficient to be attached to the body, but only of use in a minimal way. Being a member of Christ's church indicates that we should put forth effort in order to exalt the Head.

Life application: We all have talents in our secular employment which can probably be transferred to our Christian walk. Is it right to satisfy ourselves and others outside the church with these talents while keeping them hidden from the body of Christ? Be willing to share your abilities within the church for the building up of others and the glorification of God.

*Lord God, help me to be more than a bump on a log. I have talents which I know should be used to glorify You. I spend money on things which aren't necessary while neglecting the church I attend. I spend time doing stuff which has no lasting value while I skip*

*church and Bible studies. I'm a mess, Lord. Help me to get my priorities right as I live out this life. Amen.*

**Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;** Romans 12:6

Paul now takes what he has said concerning the body and he breaks it down into individual "gifts according to the grace that is given us." Before reviewing the verse, a general analysis of gifts as given in the New Testament should be listed. The reason for this is that each list is given from a different outlook.

The first is this list found in Romans 12:6-8. Seven specific gifts are noted, and these are simply a wide range of gifts which are given as either a calling on the believer's life or a temporary impartation, but they are not assigned to any specific person.

The second list is seen in 1 Corinthians 12. They are not specifically gifts of Christ as noted in the coming Ephesians list, but are manifestations of the Spirit. In other words, they are not necessarily a calling for life-work, but are temporary occurrences for the edification of the body. However, towards the end of the chapter offices such as that of the apostle and the teacher are seen.

The third list is recorded in Ephesians 4. This list is that of individuals in their specific calling.

Seeing the difference can help us from a breakdown in doctrine. The purpose of the list needs to be considered and the gift itself needs to be viewed in that context. Gifts, regardless of whether they are general callings, manifestations, or specific offices are "according to the grace that is given us." It needs to be noted that the "calling" gifts overlap in a great way with non-Christian vocations. In both Christian and non-Christian venues there are speakers, there are those who do administration, there are teachers, there are exhorters, etc.

Therefore, these gifts are formed from the makeup of the individual, whether Christian or not. Because of this, the use of the gift for the body is what makes it of value to the body. There are teachers all over the world, but they don't use their God-given gift for the body. There are even teachers who are Christians who don't use their gift for the body. Paul's list here is speaking of those who take their God-given gift and apply it for Christian use.



On the other hand, there are the "manifestation" gifts such as healings and tongues. These are not callings, but are temporary impartations to meet particular needs or situations. Once again, it should be noted that there are those who claim such gifts in a variety of other religions. Some eastern religions, for example, speak in "tongues" in the same way modern Charismatic groups do - with garbled, nonsensical noises. There are only three logical explanations for these types of "tongues" in churches then. They are faked by the speaker, they are inspired of Christ, or they are of other-than divine origin. The same is true with faith healers. There are charlatans within and without the body, fooling and deceiving for recognition or profit.

The subject of "manifestation" gifts needs to be very carefully handled and all such gifts must be taken in the context of prescriptive passages in the Bible. Using descriptive verses from Acts to justify such gifts will inevitably lead to confused theology and the misuse of these same "gifts." In the coming list in Romans, because of the nature of the gift, mentally inserting the term "let us use" prior to reading each gift will help keep that gift in the intended context. Paul's list now begins with "prophecy."

Prophecy is the uttering forth of God's word. It can be in writing or verbal. No true prophecy will ever contradict Scripture. Prophecy can be reasonably divided into "foretelling" and "forth-telling." Foretelling involves speaking forth God's word under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit and which reveals God's intent for a situation, insights previously unknown, the revelation of future events, etc. It is God directly speaking through a person in the communication of His word. This type of prophecy ended with the word "Amen" at the close of the book of Revelation. It was something used up to and through the apostolic age and which ended after that; God has spoken.

Forth telling prophecy is the speaking of God's word as it has been revealed. It is preaching, teaching, and exhortation in what has been received from God as revealed in the pages of Scripture. As noted above, like foretelling, forth telling will never contradict the written word. Extreme care must be taken by preachers and teachers to carefully and competently explain God's word to His people. Doctrine does matter. In the end, the gifts listed in the Bible must have the ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ. This includes the forth telling of God's word.

Life application: One of the most sensitive matters found in the church is the subject of "gifts." The reason for the sensitive nature isn't because it is confusing, but because believers are confused. Context and right-evaluation concerning gifts will lead to the sound interpretation of what gifts apply, when they apply, and to whom they apply.

*Heavenly Father, You have granted me certain gifts and abilities in this life. I can use them for my own gain or for the glory of Christ. May Your Spirit guide me in my walk and be revealed through my gifts and abilities for His honor and not for my personal gain. I know that if this happens, in the end I will be the recipient of many more blessings in that life which is truly Life. Thank You for the honor of serving and the hope of future glory. Amen.*

**"...or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;"**

Romans 12:7

Adding to the list from Romans 12:6, two more designations of service are named in this verse. The first is ministry. The word translated as "ministry" is diakonia. This is the word from which we receive the title "deacon." A deacon in the church fulfills an office of ministry and it is also a designation of that office. Unfortunately, the sense of being a deacon is often elevated to something other than its original intent which is humble service of any kind. Greek etymologists find the original meaning of "deacon" to be derived from the words "through the dust."

In other words, the deacon is one who serves, and as he scurries about in his duties, he kicks up the dust around him. But there is also the biblical connotation that man was made from the dust and so the deacon is the servant of all men. It then would be an office which resembles Christ as the Servant, going so far as to wash the dusty feet of His dust-made creatures. It is to be considered an office of humility and service, not authority and power. He is to be Christ's courier of service to the people of the world and for the body of Christ.

However, the term as used in Romans 12:7, although aligning with this analysis, is probably intended more for the office of the ministry rather than the designation of that office. Stated differently, it is not specifying a title, but speaking of the overall effects of ministering; that of service. Those who hold the gift of ministry, let them minister.

The second office is "teacher." The Greek word *didasko* literally implies, to "cause to learn." Hence it involves the instruction and imparting of knowledge and information so that others will grow through that instruction. In the New Testament, the word *didasko* is found in three separate noun forms, one verb, and in the form of two different adjectives which total over 200 uses. Of these, almost every instance is speaking of instruction in the Word of God. This then is certainly what Paul is referring to here - the right instruction for the proper application of Scripture.

Albert Barnes notes that "the churches in New England had, at first, a class of people who were called teachers. One was appointed to this office in every church, distinct from the pastor, whose proper business it was to instruct the congregation in the doctrines of religion." This has continued in large part since that time, but it shows that the original believers who came to America had the intent not only of bringing their denominational faith with them, but also ensuring that the word was taught in the expectation that the faithful were not just blind adherents to the denomination, but were people who were expected to know why they believed what they believed. Those who hold the office of teacher, let them teach.

Life application: Are you gifted with the ability to minister to others? Then minister in a manner and form which is honoring to Christ. Have you been gifted as a teacher? If so, before you teach, read and take to heart James 3:1. Understand that your job is of the highest importance for the continued doctrine of those you teach. Being negligent in such a high calling will have negative effects beyond your own judgment, but can also lead others into sad avenues of confusion.

*Glorious and wonderful Lord. I want to take time today to thank You for those in my church who have been so faithful in their duties. Thank You for my pastor, my Bible teacher, those who minister, those who perform the administrations, and for those who clean and maintain the building. Thank You for those who reach out to the lost, and those who support the church with their money. Thank You for all of these and all the others who make my church a home. Amen.*

**"...he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Romans 12:8**

Paul's list of services is complete with verse 8. In this verse are four gifts which can be offered by those within the church. The first is "he who exhorts." Exhortation is different than teaching. Teaching is tied to doctrine within the faith whereas exhortation is tied to the practical application of the faith. Teaching then leads to exhortation. One must be properly taught the faith in order to properly practice the faith - orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy. As this is considered by Paul as a separate function and gift, it implies that it is a different office.

Thus, in a church there are counselors. Some churches have marriage counselors, financial counselors, etc. These are not really teachers in doctrine, but rather are those who teach in the related practice. They should be grounded in the doctrine and then they should be able to give instruction to others in how to apply the principles.

Often, these offices will overlap somewhat, and a lead pastor should be able to combine them in ways which will make the most beneficial use of the imparting of the word of God, particularly in sermons. A sermon that doesn't include an analysis of the Scripture isn't really a sermon. However, there should also be encouragement within the sermon about the application of the analysis. Thus, exhortation is a valuable asset, not only for specific circumstances in life, but in general applications of how to live life. Those who hold the gift of exhortation, let them exhort with zeal.

Next Paul speaks of "he who gives." The term is *metadidous* and some feel this actually bears the notion of distributing the money possessed by the church. This is considered because the other gifts are more office-centered rather than individually expressed gifts. However, others disagree and state that it is speaking of the giving by individuals. The latter is more probable. Though the other gifts are offices within the body, they are possessed individually and expressed in the office. The same is true here.

Each person who gives is a part of the office of finances, but their giving is an individual expression. To support this, Paul says that those who give should do so "with liberality." The term is *haploteti* and it denotes sincerity, simplicity, or purity. Giving is to be done with all of these thoughts in mind. We should be sincere in giving, not hoping for some type of return. We should also be simple in our giving; to give without complication. A good way to explain this is to give "without strings attached."

Our gift is for the church and when the gift is given, it is no longer to be wielded by the giver. And it should be given with purity. Our hearts should be grateful for the opportunity to give and the gift should come without the giver having been pressured. For those who are able to, and who are blessed with the gift of giving, let them give with liberality.

The next gift concerns leading. And what a gift this is! Whether in the church or out of the church, true leaders are usually easily identifiable. There have been many presidents, but few were natural leaders. There are those who can discern the structure of human interaction and use it in marvelous ways to accomplish great feats.

Within the church, such people may work behind the scenes and yet make great advances for the furtherance of the church through their leadership abilities. This is the sort that leads with true humility and doesn't lord his ability over others, but understands that he is a participant with a unique skill. There are lead pastors who are great leaders and there are lead pastors who understand the quality of great leaders, even if they don't personally possess that quality. Either way, the effective use of leadership is a great asset and an immense blessing for a church.

The person who is so gifted is instructed to use his leadership abilities in a tireless, careful, and attentive way. When so handled, the aims and goals of the church will always be the prime target and the devoted focus of the leader. He who leads, let him lead with diligence.

Finally, Paul finishes the list with "he who shows mercy." There are those who have physical ailments and who need care lavished upon them. There are those who are weak in the faith and need grace and building up rather than condemnation and accusation. There are those who have addictions and who need help with them, not scoffing because of them. They don't need a demeaning attitude from others, but empathy and direction. A miserable drunk who comes to church has come because he is a miserable drunk. Without mercy, he will only stay a miserable drunk. With care, affection, mercy, and prayer, he can become a valuable asset in the church. Showing mercy requires tact and it also requires the ability to not be snookered. For the person who is able to show mercy, let him do so with cheerfulness.

Life application: No one person is fully proficient in all of the gifts mentioned by Paul, but each of us can strive to become more competent in every office. For those with a particular gift, it is only right that they step forward and exercise it, not for self-glory, but for the glory of the Lord.

*Yes Lord God! Each day I find myself in a unique position to grow in You. Some days I find the opportunity to help others and on other days I find the opportunity to answer questions about Your word. Sometimes, I find that I'm not the right person for a need, but You have put that need in my path to direct it to the care of another while I get a chance to learn at the same time. It all fits so perfectly, and I thank You for every such blessing! Amen.*

**Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.**

Romans 12:9

Starting here in verse 9 and continuing through the chapter, there are approximately 20 commands given by Paul. A command in the epistles is a prescriptive statement given with the intent that it will be followed by the believer. It should be obvious from reading these commands that many are things we fail at, either openly or in our heart, on a regular basis.

Unlike the law, however, there is no statement which says, "If you do these things you will live by them." Life has been granted through Jesus' work. The commands then are intended to bring us into a harmonious way of life, both for ourselves and those we

interact with. When we fail to meet up to these directives, we can lose our joy, our health, and our rewards. However, failing to meet these commands will not result in a loss of salvation.

For example, a similar sentiment to Paul's admonitions is found in 2 Peter 1:7. The surrounding verses there show how to remain fruitful and also how to increase in being fruitful. But should one fail to do so, there is no indication of a loss of salvation. Rather, there is the chastisement for having been "shortsighted, even to blindness." Understanding this, Paul begins with, "Let love be without hypocrisy..." It's a similar thought to what John states in his first epistle -

"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."  
1 John 3:18

Our love is to be sincere; not merely paying lip-service to those around us. The use of the word "hypocrisy" means that we are not to be two-faced in this love. Such love then is a volitional act of the will. There are times that we have to put aside ourselves and our negative feelings and sincerely endeavor to love those around us. It's often not an easy task, but it is what we are called to do.

Next, we are told to "abhor what is evil." That which is evil is opposed to that which is godly. We are told to hate such things. Hatred then is not necessarily evil. God is said to "hate" things in Scripture and yet God is all-good. Therefore, anything contrary to what is holy and godly can and must be hated. Perversion, untruth, immorality of any kind, etc., is not just to be avoided, but to be hated. The things our leaders do which are contrary to Scripture are included in this. Even though we are instructed to be obedient to the laws around us, unless they violate God's law for us, we are to hate them if they are evil. Abortion is a perfect example of this. We are not only to refrain from abortion, but we are to abhor it and work against it. This is a mandate, not a hope.

Finally, we are told to "cling to what is good." The word for "cling" is *kollōmenoi*. It carries the thought of gluing two things together. We are in essence to be "glued to goodness." The root of this Greek word was commonly used throughout ancient Greek medical writings when speaking of the repairing of wounds. This then is the reciprocal of abhorring evil which could be considered a wound in what is good. In order to accomplish the latter (cling to what is good), we need to perform the former (abhorring evil).

Life application: The Bible doesn't waffle on the issues of sin and evil. We are to hate them in all their forms. Clinging to the world and its fallen system is contrary to what

God expects of us. Let us be determined to live holy, godly lives and to cling to that which is good.

*Heavenly Father, I love You. Amen.*

**Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; Romans 12:10**

This verse includes continued instruction in our expected duties and relationships as members of the church. Two specific thoughts are included. The first is to "be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love." Two words based on the thought of personal affection are used. One which is translated "kindly affectionate" is the word *philostorgoi*. This is the only time it is used in the New Testament and it is implying the closeness of family; a mother for her children, or the proper love of siblings who don't quarrel or compete, but who truly care for each other. The idea is that we are to love one another within the body of believers as if they were members of our immediate and cherished family.

The second word is translated as "brotherly love." It is the word *philadelphia*. It's used six times in the New Testament, and it shows that we are to treat each other as true brothers in the faith. The idea of brotherly love finds its most direct explanation in the words of Jesus -

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34, 35

Just as Jesus loves us, we are to love each other. His love was a sacrificial love, going so far as death for His brothers. He washed their feet, humbled Himself, and cared for them with true kindness and affection. And this type of love translates into the second thought of verse 12:10, which is that we are to act toward others "in honor giving preference to one another."

Instead of being first, we are to stand back and open the door. Rather than looking for note among others, we should note others. In place of lording our position above others, we should exalt those around us. The honor is to be directed from each person outward toward all other people. By acting in this way, it then becomes a demonstration to all that honor is due to all.

Life application: Paul's list of expectations from each of us is easy to assimilate in instruction, but immensely hard to put into practice. It involves a constant mental effort of putting ourselves into a proper perspective which is in many ways contrary to our nature. In order to meet these admonitions, we need to keep looking back to the life and ministry of Jesus. When we see His treatment of those who were of the faith, we have a fixed point of reference to act in like manner.

*Lord, when I think that You washed the feet of Your apostles, how can I not be willing to submit myself to others in the same manner. You have noted that I should look at my brothers in the faith with the same attitude and to defer preference to them. As hard as it is at times to do this, I will work to do so. Give me the willing heart to glorify You in this manner. Amen.*

**...not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; Romans 12:11**

The list of admonitions concerning our Christian service continues with "not lagging in diligence." This is stated in the negative, showing us what not to do. We are then to assume the opposite and to be diligent. His use of "lagging" indicates slothfulness or idleness. Instead of hoping for opportunity and then ignoring it when it does come about, we are to seek out opportunities. If we are so blessed as to have them show up at the door, we are to be diligent in accepting what has come our way.

A great example of this is witnessing. How many times do we hear the comment that the chance to witness never comes about? Rather, we need to seek opportunities with diligence and then follow through with them. Likewise, there are many around us who subtly let us know they want to know why we believe the things that we do believe concerning Jesus. When will we actually respond to those hints?

This concept Paul is speaking of surely applies to all types of work, not just ministerial jobs. If we are slothful in our regular employ, who will want to know about our faith? This goes hand in hand with what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:10 -

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going."

One aspect of life will affect all other aspects of life. Being slothful in one area will inevitably lead to sloth in another. Next, in contrast to lagging in diligence, we are instructed to be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The word here for "fervent" is used frequently when speaking of boiling something. Paul is telling us to be "boiling with spirit" in what we do. When water or some other liquid is heated, eventually it will start



to bubble and then the bubbling will intensify until it boils. This concept is transferable to our work ethic and emotions. We should be so moved in our service to the Lord that we boil over in the exercise of our duties.

Life application: If we want to get ahead in our job, we work our hardest, put forth diligence in our duties, and look for and pursue opportunities which can further the cause of our employer. If we put this type of attention into our earthly employ, how much more should we do so for our heavenly Lord and the furtherance of His kingdom?

*Gracious God, far too often I ask for things that will make my life easier or somehow benefit me. How much more then should I ask for strength and ability which will benefit the increase of Your kingdom? Give me a heart for Your word, a desire to speak to the lost, and the zeal to work tirelessly for the advancement of the gospel. And Lord, may I never slow down when You grace me with these things. Amen.*

**...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;**

Romans 12:12

Continuing on with his list of admonitions for the believer, we are told to be "rejoicing in hope." Our hope is the "blessed hope" Paul speaks of in Titus 2:13 which says that we should be, "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." For the believer, this is the coming rapture of the church. The good thing about the rapture is that even if someone dismisses the concept, it is still coming. They will just be more surprised than those who are expectantly awaiting it. And because of this sure hope, which is so specifically laid out in Scripture, we can not only rejoice in that hope, but we can "rejoice always" as we are admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

However, even while we rejoice in hope, we are not immune from trials, tests, or tribulations. Paul reminds us of this by saying that we should be "patient in tribulation." One can't be patient in what one doesn't experience. Therefore, it would be incorrect to expect the Christian walk to be one which has paths lined with roses and tables that are filled with corn, wine, and oil. Rather, we can and should expect times of difficulty, but we are asked to be patient in them as we are carried through them.

Finally in verse 12, we are asked to be "continuing steadfastly in prayer." The King James Version says, "continuing in instant prayer." This terminology has since all-but completely lost its original meaning. The idea here is perseverance, not suddenness. Jesus uses the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 as an example of persistent and continuous prayer.

So, we could ask, what is continuous and steadfast prayer? It is a state of life which asks us to speak to our Heavenly Father rather than gabbing on the cellphone. We should petition Him rather than the government for assistance. We should pray for the needs of ourselves and others, asking that they be met in accordance with His plans and purposes, not claiming stuff as if He were a cosmic ATM machine. Prayer is to be a continuous stream of communication to God, submitted in humility and yet with confidence that He is listening and handling the requests.

Life application: Living out the many admonitions given by Paul is far more difficult than simply reading them. But by thinking on them and asking for the Lord's help in conforming to these instructions, it is possible to be molded into such a life. Take time in your prayers today to ask the Lord to change you to be conformed to the person He would truly wish you to be.

*Glorious and precious Lord, as I read Your word, I'm reminded of the many places I fall short - in my duties to You, in my relationships with others, and in my actions as a member of the human race. Instill in me right thoughts and a heart directed toward proper living so that You will be exalted, those around me will be edified, and that I will be a proper steward of this one life that You have granted to me. Amen.*

**...distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Romans 12:13**

Continuing on with his stream of counsel, Paul now mentions "distributing to the needs of the saints." The word for "distributing" implies "sharing" or "contributing." The early church as recorded in Acts had all things in common (see Acts 4:32). In other words, it was what we could ostensibly term "communist." However, this isn't to be thought of in the sense used by communists today where people are forced into wealth distribution. Rather, it was voluntary. Nobody was compelled to resign their property or income. This is clearly noted in Acts 5:4.

As evidenced in Acts, this type of life didn't work out and a new structure developed in the church as gentiles moved in. However, the concept of giving has continued to be a mark of Christianity which goes beyond anything seen elsewhere. Societies which distribute under the guise of fairness are actually the most crooked of all. What is rightfully earned is stolen away to give to those who don't work. Christian giving is one of sacrificial love. It is giving not to encourage indolence, but to assist the truly needy. Further, this admonition of Paul speaks of taking care of the "needs of the saints." Yes, Christians give outside of the faith, but this verse is speaking of tending to the needs within the faith.

Paul then finishes his thought with the idea that we are to be "given to hospitality." Hospitality here is different than the distribution just mentioned. It carries the concept of having an open door, a welcome mat in front of the door, and an offering in your hand for the one coming in the door. Hospitality is a personal sharing of one's life and possessions rather than just putting money into a box to later be distributed. Showing hospitality communicates true love and respect for others who are entering into one's presence. In his third epistle, John speaks of this -

"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth." 3 John - 5-8

Life application: Have you been abundantly blessed by the Lord? If so, when you're at church this weekend, note someone who has been less fortunate and invite them to your house as a gesture of hospitality. Such kindness will reap great rewards for all concerned.

*Lord God, how abundantly I've been blessed by You. I know that I have much more than I actually need, and I have the ability to help others who have less. Give me a heart to not lust after more stuff, but to share what I have. It all came from Your open hand of grace and so now, remind me to open my hand in grace as well. Thank You for allowing me to serve You in this way. Amen.*

**Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.** Romans 12:14

Paul goes to the words of Jesus. In Luke 6:27, 28 we read this -

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you."

This may be one of the most difficult of all of Paul's admonitions, but it is what we are asked to do. This is particularly so when we see that Jesus first spoke the words to us. To curse someone is, in essence, requesting their condemnation. But which one of us wasn't first facing that fate (see John 3:18)? And yet we are pleased that God has shown mercy on us. Shouldn't we likewise share the same feelings toward the lost?

These words, however, are often used as a pretext by those who would rip it out of its context to imply that we cannot call sin as sin. The implication then is that we are to

bless any action by anyone without considering either the perverse nature of the individual or their action. Further, it is used as a tool against protecting oneself or taking any necessary action to guard against whatever harm may befall the believer. This is not the intent of these words. It is a clear and concise statement; we are to bless those who persecute us, not to curse them. This in no way implies that the Christian cannot at the same time use whatever means is available to secure themselves from others or to call out sin in the sinner.

Following the book of Acts, there are times where the apostles will do just these things. Throughout the epistles, we are given instructions into what is and isn't acceptable behavior and even demonstrations of how to confront offenders. There is a balance which needs to be maintained and one cannot pursue this balance without being prepared through knowing the word and adhering to its precepts.

Life application: Though it is a difficult challenge, it is one prescribed to the believer - to bless and not to curse those who persecute us. God is the Avenger of His people and we need to make room for His wrath as we pray for those who come against us.

*Heavenly Father, You have given me the difficult task of responding to those who persecute me with a blessing and not a curse. I sure need help with this one Lord. Grant me the patience in such trials, the ability to prevail over them, and the resolute determination to follow Your precepts. It's tough Lord, but it has been directed by You, so it is attainable. Be with me in this challenge. Amen.*

**Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** Romans 12:15

This admonition is straight-forward and something anyone can and should both grasp and participate in. Paul gives a life example of this same thought to the Corinthians in his first letter to them -

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."1 Corinthians 12:26

Rejoicing with those who rejoice develops a bond of love simply because it shows that what makes them happy also makes us happy. We unite in a new way when we share such uplifting times. In the same way, when someone has tragedy, loss, or difficulty then showing empathy to their situation can only increase the bond between the two, though it may be delayed more than during times of joy. Grief often takes more time to process than joy because grief can completely overwhelm every other emotion and thought. This is why it's so important to demonstrate empathy at these times.

Jesus gave us examples of both for us to emulate. When He gave the disciples authority and power as laborers in His ministry, we are told they came back "with joy" at the marvels which had occurred. Then this is noted, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit..." (Luke 10:21). In the same way, those who were at the tomb of Lazarus were in mourning. Jesus likewise mourned with them, showing empathy for their plight. In the account it says, "Jesus wept." (John 11:35).

If the Lord can so fellowship with His people, then we can and should as well. Let us endeavor to participate in the joys and sorrows of those we are united to in the body.

Life application: Demonstrating empathy at sadness and showing joy at others' victories and times of happiness can only build them up. Remember that at some point each one of us will have the same times of joy or sadness and we will hope for fellowship at those times too.

*Heavenly Father, Jesus walked among us and rejoiced with those who rejoiced, and He wept with those who were filled with grief. Please grant me a heart that has the ability to unite with others in this way. When they are mourning, I can help them through with tears of understanding. And when they are filled with joy, I can be there building them up in their bliss. Grant me this that the church will be edified in this way. Amen.*

**Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.** Romans 12:16

The first part of this verse has several possible interpretations. One is that we should empathize with one another. A second possibility is that believers should be agreed in their opinions about matters. A third possibility is that believers should seek the same thing for others that they seek for themselves. Based on the translator, one will inevitably get a different meaning. To "be of the same mind" is to show unity of mind regardless of the overall intent behind the words.

After that, Paul says that we shouldn't set our minds on high things. The purpose of his words here is that we shouldn't strive for what is considered of worldly importance. Seeking after wealth will only bring troubles (see 1 Timothy 6:10, for example). Looking to be around the famous is a dead-end street as well. The majority of famous people live by the world's standards and therefore our attention can only get misdirected from what is right and honorable. Further, when attempting to get into the presence of royalty or fame, we may find ourselves shamed in the process. This is well reflected in Proverbs 25:6, 7 -

"Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king,  
And do not stand in the place of the great;  
For it is better that he say to you,  
'Come up here,'  
Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince,  
Whom your eyes have seen."

Instead of looking for fame and to the famous, Paul instructs us to "associate with the humble." With humble people, there is no pretense, favoritism, or arrogance. Instead, there is the calm life of one who understands his position and acts without contempt for others. In the end, associating with such a person is far more pleasing and uplifting than the constant maneuvering of seeking high society.

The verse finishes with, "Do not be wise in your own opinion." This fits nicely with the thought of Romans 12:3 which says one should not attempt "to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." Whether it is regarding matters of faith, industry, innovation, strength, or some other ability, it was given by grace and it can end in a fleeting moment. Strong men will grow weak, invention will become passé, agility will cease with age, etc. As surely as strawberries are sweet, once we start acting wise in our own opinion, we will be humbled. Rather than following this avenue, Solomon gives this advice in Proverbs 3:5-8 -

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.  
Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the Lord and depart from evil.  
It will be health to your flesh,  
And strength to your bones."

In the end, acknowledging the Lord, acting humbly, associating with the humble, and having unity of mind with other believers is a far better approach. It will lead to a much fuller life and one which is destined for heavenly rewards as well.

Life application: Humility is something which is in short supply in our society, but it is a treasure which will pay heavenly rewards. When arrogance steps in, there is no room for exalting the Lord, so be humble and set your eyes on that which will be pleasing to your heavenly Father.

*O gracious God, at times, I get the feeling that I'm pretty great stuff. But as soon as that kind of thought shows up, I remember that I'm not. I'm no better than others and I was saved by Your grace alone. Help me to act humbly, speak with meekness, and redirect lofty opinions of self to Your exaltation, not mine. May my life be one which glorifies You, O God. Amen.*

**Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.**

Romans 12:17

What a difficult thing this verse asks! "Repay no one evil for evil" equates to "turn the other cheek." For a good analysis of this directly from Jesus, refer to Matthew 5:38-48. As this is a part of Paul's prescriptive writings, these words are intended to be followed despite being contrary to our normal human nature. By staying in the word, fellowshiping with others, talking to the Lord continuously, and praying without ceasing, this high and lofty goal can be attained. But with the distractions in the world, constantly tugging at us from every direction, it truly is a difficult task. In the end, repaying evil for evil is simply producing a second evil. If the first evil was wrong, a second one doesn't make the first right; it only adds to the evil.

Next, we are told to, "Have regard for good things in the sight of all men." This thought comes from Proverbs 3:3, 4 -

"Let not mercy and truth forsake you;  
Bind them around your neck,  
Write them on the tablet of your heart,  
And so find favor and high esteem  
In the sight of God and man."

By living with mercy and truth as lamps on our path, we will be able to use them when strangers step in our way. When they look to harm, we should return with peace. When they bring a curse, we should utter forth a blessing. And should they refuse our graces, we should be ready and willing to offer a second helping. By writing them now on the tablet of our hearts, we will be prepared in advance when the calling comes.

It should be noted that to "have regard" for good things is not speaking of what man determines is good. The thing man determines is good is a bad standard to rely on. Rather, we are to have regard for good things which are noted in Scripture and to have that regard "in the sight of all men." They are to see our conduct toward that which is truly good. And the intention of the term "in the sight of all men" is that we are to apply

this precept at all times and in all places. In other words, we're not to act rightly just when men are watching, but as if men are always watching.

Life application: Repaying evil for evil can only lead to an unhappy result. Even if we think we obtained the upper hand, in the end we will always reap a negative reward. And that negative reward may only come when we stand before the Lord. It is incumbent on us to live without acting in revenge. As hard as this is to accomplish, it is the right avenue for peace in this life and favor from the Lord at our judgment.

*Jesus, You have asked me to turn the other cheek and to not repay evil with evil. It is an extremely high calling for a person like me. It is in my fiber to come back with punches, but You would have me return with blessings instead - even a kiss of love. Help me to fulfill this that You will be glorified, and I will have a life of peace and favor from You. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.** Romans 12:18

Unlike other admonitions, Paul begins with "If it is possible..." This should tell us that this will be a most difficult task to fulfill. A few reasons should be obvious -

Not all people want to live peaceably with Christians. They have harmful intent towards them, thus making peace impossible.

Doctrine must take precedence over tolerance. The concept of "tolerance" in today's society is so awry that everyone is offended by everything. The only thing that isn't tolerated is being intolerant. It is a confused system which asks all individuals to compromise morality. However, Jesus tells us differently. We are never to compromise our morals and we are to stand firm on the biblical truth that there is one and only one way to be reconciled to God. John 14:6 allows no other option. We must hold to the gospel of Christ even if it offends.

In a fallen world, peace is not attainable in its truest sense. Trials, stresses, weariness, etc. all affect humanity. These external pressures naturally lead to conflict.

The Christian is asked to live within these difficult circumstances with the intent and goal of living peaceably. And so, in order to establish sound guidelines, Paul adds in the thought, "as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." To the greatest measure the onus is on the believer to effect peace. Sometimes it simply isn't possible. Even though many within the faith see it otherwise, Paul would never ask a believer to compromise their morals or proper doctrine for the sake of either peace or tolerance.



When either is compromised, the believer becomes an ineffective member of the body and does more harm to the cause than good. However, this is what the liberal arm of Christianity has come to. Don't be swept up in this, but rather stand first on doctrine and then exercise the peace which Christ has granted you in order to, if at all possible, live peaceably with all men.

Life application: Some things aren't possible for us in this life, but that doesn't give us a blank pass to ignore our responsibility to attempt to meet the lofty goals set down for us. It is incumbent on every believer to endeavor to live peaceably with those around us.

*Precious Lord Jesus, thank You for the peace I find in You. In a world of toil and strife, I can rest in knowing that I have a future and a hope which will far exceed the trials I face today. Because of this assurance, it gives me even the ability to stand calmly as the storms swirl around me now. I know that whatever happens, it is only temporary, but Your sure promises are eternal. Great stuff Lord! Amen.*

**Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Romans 12:19**

Paul has just written these words to us - "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

In order to show that this is the proper avenue and that repaying evil for evil is completely unnecessary, he will turn to Scripture ("for it is written") to show us that all will work out as it should. He begins though with "Beloved." By beginning with this, he is making an appeal to the heart because it is the heart which will inevitably lead us to do wrong if left unattended.

And so, in a heartfelt appeal we are now given our instructions, "Do not avenge yourselves." This is linked right back to "Repay no one evil for evil." As noted, committing an evil doesn't cover an evil, it simply produces more evil. To grasp this, think of the modern call for abortion. The original demands came under the guise of fairness; cases of rape and incest certainly necessitated making the procedure legal, right? Once the foot was in the door, it opened the procedure for any and every reason. But even if it were only for cases of rape and incest, it doesn't make it morally right. To murder an innocent human because a previous sin was committed doesn't negate the original sin, it merely adds another to it. This is the logic of Paul here.

And so, rather than us carrying out vengeance, we are told instead to "give place to wrath." This expression is speaking of divine wrath. Though it may seem slow in coming, it will in fact come. The wicked shall not always prosper and they will have a day of reckoning. And so, we are asked to not get in the way of the divine wrath; something that we will do when we take matters of vengeance into our own hands.

And this is where Paul now cites Scripture. He refers back to Deuteronomy 32:35 for a verse from the Song of Moses to justify his stand - "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." As surely as evil is committed, the Lord has vowed to repay. There is no "getting off scot-free" and all sin will be judged. Because the Lord has spoken, He will follow through. This then is an absolute guarantee. So why would we seek to repay evil with evil when His coming judgment of the first evil will suffice?

Having said this, and understanding it to be true, there is still the caution against going too far in the opposite direction. This verse is held up on banners at rallies opposing the execution of criminals. It is often misquoted, being taken completely out of its intended context, in an attempt to stand against those who commit violations of set laws. This is an abuse of what is being stated here and is similar to the incessant and continuously incorrect use of "Judge not lest you be judged."

Jesus never surrendered His rights under the law, but appealed to the law during His trial. Throughout the rest of the New Testament, the apostles appeal to the law for their defense and as a just means of settling wrong-doings within society (see 1 Peter 2:13-17 for example). This verse is speaking of personal vengeance, not the regular and proper execution of sentences within the framework of the governing laws of the land.

Life application: Paul has shown, directly from Scripture, that the Lord will avenge evil. It is not within our right to do so, except within certain contexts, such as the law of the land. Leave personal vengeance to the Lord. He will repay.

*Lord God, when I see evil in the world, I really would like to handle the judgment all by myself... setting things right as I see it. But You have asked that I not repay evil for evil and that instead You are my protector and defender. In the end, You have vowed to repay all evil and execute justice. Though it is hard, I will confidently wait on Your timing, knowing that You have it all worked out. Amen.*

**Therefore**

**"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;**

**If he is thirsty, give him a drink;**

**For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."** Romans 12:20

Paul begins this verse with "therefore" which is translated from the word *alla* - "on the contrary." He has been speaking of not repaying evil with evil and not taking vengeance on others. Instead of such actions, he says that "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink." This is almost a direct quote from Proverbs 25:21. Proverbs is one of the five "wisdom" books in the Old Testament and is one which peers deep into the state of humanity and then pulls out general applications which can (and should be) used regularly. Many of Jesus' sayings bear directly on the wisdom found there. In intent, His statement in Matthew 5:43-45 follows the same line of thinking now presented by Paul in this chapter of Romans -

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

What Paul has written here in verse 20, is an obvious, clear, and direct statement. It has been the customary practice of many soldiers throughout wars of the past. When the battle is engaged, you fight without holding back, but when the enemy surrenders, you patch up their wounds, give them food, and treat them decently.

This type of truly noble behavior has the positive effect of helping to bring nations together after wars end. The nations which fail to do this continue to have long-standing animosities even generations later, but those who practice this attitude can resolve their conflicts and put the past behind them very quickly. This same attitude is asked of believers as well.

By acting in this manner, we are told that "in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Coals of fire are extremely hot and very targeted in where their heat is directed. Unlike an open flame which is all-consuming, a coal will burn what it touches directly. When coals are heaped on something, that thing will be consumed by the heat, but the surrounding area will remain unaffected. A coal, for example, is an extremely effective means of torture.

The idea here isn't that of actual torture, but that the same intended effect will result. Just as heaping coals on someone's head is intended to obtain a complete change in the person, the kindness expected of the believer towards their enemy will achieve the same. The very notion of kindness to one's bitter enemy is so contrary to what they would expect, that when it is received, their complete change in attitude is almost certain.

Life application: As difficult as it is to bless one's foes, lovingly care for one's enemies, and willfully withhold the returning of evil for evil, it is what we are called to do. In the end, by taking this course the change in the one who we direct these favors to will hopefully result in their conversion. Such a change has eternal value, so let us pursue these difficult avenues zealously.

*Lord God, I suppose that feeding my enemy, turning the other cheek, and blessing those who curse me is about as difficult to do as anything You ask of me. But You have asked me to pursue these avenues of peace and reconciliation. As You are Lord, I will do my best to comply. Forgive me when I fail and strengthen me in my resolve to meet Your expectations. Amen.*

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Romans 12:21

Paul finishes chapter 12 of Romans with this verse. When we allow ourselves to be overcome by evil, we are the ones who lose the battle. This is perfectly obvious when observing the actions of an instigator. As he needles and pushes, he will delight in his perverse exploits. As one falls prey to him, the smug satisfaction of victory can be evidenced on his face; he has overcome and feels vindicated by the reduction of you, his foe, to his own depraved level.

However, if you stand against him and continue to put forth blessings and goodness, there will eventually be a vindication of your approach in one of a couple ways. One is that the instigator will simply release a stream of anger and profanity and depart, or he may concede that you have been right in your actions. Either way, good has overcome evil.

An excellent place to see this in action is on a news talk show where a political issue is debated. Or listening to various talk-radio hosts will allow the same opportunity. Those hosts who continuously put forth a stream of positive thoughts and encouragements will inevitably win their debate. Eventually, opponents don't even bother entering the dialogue because they see that the host won't be shaken.

However, for those hosts who allow themselves to get rattled, those who engage them will continue to needle them until that comes about. In these cases, even if the stronger or morally right argument is held by the host, the debate is still lost.

This is what Paul is speaking of in any life situation. When we allow evil to overcome, then only evil has come. But when we overcome evil with good, then good has prevailed and the enemy is silenced.

Life application: One of the most difficult tasks of all is to know when to throw out a blessing in order to fend off an attack. As a stable and reasonable thinker, you will always win the argument if you keep your emotions in check and allow grace, not angry emotion, to rule the situation. Learn this thought from Paul and remember it when you face such pressure –

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." Colossians 4:6

*Lord God, help my words to be seasoned with grace and free from anger. Grant me the ability to throw out a blessing instead of reviling when I'm attacked by others. I know that as soon as I respond in anger, the argument is lost. So please, help me to overcome evil with good and to never be overcome by the evil which comes my way. In so doing, I know that You will be glorified. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 13

**Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.** Romans 13:1

Paul now begins a new chapter and a new direction of thought. His statement in verse 1 is clear and concise. It is prescriptive in nature, meaning it is a prescribed directive; not a "wish" but a command. The second half of the verse will explain the first half. Afterwards, he will give obvious conclusions based on his comment here. Verse 1 begins with, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities."

God's people are in this world, here and now. Though we belong to a higher rule and authority which exists, it is a spiritual kingdom at this point. Until Christ returns and sets up His kingdom here on earth, He has appointed us to live within His spiritual kingdom while at the same time living under human authorities.

Because of this, we are directed to "be subject to the governing authorities." This means that we are to be obedient to the laws of the land, whatever they may be. But there is an obvious conclusion that we can make. If we are under the rule of Christ, the highest authority that exists, and a governing authority under which we live issues a rule which is contrary to the precepts of the Bible, then we must disobey that rule of the lower government.

This is no different than how individual states are set up under the overarching federal rule. If America, for example, has a set law, and a state issues an order which violates the federal law, then we must obey the federal law over the state law. The same is true with our obligation to God. This precept is seen explicitly exercised by the apostles who faced the high priest and council in Jerusalem. When they were given a directive contrary to what God would have them do, their answer was that "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29.

However, supposing that the government under which we live has issued nothing contrary to our duties to God, we are expected to be in submission to them. And the reason is given, "For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Time and again, the Bible notes that it is God who sets up kingdoms and brings them low. He directs the course of nations according to an infinitely wise plan. He also directs where we will be born and live out our years (Acts 17:26-28). Therefore, because He has established these things, we are bound under them and are expected to be in adherence to what He has ordained.

Life application: Regardless of where you live and whether you agree with the policies of your governing authorities or not, you are expected to be obedient to them. The exception is that you are never to violate your obligations to God in order to adhere to what a human government has ordained. And how can you know when such a violation of God's rule is directed? By knowing your Bible. Read your Bible.

*Heavenly Father, I know that my highest allegiance is to You. Help me to be strong in the face of persecution if it comes my way, and also help me to be obedient to Your rule above all else. Grant me the fortitude to work against evil at all levels and to never compromise my adherence to Your word and obedience to the faith I have placed in my Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.** Romans 13:2

This verse begins with "therefore" as an introduction to the consequences of disobeying the prescription of the previous verse where all people are to "be subject to the governing authorities." When we fail in this regard, we can only expect the governing authorities to respond with the force they bear against malefactors.

"Whoever" is given as an all-encompassing round up of those who would subvert the duly established authority which was appointed by God. By stating "whoever" Paul is ensuring that we note that believers are not exempt from the statement. If we think that because we are a part of Christ's kingdom that we are not subject to earthly rule and authority, we are only deluding ourselves. And so, "whoever (including believers) resists the authority resists the ordinance of God." Why? Because verse 1 told us so. The "authorities that exist are appointed by God."

If we fight against our God-appointed rulers, we are fighting against what God has ordained. It couldn't be laid out any more clearly. And such resistance "will bring judgment on themselves." The word for "judgment" is *krima*, a word that is at times used for "condemnation." However, it should be noted that civil disobedience by a believer doesn't mean they will lose their salvation. This isn't the type of condemnation spoken of. A sealed believer is saved, despite such wrongdoing. It is rather speaking of condemnation within the framework of the society, up to and maybe including a sentence of death.

When we do wrong, we can only expect whatever punishment is handed out for wrongdoing. And even when we don't do wrong, if the society sees our actions as wrong, judgment may still come. The apostles found this out. Most of them were

beaten, tortured, and executed for their faith. The same is true with countless millions since their time. But Peter (who was martyred for his faith) says this concerning such suffering -

"For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully." 1 Peter 2:19

Life application: At times, the values of our leaders are much different than those that we as Christians hold to. However, if their decisions don't force us to act in a manner contrary to our faith, we must be obedient to their rules. This is right and pleasing in the sight of God who ordained those leaders to be over us.

*Lord God, I want to take time today to give You thanks and gratitude for the many blessings You have bestowed upon me. How can I ask for more when You have given me so much? Help me to be content with this life and understand that I have it so much better than so many in the history of humanity who have walked upon this earth of Yours. Thank You, Lord. Yes, thank You. Amen.*

**For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.** Romans 13:3

Paul's explanation of verse 1 continues here in verse 3. He makes a general proclamation concerning the state of rulers. This isn't intended as a complete evaluation of all rulers, some of which are truly crummy, wicked, and bent on evil. Rather, the general state of rule is one intended for the good of society and rulers generally work for what they believe is that good, even if it is skewed or perverse. What is universally true though is that God has ordained these rulers to be rulers and therefore His good end is being worked out through them.

The thought that such rulers "are not a terror to good works, but to evil" means that if the laws they lay out are obeyed, then one can expect peace from them. Saddam Hussein was a ruler who was generally considered corrupt, evil, and immensely brutal, but for those who were obedient, their lives were not usually ones of terror. However, if someone bucked the system and the rules he had in place, they were certainly expecting harsh judgment when brought to trial. "Terror" is a good word to describe their state.

And so, although to be generally applied, Paul asks a question which should generally be considered, "Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?" This is to be taken as a rhetorical question with an obvious answer of "Yes." Only a perverse person would want



to be on the outside of the law. And though it is quite common, it is still the exception rather than the rule. Most people want to live peaceably. And so, in response to this, he gives the correct attitude to bear, "Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same."

Laws are in place for the proper working of society. Police are in place for proper adherence to the law or to arrest law breakers. Courts are in place to try law breakers. And sentences are given under the law for the punishment of crimes and even the execution of criminals. By doing what is good, instead of arrest, trial, and punishment, one can expect praise, not condemnation.

Life application: Paul's words so far in Romans 13 are given for peaceable living. He wrote this epistle under a most corrupt and wicked leader and yet they were applicable as general statements of living in any society, even one such as that of a bad Roman emperor. And the same is true today. Whether we have a good leader or a bad one, we should endeavor to do what is good under their rule.

*Heavenly Father, Your word tells us that all people are descended from one man, Adam. Because of this, we are all one people, even if there are divisions within our makeup. Help me to see others as You see them - bearers of Your image and the objects of Your love. Help me to share the message of hope found in Jesus which is the message of restoration to You through His shed blood; blood shed for all people everywhere. Amen.*

**For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.** Romans 13:4

Verse 4 starts with "for" to show the continued explanation of the previous verses. "He" is speaking of the "governing authorities" of verse 1 and the "rulers" of verse 3. Whoever our leader is, in whatever land and whatever time in history, this is the individual Paul now speaks of for us. This individual has been appointed by God to "minister to you for good." He is the protector of the land, the defender of the judicial system, the one responsible for the infrastructure, etc. Without leaders, society breaks down into anarchy.

Continuing, Paul notes next that based on the leader's position for us in doing good, "if you do evil, be afraid." That follows logically. A leader is appointed for the good of the society and when someone is hindering that good end, he has every reason to be afraid of the leader's wrath. He is the bearer of the sword (symbolizing the one who wields the policing and military powers) and "he does not bear the sword in vain." The sword is an

emblem of death power and death. It isn't a tool used for chopping wood, instead it is an implement used for taking life. The power and authority the ruler has been entrusted with will be used to ensure the continued, uninterrupted furtherance of society, or he will use the sword for corrective measure.

As noted in verse 1 though, there is a point where facing the sword is expected. That is when our allegiance to God is usurped by a human ruler. The exiles from Babylon were faced with such a dilemma in Daniel chapter 3 and they stood on the side of the Lord, even in the face of death. However, this is the exception, not the rule. Apart from our allegiance to God, we are instructed to live and work within the confines of the rule under which we reside (see Jeremiah 29:7). And the reason is restated for us to understand clearly, "For he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

God is the one who establishes, builds up, and tears down societies. And He is the one who places every person in exactly the position that He determined (Acts 17:26-28) for His purposes. Because these are biblical truths, we only strive against what He has ordained when we strive against the life and position in which we have been placed. In the end, by subverting proper rule and authority, we can expect our leaders to execute wrath on us if we practice such evil.

Life application: If you are unhappy with your leaders, then work within the legal framework of your society to get them out of their leadership position. If you work in an illegal or subversive manner to oust them, then you are opening yourself up to whatever wrath is determined upon you.

*O glorious God! When I think about the marvelous tapestry of human history which You have woven together, I see how everything fits so perfectly. It is revealed in the word You spoke to the prophets so long ago, and as I read I can only marvel at what I see. History is held within Your hand and surely nothing occurs apart from Your foreknowledge. I stand amazed in Your presence! Amen.*

**Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. Romans 13:5**

"Therefore" is given to sum up what has been stated in verses 1-4. It should be noted that the term "God" is used six times in chapter 13 and all six are in connection with the concept of the rule of human government. This rule was established after the Flood of Noah in Genesis 9 and it has continued since that time. The covenant has never been

revoked and so in addition to our duties to God, we have the added responsibility to human governments appointed over us.

Because of this, "you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake." Paul has just told us that the appointed ruler "does not bear the sword in vain" and so we should be responsible citizens in order to avoid his wrath. But even more, because he is God's appointed minister, we have the added reason of being subject which is "for conscience' sake."

In other words, if we rebel against the duly established government, then we rebel against what God has ordained. We, in essence, work against what our conscience should be subject to. An interesting thought then arises. If we are to be subject to our rulers, then how can we expect governments to change, because they in fact do change. A prime example would be the American Revolution. If the colonists were to be subject to their government, were they then in violation of what God ordained when they revolted against the king?

The answer is "no" because the leaders of the colonies signed their names on the Declaration of Independence. By signing their names, they established a new government with the intent of separating from the old. Those who vowed allegiance to the new government, after the signing of the declaration, were now subject to that new government. However, it should be noted that if their cause failed, those who severed the ties of the old government would have been punished for their actions. Such wasn't the case and so those who are citizens of America today cannot be held to the governing rule of England.

Life application: One must consider carefully what they believe is a just cause for severing the ties they have with the government under which they live. It isn't always easy to determine, but until such action is taken, one is expected to be subject to their governing authorities.

*Lord God, there are many governments on earth and the citizens of each land face various rules and restrictions. But You have placed us where we are to meet Your purposes. So, Lord, help us to live peaceably under our governing authorities until that Great Day when You come to set up an eternal kingdom for Your chosen and called citizens. Amen.*

**For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Romans 13:6**

In the previous verse, one avenue concerning the change of governments was looked at. There are many ways in which governments change - *coup d'état*, elections, overthrow by attacking enemies, etc. are common ways that changes in political landscapes may occur. Another one is implosion through over-taxing of the people and abuse of the taxes which were levied on them.

This is where the United States is today. Although the implosion hasn't happened yet, the meal is already over, the cake has been served, and her fall is inevitable unless drastic measures are taken, a self-inflicted wound due to greed for power and control will be the result. And it has come about in no small part through the taxing system which is in place.

Having said that, and despite that fact, Paul instructs us that it is our obligation to pay taxes. "For" explains the previous thought which is that we are to be subject to the ruling authorities. Because we are, and because they are the ones who levy taxes, we are to pay what they levy. And Paul gives the reason. "For they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing." Their job, even if it means financially ruining the lives of the citizens under them, is ultimately to meet God's purposes.

It is God who sets up nations and it is He who gives them either good leaders or crummy leaders. This is seen again and again in Scripture as Israel and her surrounding neighbors are highlighted. When a nation is obedient to God, He gives them good leaders who properly shepherd the people. When they turn from him and mock Him and His word, He gives them crummy leaders. In a constitutional republic like the United States, this means that the wound truly is self-inflicted, and yet God knew before the choice was made what it would be.

In a nation such as the US, having an ungodly leader means that a vast portion of the electorate chose that ungodly person. God's foreknowledge of this is used in the overall plan of nations as He has ordained. Therefore, when a political party comes into power which ignores the constitution, redistributes the earnings of those who work to those who are indolent, shuns God, and promotes perversion, there is still no excuse to not pay the taxes which have been levied - no matter how exorbitant. God's plans are being worked out, even through such wicked people.

One important lesson of the Bible is that even though God doesn't author evil, He can work with the evil we perpetrate to meet His good end. So, when you get your tax bill and see that it is unfair from your perspective, pay it as you should. You are a citizen of the nation you belong to and the money, though seemingly wasted, is having its intended effect.

Life application: Pay your taxes.

*Heavenly Father, You have instructed us in Your word to pay our taxes as responsible citizens of the nation in which we live. It really torques my jaw to pay taxes for the often-wicked agenda which I see set in place around me, but I know that even the self-inflicted implosion of my nation is a part of Your plans and that my taxes are ultimately meeting Your purposes. And so, I shall pay them as I have been instructed (gritting my teeth and calling out for the return of Jesus as I lick the stamp). Amen.*

**Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.** Romans 13:7

Verse 7 begins with "Render therefore..." and then it lists what we are to so render based on the discussion of the preceding 6 verses. This term, "render therefore," is beautifully described by Albert Barnes –

"Christianity is not designed to break in upon the proper order of society, but rather to establish and confirm that order. It does not rudely assail existing institutions: but it comes to put them on a proper footing, to diffuse a mild and pure influence over all, and to secure "such" an influence in all the relations of life as shall tend best to promote the happiness of man and the welfare of the community."

It is we who should be the model and goal of all others within society as we live out the high calling of our Christian life. And this high calling is to render "to all their due." This, as described here, includes "taxes to whom taxes are due." Paul told us to whom we were to pay taxes and the reason for it in verse 6, and now he reiterates it here. In essence he is saying, "They are due this for the reason I explained. Now follow through with it." The word "taxes" in Greek is *phoron* and indicates those taxes that are imposed on people and on estates.

Next, he notes "customs to whom customs" are due. The Greek here is *telos*. This is a tax which would be on things bought and sold and things imported and exported. When taxes like this are imposed, we are to pay them. In the modern world, the taxes are usually already figured into the cost of an item, but there are also legal ways of getting around them, such as bartering, buying on-line, etc. Eventually though, nothing will be bought or sold without first accepting the mark of the beast (see Revelation 13:16, 17). At that time, there will be only two options.

In Luke 20:25, Jesus told us to "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." If taking the mark of the beast means that we are

not rendering to God His due, then a sobering choice will have to be made. Will the individual honor God and refuse the mark - thus sealing his fate in this earthly life. Or, will the individual honor "Caesar" and take the mark, thus securing temporary life and with it eternal damnation. The far better choice is to receive Jesus Christ now. By doing so, before that horrible day comes, they will be taken up at the rapture and free from facing this dilemma.

Paul's next thought is that we are to render "fear to whom fear" is due. This is referring to what he said in verses 2-4. The authorities bear the sword and therefore they are due the fear of their office. This doesn't mean they are to "be afraid" of them, but to show the fear which leads to obedience and proper submission. This thought is comparable to our duty to the Lord, as is noted again and again in Scripture. One such verse is Leviticus 19:32, "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord." The thought is not that we are to be afraid of the Lord, but that we are to fear who He is. It should be a fear in awe, not of threat.

Finally, Paul notes that we are to offer "honor to whom honor" is due. This takes us back to verse 1 which noted that we are to be subject to the governing authorities. These people have been placed over us and therefore they are due the honor of the office. For example, regardless of who is in the White House, and there have been some really crummy presidents in our history, the office itself demands the honor. But that isn't the end of who is to be honored. Peter, in his first epistle, will expand on this thought to include all people. We are to defer honor to all others and thus be humble in how we present ourselves. Here is his thought from 1 Peter 2:17, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

Life application: If Romans 13:1-7 have seemed like a tough challenge to you, don't feel alone. Most people find these verses difficult. However, we are instructed to be the model of society and the epitome of those who are respectful of others. At the same time, we are to be as hard as a wall of iron in tolerating sin. And so, there is a balance which needs to be presented. If we live the love and don't challenge the sin, we err. We cannot tolerate that which God will not accept. However, if we live for judgment on sin without granting respect and honor, we become (and are so viewed as) self-righteous. Without the balance, we become ineffective in our Christian testimony.

*Lord Jesus, as Your servant, help me to be the model of society, an example of humility, and a person of respect and honor. On my own, I'll always fall short, but because I bear Your great name, be with me and guide me in this so that You will be glorified, not diminished, in the eyes of others. Thank You for hearing my prayer O Lord. Amen.*

**Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8**

Although this verse is commonly used to express the concept of Christian love, this actually isn't what Paul is first and foremost speaking of. Context... The past 7 verses have spoken of the Christian's duties to the state - paying taxes, paying customs, showing fear towards those who bear the sword, and rendering honor to those whom honor is due. These are all considered debts to be paid. And so, Paul now reiterates this.

"Owe no one anything" implies that we pay our debts. This cannot mean that we shouldn't acquire debt, such as in the purchase of land, a vehicle, or some other big-ticket item. Even the Old Testament has provisions for buying land and the payments to be made (see Leviticus 25:13-17 for example). However, in such a debt we are to be faithful in its repayment. We are to "owe no one anything." If a loan is made, the part that is owed is the part that is due at any given time. True, the entire debt is owed, but it is spread out through a set duration so that it is not truly "owed" until that duration comes about.

We owe taxes when we buy something, not before (except maybe with healthcare, I suppose). Therefore, we are actually owing taxes at any given time. Again, Paul cannot be saying to acquire no debt at all, or we could never buy anything. Instead, he is telling us that when the debt (taxes in this instance) is due, we pay them at that time.

Honor is owed to the office of the president. Charlie Garrett may become president someday, but he is currently not in that position and so no debt of office is owed to him. However, should his day of inauguration come about, he will be owed the debt of that honor; not because he is inherently worthy of it, but because the office he holds is. And again, Paul cannot be telling us to owe no such debt in the ultimate sense, because we always owe it if we are in the United States. What he is saying is that we are to render it at the time it is due. When ushered into the presence of a crummy president, even he is to be addressed as "Mr. President."

The reason for paying our debts when they are due should be obvious. We bear a title and distinction which is higher than any other. We bear the name of Christ Jesus. We err when we -

- Fail to render unto Caesar
- Fail to pay our loans
- Owe respect, but instead withhold it

In such instances and others like them we bring discredit upon the exalted name we bear. May it never be so!

This is why the selection process in Acts 6 is cited for a job even as menial as to "serve tables." The apostles were being bogged down because of the daily distribution and so they came together and determined to correct the matter -

"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:3, 4

Honorable people were chosen to handle matters which demanded an honorable resolution.

After telling us to "owe no one anything" Paul now throws in one caveat which is "except to love one another." The debt of love is a debt which can never be fully paid. Unlike other debts which are paid at the time they become due, the debt of love is ongoing and will never end. It will continue as long as love exists. As "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and because redeemed man will live eternally with God (John 3:16) the debt of love shall never end. It will never cease towards fellow man nor will it cease towards exalted Creator. The office of president will someday disappear, the paying of taxes will cease (thanking the Lord for that one!), but God and the people of God will always be; the debt of love shall never cease.

While in this earthly life, the debt of love is to fulfill a set requirement and purpose. It is that "he who loves another has fulfilled the law." This precept will be explained in and through the next three verses. There is a law which requires obedience, and it is fulfilled in paying the debt of love.

Life application: Love is a debt. Be sure to pay it out in a continual stream of unceasing joy.

*Heavenly Father, I know that all governments will cease, all swords will be melted down, and some great day ahead, there will be no taxes (!), but I know that there remains a debt that will continue forever. Not the debt of honor to a leader, respect to a uniform, or bars of gold to a greedy government, but the debt of love. You are Love and You are eternal. And because of Jesus, I shall eternally live in Your presence. I shall pay my debt of love forever! Amen.*



**For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Romans 13:9**

Paul now makes a statement similar to what Jesus said in Mark 12. He was confronted with a question concerning the law as is seen in this exchange -

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?'"

Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'" Mark 12:28-31

Jesus showed that these are the two greatest commandments. In Matthew's account of the same incident, He went on to say, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:40

Israel was given the Ten Commandments. They came from the Lord and were engraved on two tablets of stone. The first five commandments generally deal with man's responsibility to God; the second set of five commandments by and large deal with man's responsibility to neighbor. The second set is highlighted by Paul now. When one commits adultery, they violate the marriage bond set between two people, thus harming one's fellow man.

Murder is an act committed against a fellow human being with willful intent. Accidental killing of another is considered differently under the law (see Deuteronomy 19:4-7, for example). Further, the execution of criminals for capital offenses is not considered murder. Rather, it is considered against God's wishes to let a capital crime go unpunished. But the intentional taking of another life, murder, is an utter failure to lovingly consider one's fellow man.

Next, he cites the law against stealing. What a person has worked for or earned in whatever legal way is that person's private property. To willfully take what belongs to another fails to regard that person's right to his possessions. In so doing, it is showing a disregard for the life and efforts of the person who is being stolen from. This concept

can and should be elevated to the wrongful taking of assets from citizens by a government, including unfair taxation. By levying taxes in an arbitrary manner, thus favoring some over others, it demonstrates an unloving attitude towards all citizens. By taking from producers, it demonstrates a disregard for their efforts; by handing out welfare to those who can work for themselves, it demonstrates a disregard for their value as productive members of society. It is harmful and unloving.

Bearing false witness is unloving in that it is injurious to the innocent. When someone is wrongfully testified against, their rights as individuals are stripped and they become accountable for crimes they haven't committed. A good example of this from the Old Testament concerns Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. False testimony against him led to his death and his family inheritance being stolen away.

Coveting harms one's fellow man because it inevitably leads to a violation of some other commandment. Coveting the wife of another will lead to adultery. Coveting someone's personal property will lead to theft. Coveting one's position or authority will lead to false testimony against them in order to usurp them. Further, coveting in particular will inevitably violate some of the first set of commandments and thus it shows a lack of love not only for others, but for God as well.

And so, Paul gives the remedy to us in order to keep from violating these, and "any other commandment" that may apply, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." No one would appreciate their own wife committing adultery against them; the thought of being murdered isn't nearly as pleasing to a murderer as killing others; where theft of others may seem trivial, the same person will feel completely violated when their property is stolen; a person who has borne false witness may shrug off the sentence of the one they bore that witness against, until they are in the same cell with them, having been falsely testified against by another; and no coveter would sleep well knowing that someone else was continuously coveting what they possessed.

In the end, when the shoe is on the other foot, none of these crimes seems pleasant. By loving others as one loves himself, we take away such thoughts and replace them with a right attitude toward our fellow man.

Life application: When you are contemplating harming another person in some way, consider how it would be if you were so harmed. In today's wicked world, we can be small beacons of light if we simply hold fast to the words of the Bible and the faith we possess.

*Lord, You have summed up the commandments by tying them all together in love for God and love for others. I love You and want to please You, but at times I'm less loving toward others. Help me to be a complete and responsible follower of You by loving as You love - completely and without holding it back from those I otherwise find it hard to love. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Romans 13:10

The thoughts of loving another and harming another are contradictory. Where there is love, there will be no harm. In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the commandments mentioned in the second half of the Ten Commandments. These are directed in general towards other humans, now collectively called "a neighbor."

Each of these commandments finds its fulfillment in love. After stating those written commandments, he finished with, "and if there is any other commandment." This opens up the statement to any prescriptive directive in Scripture. We know this because the Greek includes no definite article before "law." Love then is the fulfillment of all divine law. As The People's New Testament states, "God requires nothing which is not comprehended in this word."

As "God is love" any law which stems from God will be revealed in love. One could argue against this by going back to the Old Testament and citing one of numerous laws which calls for the stoning of someone, a homosexual for example (See Leviticus 20:13). The argument could be that this is an unloving mandate of God. Incorrect.

The act violates what is determined "good" by God from the beginning of creation. A perversion of something good cannot be called "good."

For the soundness of His covenant people at large, God has forbidden acts contrary to what He has ordained in creation to keep them healthy, holy, and free from sin. Such laws are actually loving directives by God for the general good of His people.

The law was given that sin might become "exceedingly sinful" (Romans 7:13) and therefore it acts as a tutor to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). By seeing our need for freedom from this sin, and then calling on Jesus for forgiveness of that sin, the greatest demonstration of all love is witnessed, the giving of God's own Son for the sinful people of the world.

What we arrogantly (or ignorantly) claim as unloving in God is, in fact, directed towards the highest demonstration of love. Nothing God demands or determines can be unloving. By our own perverse choices, we bring wrath upon ourselves because we are acting in a nature contrary to what the all-loving Creator has determined for us. It is our actions, not God's requirements, which are unloving. He is the Creator; we are the created.

Life application: Shall we charge the Almighty with wrongdoing? May it never be so! God requires nothing of us which is not understood and obtainable in the concept of love. However, we must view all things from His perspective, not our own.

*Heavenly Father, when I see a commandment in Your word which seems harsh, help me to perceive that law from Your perspective, not mine. I know that nothing You require will be expected of us that is not grounded in love, for You are love. So open my eyes, Lord, to see all things apart from my personal emotions or misguided notions. Amen.*

**And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.** Romans 13:11

"And do this" refers to the thoughts of the previous verses, culminating in the commandment to love one another. It is our obligation, and it is all the more necessary because of "knowing the time..." He states this and takes it as an axiom that believers should in fact be aware of the time in which we live. And what is that time? It is the indeterminate span known as the church age.

This dispensation began at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 and it will end suddenly and without prior notice at some point in the future. Christ will return at the rapture for His people in "the twinkling of an eye." Because we don't know when it will happen, nor will we have time to prepare when it comes, Paul says "that now it is high time to awake out of our sleep." Being awake implies being alert and ready. Being asleep implies being not ready.

Taking this and tying it back to the previous verses, Paul is telling us to always and at all times have a loving attitude (how difficult that can be!). The imminence of the return of Christ should direct our every thought and action. Who would want to be found living in disobedience to the Lord's directive at His coming? If we look at it from this perspective, then we should endeavor to always live in a manner worthy of our high calling.

Though it has been 2000 years, and many will dismiss the Christian religion simply because things have continued unchanged for so long, to the Lord a day is like a

thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. Time is of no consideration from His eternal perspective. He has a plan, and that plan is being worked out in a meticulous manner. When it is complete, there will be no delay. Therefore, as we live within this stream of time, we should be ever-expectant of His return "for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."

Every believer since that first day of the church age has been added as a "living stone" to that Temple which He is building. When the final stone calls out in belief, there will be no need for more stones. No architect continues to order materials for a building which has enough for its completion. And so, each new person who believes brings us nearer than when every other believer first called out in faith.

Life application: There will be a moment when the building is complete. When that time comes, Christ will return for His church. Let us not be found filled with bitterness and hatred. Instead, we need to live our life in love, thus fulfilling the law we have been given. Christ could come at any moment; let us remain awake and alert.

*Lord Jesus, the thought of Your return gives me a continual reminder that I need to be about Your business. Help me to be the loving Christian, the faithful witness, and the helpful, cheerful person that You would have me to be. I don't want to be found sleeping or backslidden when You come. Help me in this and keep my feet on the right path until that great Day. Amen.*

**The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.** Romans 13:12

Based on his preceding comment concerning our need to "awake out of sleep," Paul uses a set of metaphors "night" and "day" to explain that. He says, "the night is far spent." The literal night equates to the darkness of the world and its spiritual corruption; a world lacking order, and one which is in chaos. This is seen, for example, when Jesus was confronted at night at Gethsemane -

"When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." Luke 22:53

This time of spiritual darkness is still in the world. Victory is found in Jesus, but it is not yet fully realized. That will only occur when He returns. For now, and for an indeterminate length of time, "the day is at hand." The rapture of the church and what comes after that has been imminent from the start of the church age. There is no time that a believer could rightly say, "the Lord won't come back today." Therefore, that day

is always at hand. And because it is, Paul gives us a stern admonition - "Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light."

"Therefore" asks us to consider what has been said and then to act on it. "Let us cast off the works of darkness" implores us to live in spiritual light and in holiness. Time and again, the Bible refers to the light in this way. John speaks of the light contrasting the darkness in the first chapter of his gospel - "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (John 1:4, 5)

In order to "cast off darkness" one must be clothed with light. Darkness cannot overcome itself. Only when found clothed in light will the darkness flee away. This is why Paul next says to "put on the armor of light." In order to do this, one must move from the devil to Christ; from the misdeed of fallen Adam to the triumph of Jesus. He is our armor from the darkness which is found in the fallen world and the One who can protect us from being cast into "outer darkness" when our days are complete.

Once one has put on Christ, they need to continue in Christ actively through prayer, studying His word, fellowshiping with others, etc. By doing this, we won't be unfruitful, nor will we be pulled back into the spiritually corrupt world around us.

Life application: The Bible uses many metaphors to help us understand spiritual truths. As you read the Bible, take time to think through these things - elements, types of animals, types of grain and other foods (milk and honey for example), light and darkness, etc. God uses things we understand in the natural world to show us these spiritual truths.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for another beautiful day. I look forward to walking in Your presence, talking to You, enjoying the sights and sounds as they come my way. As the day unfolds, please keep reminding me of our close and personal relationship as I ponder the work of Jesus and how He has reconciled me to You. I want to thank You for all You do for me! You are great, O God. Amen.*

**Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. Romans 13:13**

Paul uses the common idiom "walk" to describe the way to conduct one's life. When he says, "Let us walk properly" he is saying then that we should conduct our lives properly. When we walk about, we interact with others, we converse with others, we set our

paths on certain goals, etc. Therefore, as we walk about, doing any of these or a myriad of other things, we should remember our conduct and select honorable destinations.

To describe this proper walking, Paul says that it should be "as in the day." When one walks at night, they can't see clearly where they are heading. It's also harder to see where one's foot is going to step. Tripping becomes easier, falling into a pit may happen, or even bumping into a nice hard wall is a possibility. The spiritual symbolism of walking at night is one of improper and unhealthy conduct.

And as examples of such conduct, he says we should not walk "in revelry and drunkenness." Excessive alcohol leads to belligerence and fighting. Someone who is already a loud mouth will only increase in that manner when in a stupor. The natural result of hanging out at bars all night is trouble. Paul asks us to consider who we belong to and the name that we bear and not to allow ourselves to diminish others' perceptions of Christ through this type of behavior.

He next mentions "lewdness and lust." This was a common attitude in the Roman and Greek areas of Paul's time, and it is ever-increasing in the world again today. Young TV stars grow up, and along with their fame comes a desire to continue to be noticed. And so, they will stretch what is morally acceptable to see how far they can go. As they do, young eyes notice, and they emulate what they see. Quickly society has been reduced to doing anything in order to grab attention, no matter how profane. With the advent of the internet, someone can demonstrate the most vile perversions to millions of people, and others then want to join in. It is a cycle of depravity which we are asked to refrain from. We are to conduct ourselves in a circumspect manner, remembering that the Lord is not pleased with sexually immoral behavior.

Finally in this verse, "strife and envy" are noted. Strife is the constant argumentative attitude which many possess. It doesn't matter what they believe, they will always take a contrary side to an issue, simply to cause division and argument. Strife could also include having a litigious attitude. When someone sues another for minor or dubious reasons, they are causing harm to others. Suits should be used only in circumstances where actual harm has resulted. And that harm must have been by the truly negligent conduct of another. Spilling hot coffee on oneself is not a just an honorable reason for suing the maker of the coffee; it is perverse.

"Envy" is from the word *zelo* (zeal). It is fervid passion, but it is misdirected passion. In Galatians 4:18, Paul says, "But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always..." The reciprocal is true too though. Misdirected zeal is always a bad thing. We must use the Bible as our standard for the things we are zealous for. If the Bible is silent on an issue,

then our zeal is acceptable as long as it doesn't turn into an idol. For example, it is wonderful to be zealous for hard work, and the Bible commends hard work. But we can make hard work an end in and of itself. It can become an over-riding passion and thus replace our devotion to God. Setting aside a day of rest in one's work week is a wonderful thing as it helps us to redirect our thoughts away from what otherwise consumes our time.

Life application: Paul tells us to walk "as in the day." Our life should be plainly and evidently seen by those around us. Our conduct should be honorable and glorifying of Christ. If we act in a manner which belies our calling, then He will be diminished in the eyes of those who see us.

*Glorious Lord, You have instructed me to walk properly, as if in the daylight. And so, may the conduct of my life be appropriate to the high calling of Jesus. Keep me from deeds of darkness and the sin which so easily besets. Rather, give me the wisdom to walk in holiness, purity, and as a radiant example of the precious mandates You have given me in Your word. Amen.*

**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.**  
Romans 13:14

We've come to the end of chapter 13 with a most beautiful prescription. Paul begins with "but." This is to contrast what was stated in verse 12 where we are to, "cast off the works of darkness." Instead of being clothed in such deeds, we are admonished to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." An exchange is to be made in our lives when we call on Christ. Salvation isn't the end of the story, but the beginning of a new, beautiful one.

It may seem odd that we are to "put on" a person, but this was an idiom of Greek literature. To "put on" another means to take on his qualities, follow his principles, imitate his life and mannerisms, and walk in the same spirit as that person. It is an idiom of complete emulation of that person. And this is what Paul is asking of us; to adorn ourselves with the likeness of Christ. In so doing, we are to "make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

The flesh, or the earthly human nature, is contrary to life in Christ. Instead of gratifying our old Adam, we are to be emulators of, and pleasing to, our new Master, Jesus. The manner in which He walked; we are to also walk. The attitudes He displayed are to be displayed by us. He was meek, gentle, loving, and caring of those who were ignorantly lost in sin. At the same time, He was strong and aggressive against those who looked at



their own self-righteousness and who denied that they were in need of God's grace and mercy.

Those who see a weak and overly tolerant Jesus completely miss how he handled the arrogant, proud, and boastful. Putting on Christ then is to put on the complete Christ. We are to be loving to those who need love, caring to those who are down and out, and meek with those who are humble. We are also to be stern and strong as we stand against those who promote perversion, divisiveness, arrogance, and a haughty, self-righteous attitude.

Life application: We are to put on Christ in all of His glory, standing firm against the deeds of darkness and the lusts of the flesh. In order to fulfill this, we must know how He acted and when He took action; we must know our Bible. Be sure to have a complete picture of who Jesus is.

*Lord, it is right that I should follow You and endeavor to emulate You in all ways. When I face the needy, I am to extend an open hand. When I encounter the afflicted, I am to provide comfort. When I face the arrogant or self-righteous, I must stand against their haughtiness and be firm in promoting right morality. Help me to be balanced in my emulation of You. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 14

**Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.**

Romans 14:1

In chapter 14, Paul now turns to the concepts of liberty and license. In particular, he will use food and drink along with days of rest/worship to show how we can easily err in our liberty, not in exercising it, but by lording it over others with less knowledge than we may have. What is for us freedom from sin for the individual can easily turn into the cause of sin for ourselves or others. We do not have license to sin or to cause others to do so. And so, he begins with, "Receive one who is weak in faith."

A person who is weak in the faith is not someone who lacks faith in Christ. Either a person has faith and is saved, or they lack faith, and they are not saved. To be "weak in the faith" is to be saved and yet unsure of what is allowed and what is not allowed within the context of the faith. Jews coming to faith do so from the lens of the law where many foods are prohibited. They also come from those rules concerning Sabbath observance (the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. It is not a term which is appropriate for Christianity except as is concerned with training on what the law taught; it is not a concept which is to be applied to a particular observance within the faith.)

Others may come into the faith with preconceptions about music, types of clothing, the drinking of alcohol, holiday celebrations, and on and on. Many come into the faith with all types of baggage that they carried from their previous lives. Without proper knowledge concerning these issues, they are therefore "weak in the faith."

Paul says we are to "receive" such individuals as fellow believers and to do so without "disputes over doubtful things." The term here for- "doubtful things" is literally "judgments of thoughts." We are asked to not argue over such judgments. Having said that, this was written at a time when the principles of the faith were not yet written and categorized into what we now call the New Testament. Therefore, there is a more definite understanding now of those things.

Knowing this, we should receive fellow Christians without disputes, but we also need to be ready to defend our freedoms in Christ and also be ready to instruct the weak in the faith as to what is right and proper. Eventually, a person "weak" in the faith may become someone who is belligerent or obstinate in the faith.

When shown that certain types of foods can in fact be eaten, they may balk and actually accuse the brother who is stronger in the faith. Thus, the weaker actually presumes to be the stronger through their lack of proper understanding of what is acceptable. This becomes perverse dissension, and it is very common. When someone willfully rejects what is clearly presented and shows a defiant attitude, they should no longer be received.

The key to all of this is Christian love. When it is demonstrated, by the knowing or by the one lacking knowledge, a harmonious relationship will more likely continue -

You have ham and that'll be ok with me  
But I will abstain; it's really not my thing  
I know that either way, we have been set free  
And so, between us, let peace and harmony ring

If such an attitude is demonstrated, then the weak and the strong will exercise their liberties without animosity or dissension. Paul will continue to explain these things as chapter 14 progresses.

Life application: Don't set out to ruin another's faith over what is acceptable. Receive one another without lording your knowledge over those you disagree with. Rather, stand ready to demonstrate what is right directly from Scripture without fighting or accusation.

*Heavenly Father, I love the freedoms which have come to me through the work of Christ. In Him, I can worship on any day of the week; I can dance as a form of praise; the type of instruments we use at church reflects the style of music we enjoy; the foods we eat are eaten with gratitude, not finger-pointing. In Him, we have so many freedoms. Thank You for worship which is in Spirit and in truth! Amen.*

**For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.**

Romans 14:2

Concerning matters of conscience (doubtful things) Paul now begins with food. He says that "one believes he may eat all things." This refers to a person well-grounded in Scripture. He understands the dispensational model and what God has ordained. After the flood, God told Noah that, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs." (Genesis 9:3)

This has never been revoked for non-Israelites. After this, at the time of the giving of the law, God gave dietary restrictions to the nation of Israel. These restrictions applied to them, and to them alone. These fell under the law and the law is now obsolete in Christ (Hebrews 7:18, 8:13, 10:9 - among many other passages). There are now NO dietary restrictions because the only change to what was ordained at Noah's time (the Law of Moses) is set aside in Christ. This is confirmed, explicitly, in Acts 15:18-21 and it is testified to by Paul time and time again in his writings. The Christian is at liberty to "eat all things."

However, Paul goes on. "But" is given to show a contrast to this thought. This is concerning "he who is weak." This individual, weak in the faith and in the understanding of the freedom found in Christ "eats only vegetables." Such a person may have a conscience about the slaughtering of animals for food (not understanding what God has ordained). Or they may have a conscience about the use of slaughtered animals which are killed and dedicated to an idol (see 1 Corinthians 8 which discusses this issue in detail). Finally, they may have come out of Judaism and be weak in their ability to overcome the dietary restrictions of the law they left behind to receive Christ.

People who fit into this "weak" category are those who have a conscience that is not developed enough to understand these freedoms properly. What they need is sound instruction, not a belligerent attitude. Knowing your Bible and being able to explain the passages above will set them on a course of proper understanding and into the freedom of the faith.

However, and having noted this admonition from Paul, it is to be understood that the Bible is now complete; at Paul's time, it was still being written. It is also set, fixed, and understandable. If an individual receives this instruction properly and remains defiant and hostile towards those who exercise their freedom, they are usurping God's rule and what God has ordained. If they don't eat meat for personal reasons, they need to remain quiet about it and not be arrogant or antagonistic towards those who do. If their attitude is improper towards meat eaters, they are to be wholly rejected as unsound teachers, even heretics. Paul could not be clearer that reinserting precepts from the law is "another gospel" and is to be condemned (see Galatians 1:8).

The issue comes down to:

- Knowledge
- Sensitivity
- The introduction of heresy

The sound Christian is to carefully weigh the source and the attitude of the individual to determine these precepts. Although jumping ahead in the context of Romans 14, it is a good time to look at this issue from outside a myopic viewpoint on the matter of food. If Paul says, "one believes he may eat all things" and he doesn't later correct this during his discussion (which he will not), then it shows definitively that a believer can, in fact, eat all things. There is complete freedom in Christ to eat anything that has been given by God for the people of the world. Stand fast in this and do not be led astray through aberrant teachings.

Life application: Pass the ham, please.

*Lord, with the work of Christ complete, You have shown us that the law is fulfilled in Him and it is therefore set aside in Him. Thank You for His work which I could never have accomplished. Help me to exercise my liberties in Christ in a way which glorifies You and which is sensitive to those around me while still being firm in the truth of what You have ordained. Amen.*

**Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.** Romans 14:3

This is plain and clear. People eat meat because God has ordained that meat is to be eaten. Those who don't eat meat need to not be hostile to those who do. They have every right and freedom to do so and therefore, because God has allowed it, there should be no argument against it by those who refrain.

Likewise, there are those who abstain from eating meat. They may have a tender spot for animals; they may have an inability to eat meat because of their physical makeup; they may have a guilt complex that is deep-seated, and which interferes with their ability to enjoy it. For these or any other reasons, they need to not be judged by "him who eats."

In either situation, if God has received that individual, how can we despise them? This thought goes right back to verse 10 of chapter 13, "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law." If God has received a person, then for us to be unloving toward them is showing a disdain for the person whom God has already accepted. John would go so far as to say,

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" 1 John 4:20

The very notion of "loving God" but then despising a person God loves is contrary to sound reason. We need to evaluate our relationships based on this higher perspective and be willing to accept the perceived shortcomings of another based on His view of that person. But again, as noted in the previous verse, if someone is a contrarian and is violating set Scripture through their dietary restrictions by reinserting the law which has been set aside in Christ, then they are to be dismissed outright. Such legalism can only cause a wall between others and Christ. This cannot be accepted.

In the end, doctrine does matter. Without proper adherence to the precepts laid out before us, then anything goes. And this is not how God works in any dispensation. We are freed from the law, but our freedom is not license to sin. There is, and there must be maintained, a proper balance in our lives and doctrine.

Life application: Don't lord your freedom to eat over another to their harm. Rather know that God has accepted them and so love them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

*Heavenly Father, as time goes on, each day draws us nearer to the completion of Your marvelous plan for the sons of Adam. Thank You for Jesus who came to reconcile us to You and on Whom we wait, counting the moments until He comes for His church. May that glorious Day be soon. Amen.*

**Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.** Romans 14:4

As can be seen in this verse, Paul doesn't take sides on the issue of those "weak in the faith" and those who are well-grounded in matters of "doubtful things." Instead, he acknowledges that both have received exactly the same salvation by noting that they are "another's servant." In other words, if they are servants of Christ, then they are saved. Their weakness or soundness in doctrine isn't an issue which will change that. Because this is so, "Who are you to" so judge them?

If Christ has accepted someone through the exercise of their faith, and they never grow in doctrine, but remain weak concerning these disputable matters, that is between them and God. We have no right to judge their walk. Instead, "to his own master he stands or falls." It is true that we should grow in the knowledge of the Lord; we should mature in our faith; we should endeavor to walk in soundness of doctrine. It is also true that someone who lacks these things is a weak and ineffective member of the body, but... he is still a member of the body.

And not only has he been accepted, but "he will be made to stand." What Paul is saying by using the term "stand" is that they will not lose their salvation over their lack of knowledge or growth; instead, they will continue on in His grace until the end. And the reason should be obvious: God doesn't make mistakes. If someone believes and is sealed with the Holy Spirit based on that belief (Ephesians 1:13, 14), then they have been adopted as a child of God. They will never fall again because "God is able to make him stand."

It would be unthinkable that God would receive someone and then turn around and "un-save" them. It is contrary to His transcendent knowledge, His omnipotent power, and His great love for the objects of His affection. Those who preach that one can lose their salvation are exactly who Paul is speaking directly to in this verse. When they point a bony finger at another in condemnation, Paul points right back (on behalf of the Lord whom he represents) and says, "Who are you to judge another's servant?"

It should be noted again though that the term "servant" is applied here. There are those who are in Christ and beyond such judgment, and there are those who are not in Christ. We must use doctrine and reason to defend against heretics who would impose that type of teaching which goes beyond or blemishes Scripture. While accepting our brothers who are weaker in the faith, we must be ready and able to stand opposed to heresy, confusion, and disorder.

Life application: When God's grace is extended to an individual, we are to accept that individual regardless of how they later develop. Not everyone will become a Billy Graham evangelist. Not everyone will become a Hebrew scholar. Not everyone will become a preacher. Etc. To each God has appointed a measure of faith and a measure of knowledge. Let us accept our brothers and sisters in Christ because God has already accepted them.

*Glorious God Almighty, I am told in Your word that I am to accept those whom You have accepted. Help me in this Lord. If they are Your servant, then they are Yours. How can I challenge Your right to receive them? And so, when I see someone who is Yours, instead of conflict, let there be peace and acceptance. Again, help me in this that there will be fellowship in the brotherhood. Amen.*

**One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.** Romans 14:5

Paul turns now from food to days. He has demonstrated that what we eat is of far less importance than many claim, and that those who take the stricter path on dietary

matters are actually the "weaker" of the faith, not understanding their freedom in Christ. Now, concerning certain days, he begins with, "One person esteems one day above another."

What is he talking about? The answer is so clear we may actually miss what is intended. He is speaking of observing a particular day for a particular purpose such as:

A Sabbath Day

A Day of Worship

A special holiday or "feast day"

Some people coming out of Judaism, or who have been influenced by the Jewish concept of a "Sabbath" esteem that day above the other days of the week. It should be noted that the "Sabbath" is Saturday. It is entirely inappropriate to say that the "Christian Sabbath" is Sunday. There is no such thing as a "Christian Sabbath." The Sabbath is the seventh day, as is outlined in the Old Testament. It was given to Israel under the law, and it is not somehow amended or transferred to mean anything other than what was ordained at that time.

Some Christians may esteem Sunday, also known as "The Lord's Day," above other days of the week. They honor the Lord on this day because it's the day He rose from the grave, triumphing over it. This day, though not a "Sabbath," is considered a special day and may be called a "day of worship." By doing this, it honors God for His great acts which culminated in the resurrection and which look forward to the eternal state; the "8th Day" if you will.

And of course, there are those who go to church on other days, maybe both Wednesday and Sunday, thus esteeming both days as days of worship. Others meet on Monday, Thursday, or whatever. They have set aside a day, esteeming it above other days. There is nothing wrong with any of this so far. If they are living one or more days to the Lord, how can they be erring? But Paul goes on by saying, "another esteems every day alike."

Some people treat each day of the week alike. Without setting any particular day above the others, or by exalting all seven days, they are the type who "pray without ceasing." They "rejoice always." Likewise, they, "in everything give thanks." They are the type who walk in the Spirit and may be less interested in externals than internals. Whatever.

Seeing this so far, there arises a problem in these observances which Paul wants to head off. Far too often, we get so stuck in the mud of our routine that we suddenly decide that "our way is best." When we see someone observing a day differently than we do,



we become judgmental of their choice. But this is God's world, and He sets the parameters for our Christian conduct.

By bringing into the discussion those who "esteem every day alike," Paul has demonstrated, completely and clearly, that there is no set day (Sabbath, worship, etc.) that is mandated within Christianity. There should be no finger pointing at those who observe differently than others. And yet we fail to see the clarity in Paul's words, and we point bony fingers at those who observe differently than we do... a sad state of affairs. Endeavoring to accept what others do, when done to the glory of God, is good and honorable.

Having noted that it is perfectly acceptable to the Lord, according to Paul's instruction, to set aside any day as special or to esteem every day alike, it needs to be stated that mandating a Sabbath based on the requirements of the Law, is specifically contrary to what has been ordained for the church.

Paul has gone into great detail in the earlier chapters of Romans, and he will continue in this detail throughout his epistles, noting that the Law is not to be reintroduced now that it is fulfilled in Christ. Observing a Sabbath to the Lord, based on the Lord's finished work, in a voluntary manner is fine; mandating a Sabbath based on the Law is "another gospel" and is to be condemned. We are not ever to reintroduce what Christ has triumphed over. Such an attitude sets aside the grace of Christ and makes us debtors to the entire law; requirements we can never meet. Such is a self-condemning act.

Life application: Concerning days, use your freedom in Christ to honor Him in the way that suits you best. But don't allow your freedom to be turned into a legalistic attitude towards others who worship differently. Be at peace in their conduct and may they be at peace with yours.

*Glorious Lord Jesus! You triumphed over the law so that I may have freedom to live for You in newness of life. Help me to be honoring of Your work by never reintroducing that which You have already fulfilled on my behalf. I stand in Your work alone. Thank You for the freedom which is truly being free. I will worship in Spirit and in truth as I pursue You. Amen.*

**He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.**

Romans 14:6

Paul now ties both previously discussed concepts, days and food, into one concise thought. He's already noted that some are "weak in the faith" and therefore fail to receive all the liberties found in Christ concerning the eating of food. On the other hand, there are those who understand that there is nothing which, as Jesus taught, "enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man." (Mark 7:15)

He has also noted that "one person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike." There are those who want to observe a traditional Saturday Sabbath to the Lord. There are those who desire to have a "day of worship" to honor the risen Christ. There are some who may wish to esteem Thursday above all others; whatever. And then there are those who hold all days in equal esteem. Additionally, concerning the Sabbath observances and festival days, particularly those once mandated under the law, Paul will tell us this in Colossians 2:16, 17-

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."

All of these Old Testament things only pointed to Christ and His work. They are mere shadows of the reality found in Him. If someone wants to have a Yom Kippur observance in their church, there is nothing in Scripture to say, "do this thing" or "don't do this thing." On the contrary, if they mandate such an observance because it is a requirement under the law, then they have reintroduced the law where it has already been fulfilled; they have set aside the grace of Christ and are now debtors to the entire law.

But Paul's point in verse 6 isn't about those who mandate such things. It is about different people desiring to honor the Lord in their own way. And so, he says, "He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks."

Those who observe any or every day, do so to the Lord. If they don't observe any day, they don't do so to the Lord. The bony finger which points at the observer (or non-observer) is actually making an accusation against what the Lord has accepted. Likewise, those who eat whatever is set before them do so because the Lord has ordained that anything can be eaten, without violating a New Testament precept. And those who don't eat, do so in the understanding that they are not required to eat any particular thing; there is no mandatory food requirement in the New Testament and so they are free to not eat whatever they feel violates their conscience.

In both instances - days and food, and in both instances - observance or non-observance, eating or not eating, the person does so to the Lord, and they do so in thanks to God. Therefore, what has been received in gratitude and in the freedom found in Christ, it is sanctified and acceptable. How clear this is, and yet the waters are so easily muddied.

These "doubtful matters" of food and days include many other issues not specifically addressed by Paul - styles of clothing, moderate alcohol consumption, types of music in worship, etc. These issues are left up to the individual. When judgment is rendered toward others over such matters, the inevitable result is legalism and imposed bondage. Be ready to defend your freedoms in Christ by knowing your Bible and what it allows.

Life application: Let us accept those who eat different foods than us and let us accept those who observe different days than us. And may we not find fault in their observances with the exception of those who mandate them as a precept which is contrary to Scripture. Only in such instances should we stand against their poor doctrine which can only lead others away from the truth found in Christ.

*Glorious, wonderful Lord, I love the freedom which is found in You. The Old Testament mandated a Sabbath; You fulfilled that day. The Old Testament mandated feast days; You fulfilled them all. The Old Testament mandated dietary restrictions; You fulfilled the Law and now I am free to eat or not eat those things sanctified through the Word of God and prayer. Thank You for the freedoms I now have in You! Amen.*

**For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.** Romans 14:7

We are reminded, based on the previous discussion concerning foods and days, that "none of us lives to himself." We are accountable to God and to live for God. What He has ordained is right and therefore we are to treat His granted liberties as appropriate. In essence, those around us who eat differently, or worship differently, are to be given regard for their choices without judgment as long as they are not forbidden. For example, we may not like others eating pork, but there is nothing wrong with it. We may like to eat pork and we shouldn't be shamed by those who don't. The food is acceptable because we have been accepted (see Acts 10:34, 35, for example).

Disputable matters are to be handled as such. And not only do none of us live to ourselves, but "no one dies to himself" either. God is in control of our lives and He likewise controls our deaths. The timing of our death, the duration of our time in the grave, the status we will be given in eternity, and the rewards and losses we shall receive are all up to Him. As we don't control these things, then why should we judge

other believers in matters of a disputable nature which He alone will decide upon? There are enough doctrinal issues which are clear and of great importance that we don't need to get in a tizzy over the lesser issues.

Remember though, there is a difference between freedom to act and being coerced into acting. We have the freedom to eat what we wish, or to abstain from the same. We have the freedom to observe whatever day we wish or consider all days the same. But when we are told that we must eat or not eat, or that we must observe or not observe, then a line is crossed. Imposing the law where the law has been set aside is to set aside the grace of Christ.

Understanding this distinction is necessary because it all comes down to what God has done in Christ. Freedom in Him is exactly that, freedom. Rejecting what He has done then can only be bondage. Let us never allow our freedoms to be exchanged for a return to bondage.

Life application: Because we neither live nor die to self, we are to live for God and in harmony with those who are likewise in Christ. Be separate from those who attempt to find fault in disputable matters and be at peace with God.

*O God, thank You for allowing me to live at such a time in history that I have such easy access to Your word. With the advent of the printing press, modern transportation, industry, radio, TV, and now the internet, I have it better than any generation before me. It is literally at my fingertips at any moment. Thank You that I can read it and study it throughout the day! What a blessing. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Romans 14:8**

Paul is speaking to believers here as he has throughout the epistle. The earth and all its fullness belongs to the Lord, it is true, but Paul's words are not speaking in this general sense. Rather, his words are directed to those who are "His" in the sense of relationship. Although this should be obvious from the surrounding context, and even within the verse itself, it is not uncommon for verses like this to be ripped out of their context and universally applied. But they are directed to His people, not the world at large.

And so, Paul begins with, "For if we live, we live to the Lord." As an all-encompassing thought concerning our lives, he says "for if we live." This is stated to tie back to the previous thoughts concerning eating food and observing days. He used these two concepts as emblematic of all matters which are doubtful. Food is a daily necessity

which keeps us alive and sustains us. When we observe a day or days during the week, we form the schedule around which we conduct our other affairs. In other words, these two things have been used by Paul as representative of our on-going life and activities. If we eat, we do so to the Lord. If we observe a day or days, we do so to the Lord. As these represent our general life, then he sums up that "if we live, we live to the Lord."

In the same manner, when these activities cease because of our death, we are no less the Lord's. Because of our position in Christ and our spiritual rebirth, our bodies may die, but we are eternally alive in Him. To confirm this he says, "if we die, we die to the Lord." This is a wonderful verse which demonstrates the eternal security possessed by the believer. There is nothing, including death, which can separate us from Jesus Christ; we are always His.

"Therefore" - because of these things, "whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." This sums up what has been stated in verses 1-7. Having used that which sustains life (food), and that upon which we determine our weekly cycle of life (the basic 7-day rotating period established at creation), Paul has shown that we belong to the Lord.

But let us remember what this means from the perspective of those previous verses. The use of "we" isn't speaking about the individual. Rather, he is speaking about all those who are in Christ. Whoever is in Christ, whether he lives or he dies, belongs to the Lord. As this is so, we are not to despise other believers over matters of food or days. Instead, we are asked to accept them, and their mode of life and worship, as having already been accepted by Him.

Life application: Make an effort when you encounter the word "therefore" to go back and review the context of that word. Verses, especially verses with conjunctions, are not isolated thoughts which can be pulled out of their greater context. Instead, they build upon what has been previously stated.

*Lord God, the morning dew on a spider's web, the changing of the breeze as summer turns to fall, the smile on each child's face... these things show me how wise You are and how much You care for us. There is a continuous stream of delight and wonder in Your creation if I will but stop and ponder it. Thank You for allowing me a moment in time to enjoy life in Your presence. And thank You that because of Jesus, that moment will now last for eternity. Amen.*

**For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.** Romans 14:9

A review of some of the closest conjunctions of the preceding verses will help understand what Paul is relaying in this verse:

"For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

As always, he uses these connectors to build his thoughts and help us to be sound in our doctrine. The first "for" came as a result of the idea that the things we as believers do are centered on the faith we possess. Because this is so,

- We neither live nor die to ourselves, but rather we exist for the Lord who has redeemed us.
- As He is the Lord of both the living and the dead, then in both life and death our conduct should be directed to Him.
- Because of these things, no matter what happens to us, either in life or in death, we still belong to Him.

And then verse 9 -

It was for this all-encompassing state in which we live that Christ died and rose again to life.

What would be the point of the cross if Christ were only the Lord of the dead? And what a sad state it would be if He were only the Lord of the living - because we all die. In either of those scenarios, there would be a lack in His Lordship; it would not be an all-encompassing Lordship, and therefore He wouldn't truly be Lord at all. Presidents aren't presidents of the dead. And anyone could die at any time during a presidential term. Therefore, their presidency is a temporary and tenuous type of rule. The same is true with kings or any other type of leader.

But Christ died for His people at the cross of Calvary. Because He did, He is the Lord of all His people who have died. And even more, Christ was triumphant over death; He rose again. Because He did, He is Lord of all the living. There is no aspect of the believer's existence that is not covered by Christ. He is the complete Lord of His people.

Paul is asking us to remember this because we have believing friends who have died; Christ is their Lord. We also are here for an indeterminate amount of time. And our time

is filled with setbacks, trials, and troubles. But He is our Lord through those times. We are being invited to view the world and all that it brings our way from the perspective of Jesus' cross-death and resurrection. The most formidable foes that we could face have been vanquished. Christ is Lord!

"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." Revelation 1:18

Life application: Our relationship with Jesus isn't just a get-together on Sunday morning. Our relationship with Jesus is an every-moment existence. He is our Baptizer into the Holy Spirit. We now have the fullness of His presence at all times. But He can get more of us. Submit to Christ and live each moment for Him.

*Lord God, I know that because of Christ, You are with me every moment, but how easily I forget that! Help me to act in a manner which reflects this. Help my speech to be wholesome; my internet posts to be without impurity, keep sin from infecting my thoughts, actions, and relationships; and help me be a light to others to act in the same manner. Your glory is what I desire. Be with me in this endeavor. Amen.*

**But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.** Romans 14:10

"But why do you judge your brother?" is asked according to what Paul has submitted so far throughout this chapter. If someone wants to refrain from eating certain foods, then don't laugh at them in their weakness. If someone eats anything and everything, then don't judge them as if they were somehow unacceptable to Christ. God has already accepted them. The same is true with the observance of certain days. If someone wants to go to church on Thursday morning, isn't that his business? Those things which are not specified in the Bible for New Testament believers are left up to personal choice. So, who are we to judge another for what they have been given liberty by Christ to do?

Likewise, "why do you show contempt for your brother?" Showing contempt is, in fact, a type of judgment on them. If you refrain from eating pork, you still have no right to look down on people who do as if they were somehow beneath you. Diet, in particular, has become a standard of class in modern society. People who refrain from certain foods, especially meat, tend to look down on those who eat meat as if they were more contemptible than they. Add Christian faith into that mix, and it becomes a standard of accepting them as fellow Christians. But Paul has already shown that those who don't eat are the weak in the faith. So where does the contempt come from? It comes from pride in self.

The very fact that Paul asks these two questions demonstrates that they are unacceptable attitudes towards those around us. Let those who eat enjoy their food without being held in contempt. Likewise, let those who abstain enjoy their food without judgment. Likewise, have the same attitude toward others' observance or non-observance of certain days.

Paul has already said that those who have called on Christ have been received by Christ (verse 3). He is the final judge of all such things. And we know this is true because, as he continues, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

For believers, the question of salvation is not addressed here because salvation is eternal. It is a grant which will not be revoked. Therefore, the judgment we will receive from Christ is a judgment for rewards and loss of rewards. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul explains this judgment -

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."  
2 Corinthians 5:9-11

The "things done in the body" are our actions from the time of our salvation. They will be judged in a completely fair and unbiased manner and rewards will be based on whether they survive the judgment. This is explained in 1 Corinthians 3 -

"Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Understanding this then, it should be clear that we have no right or authority to judge one another in these undefined matters. We do not set the standard. Rather, Jesus set it in the pages of Scripture, and we are to adhere to that. When we violate Scripture, He will judge us for loss. When we uphold His words, He will judge us for reward. And those things which are not delineated in Scripture are matters of conscience for the individual, not for others to judge and condemn.



Life application: Scripture is our standard. When those around us violate set matters of doctrine, we are to correct them accordingly. But when their actions have not been defined by Scripture, we need to step back and allow them the freedom which Christ has granted.

*Lord, I love to learn Your word - more and more each day. But with my learning, let me not forget that I am still completely dependent on You. Please help me to keep my knowledge from actually being a stumbling block to me by turning me into a judgmental finger-pointer. Instead, I pray that I will use the knowledge You have blessed me with to guide others, not show contempt for them. Amen.*

**For it is written:**

**“As I live, says the Lord,  
Every knee shall bow to Me,  
And every tongue shall confess to God.”** Romans 14:11

Again, we begin with the conjunction "for" to show us that this verse is tied to the previous discussion. Because it is, it has to be evaluated from that context. Therefore, the quote which Paul now gives from Isaiah 45:23 is given not so much for the truth that all people will pay obeisance to Jesus (which is still true nonetheless) as it is to acknowledge that every person is accountable to Jesus rather than to the arbitrary judgment of others.

In other words, Romans 14:1-10 has been talking about other believer's accountability to Christ, not to us. We are to refrain from judging others based on matters which Christ has not specifically defined (using foods and the observance of certain days as examples). Understanding this quote from this context will help us to keep it in that intended train of thought.

And so, he now states, "For it is written:" Paul is reaching once again back to Scripture to justify his previous thoughts. Returning to his often-cited prophet, Isaiah, he gives a general idea of 45:23, not a direct quote. Here is the exact verse for comparison -

"I have sworn by Myself;  
The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,  
And shall not return,  
That to Me every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue shall take an oath."

It must be noted for the sake of doctrine that this quote is preceded by these words in Isaiah 45:22, "I am God, and there is no other." And then, immediately following the quote, this is read in Isaiah 45:24, "He shall say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength.'" In other words, Paul is showing us several very clear things -

- ✓ There is one God.
- ✓ Jehovah is that God.
- ✓ Jesus is Jehovah incarnate; the one God.

To come to any other conclusion would be to state that the God presented in the Bible is confused. With such a conclusion the only logical subsequent conclusion is that the Bible is not true and that the God of the Bible is not truly God. But He is. Paul is clearly identifying Jesus as the one God, the true God, and the only God. And this conclusion then must support the concept of the Trinity - not a triplicity or a triad, but one God in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the Bible elsewhere confirms.

This God, now cited by Paul says, "As I live, says the Lord..." The equivalent of this statement is "I have sworn by myself." The two expressions are conceptually a one-to-one comparison as is noted elsewhere in the Old Testament. As there is no one greater than God, to swear by Himself means that the statement is certain. This is explained in Hebrews 6:13-18. And the oath He swears is that -

"Every knee shall bow to Me,  
And every tongue shall confess to God."

There is no person who has ever lived who will fail to recognize this truth. Jesus is the Lord God who will be so acknowledged by every son of Adam. Every knee will bow in homage and in submission to Him and "every tongue shall confess to God." In other words, God will be exalted through their confession that Jesus Christ is, in fact, Lord. This is the intent of the words as Paul states them, but let us now return to the context of those words. We have been given ten verses of instruction concerning accountability to the Lord. Our allegiance is to Him, not to the whims of others. Our responsibilities are those defined for us in His word, not in legalistic additions by those around us.

If God has a prescription for us in His word, then we are subject to that directive and those around us may hold us accountable to what is stated. But if there is freedom within a precept (such as eating meat or eating only vegetables) then we are accountable to the Lord only for what we do; others have no say in our decisions. Remember this before you point out a supposed fault in another or when you are

supposedly faulted by another. God's word is the authority. Stand firmly on this and remember that you will bow to Jesus, not to anyone else.

Life application: By keeping Romans 14:11 in its proper context, we can see how fervently God feels about His word. We are completely accountable to it and not to the external pressures of others who feel differently about disputable matters. And the only way we can know what God expects of us or what liberties God has granted to us is to know our Bible and properly apply it. Know your Bible!

*Lord, You have given Your word to us in the pages of the Bible. If I don't know what that word says, then how can I be obedient to You? And if I don't know what Your word says, then how can I avoid being pressured by someone who claims that I should be doing this or that to be pleasing to You? In the end, I will either stand or fall based on what Your word says. I think I'd better get my nose into the pages of the Bible. Be with me as I do! Amen.*

**So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.** Romans 14:12

The word "so" is given as a confirming note concerning the previous thought. Paul has been extremely clear in our responsibilities to those who are weaker in the faith. If they, because of their weakness in the faith, abstain from meats then we are to accept that. If someone who is deeply grounded in Christ esteems every day the same (meaning he doesn't have a particular day of worship set aside), then we are not to judge him for his freedom. We are not the judge of biblically non-stated matters. We have no authority to point accusing fingers at the freedom exercised by others which has been granted by Christ.

This has been the context of the entire chapter so far, including verse 11. Though verse 11 made a true statement about all humanities' acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, that is not the intent of that verse as regards the surrounding context. Rather, the intent is the responsibility of all believers to Jesus, not to the external pressures or whims of other believers. In such non-defined matters then "each of us shall give account of himself to God."

Those things that we do with freedom of conscience will be accepted. But there are those things which we did apart from a good conscience. Paul will sum those things up in the last verse of this chapter with the words "for whatever is not from faith is sin." Sin can come from acting in a manner contrary to our own lack of faith. And that can easily come from external pressure as he tells us in 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 -

"But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

As you can see from these verses, sin isn't just working against our own conscience, but it is also sin to make another work against their conscience. God wants us to live in faith and to teach others to live in faith. When we violate this, we sin.

Life application: Let us consider that Paul's words in Romans 14 do not cover the judging of actual violations of Scripture. We are obligated to judge such matters. But judging doubtful matters not defined in the Bible is wrong. If we don't know our Bibles, then how can we make or withhold judgment? Know your Bible!

*Once again Lord God, I come before You to acknowledge Your presence in my life. Help me to grow in my knowledge of You, to stand on the principles You have given in Your word, and to demonstrate Your character towards those around me. Help me to be loving to those who need love, cry with those who mourn, stand against wickedness in the world, and above all - to proclaim that there is pardon and redemption in Christ. Help me in these things, O God. Amen.*

**Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.** Romans 14:13

Verse 13 begins with "therefore" to tie us back to the previous instruction. In the end, Paul says that we are accountable to Christ, not others, where "doubtful matters" are concerned. As this is so, "Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore." One can almost hear the backbiting which precipitated Paul's letter, backbiting which continues on to this day. People were certainly pointing fingers and accusing one another of not being true "Christians" because of their diet or their timing or mode of worship.

What is sad is that since the letter of Romans, along with all of the other epistles, has been written we now have these surer guidelines than before that time. And yet there continues to be the same argumentation almost 2000 years later. Churches divide over petty issues and strong heads argue over matters which should be laid to rest by merely opening the word, accepting what is written, and then exercising love along with adhering to the instruction.

But there are constants which never seem to go away - conscience, knowledge, and stubborn pride. Some are weak in the faith and lack knowledge and so they live moment by moment holding on to what their conscience dictates. Others are stronger in the faith and possess right knowledge and so they conduct their actions in accord with proper doctrine. In either case though, rather than pursuing harmony, stubborn pride often rules the heart.

Rather than this, the successful believer (whether possessing little or much knowledge) is he who lives in love concerning disputable matters. The weak without love may become an accusing fool; the strong without love may become haughty and self-righteous; but the Christian who exercises love in the treatment of others in these doubtful matters is the one who is on sound footing. This is the one who determines not to judge what they have no right to judge. In order to be one such as this, Paul says that we should "rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way."

A stumbling block is something that one can easily trip over. For example, if a person doesn't want to eat meat for a particular reason (such as that given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8) and another Christian coerces them to work against their conscience, they have now placed a stumbling block in front of their weaker brother. This is because anything which is not of faith is sin. A "cause to fall" would be a stumbling block which actually trips up the faith of a person so that they then sin, possibly violating their conscience to the point where they walk away from the faith... and that over food! Imagine how displeased the Lord will be when we face Him and receive our judgment concerning things we unrightfully judged.

Life application: Our freedoms in Christ do not include the freedom to coerce others to violate their conscience. Proper instruction is necessary. After that, let the believer decide how they will conduct their affairs on their own.

*I am so grateful for Your word, O God. It gives me guidance in how to conduct my life in a way which is pleasing to You, but it also gives me the freedom to choose many avenues which You have left open for me to decide upon. You don't forcefully control my every action, but You still guide me enough to remain healthy, happy, and safe. I love the Bible... my instruction manual for right living. Thank You for the Bible. Amen.*

**I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.** Romans 14:14

Paul's thought takes us right back to what was analyzed in verses 2 and 3. They state, "For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him." At that time, it was noted that, "If Paul says, 'one believes he may eat all things' and he doesn't later correct this during his discussion (which he will not), then it shows definitively that a believer can, in fact, eat all things."

The words of Paul now confirm that analysis. In an emphatic way, he gives two affirmations of the thought:

- I know
- And am convinced by the Lord Jesus

Paul's understanding of the gospel, combined with his own personal instruction from the Lord, showed him (and thus he to us) "that there is nothing unclean of itself." He is speaking of food in this passage and so states, as clearly as could possibly be stated, that any and all food is clean. There is no other way to interpret this without abusing the text, and yet denominations and cults are lined up to speak contrary to what is stated here, forbidding foods which God has ordained for us to eat. Again, "nothing is unclean of itself."

However, something can be unclean, despite it being clean. And that is "to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." By stating this, he has resolved two key points:

1. Nothing is unclean in and of itself
2. Violating one's conscience will defile something that is clean

Therefore,

- ✓ If the conscience is what defiles something, then if that conscience accepts that thing as clean, it remains clean.

That which is unclean is that which is received without faith. Should someone have a conscience about eating an animal because they feel bad for the animal (or for whatever reason), then that animal is to them unclean.

Through understanding Paul's words that nothing is unclean of itself, it then becomes incumbent on teachers of doctrine to properly teach that precept. To teach that any

particular type of animal isn't to be eaten because it is unclean becomes a violation of doctrine. The animal is clean. It is the conscience which defiles. Personal conscience is not a reason to teach doctrine contrary to what the Bible states; it is sin.

Life application: If someone teaches a precept based on emotion or personal likes or dislikes rather than as the Bible instructs, they have sinned against God who gave the Bible. Be aware of such teachers and find other avenues of instruction for your doctrine and practice.

*Lord, I thank You for the Gift of your Son; I thank You for His cross; I thank You for the Gift of Your Holy Spirit who has sealed me because of my faith in the work of Christ; and I thank You for Your word which has led me to understand these things. Now Lord, I would ask that You give me the boldness to go out and proclaim that which I am thankful for... to Your glory. Amen.*

**Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.** Romans 14:15

We've been given instructions on our liberties in Christ, but those freedoms need to be exercised carefully in both directions. Just as one "weak in the faith" shouldn't be accusing another who eats whatever they wish, the opposite is true too. The person who understands their freedoms needs to not attempt to impose them in a haughty manner over the weaker in the faith. When a Jewish person comes to Christ, they may have spent their entire life refraining from foods forbidden under the law. Even if they understand their freedoms, they may be so fixed in their dietary restrictions that they don't want to change.

It would be wholly unreasonable to try to get them to indulge in something they are not prepared to eat. In having them work against their own conscience, you will grieve them. In so doing, "you are no longer walking in love." The same is true with vegetarians. Whose stomach are they filling? If they wish to eat only vegetables, is that truly any business of another? Let people choose what they wish to eat and "do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died."

If they are believers, He has already accepted them. Will another's attempts to change their dietary habits change their position in Christ? No. So let them be, let them partake as they wish, and don't force your freedoms on them. By doing so, they are no longer freedoms. Love is the key, and one cannot be forceful about "doubtful things" and still be acting in love.

On the other hand, one cannot be acting in love while tolerating that which is clearly forbidden. God has decided what is and what is not acceptable. It is incumbent on us to be firm in that which He is firm in and to allow freedom in that which He has allowed freedom. To go too far in one direction or another leads to either license or legalism; both of which are poison to the faith and practice necessary to have a sound relationship with the Lord.

Life application: By knowing what is allowed and what is forbidden, we can know how to handle each situation as it arises within the context of our Christian faith. And the only way to know these things is to... to... to know your Bible. Never stop reading, studying, and memorizing this precious word.

*Heavenly Father, I have to stop and ask myself from time to time, "How can I be pleasing to You unless I do what You ask?" From there, "How can I do what You ask unless I know Your word?" It all comes back to Your word. Doctrine does matter and it can only come from keeping my nose in Your word. Thank You for the Blueprint for my life, the Constitution of my faith, and the Lamp for my feet. Thank You for Your word. Amen.*

### **Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; Romans 14:16**

With the use of the word "therefore" we are asked to refer to what was just said in order to grab Paul's intended meaning. The previous two verses stated, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died."

Because "nothing is unclean of itself" we may feel that we have liberty to partake of anything at any time without harm. This is not the case. It would be entirely inappropriate to invite a known Christian vegetarian over to your house and then serve only dishes with meat. In fact, knowingly doing this would be evil. And the good you intended by the invitation for dining will only be "spoken of as evil."

Likewise, if you were to start attending a congregation which consisted of Messianic Jews (Jewish folks who have accepted Christ as Lord) and were to bring a ham sandwich along for a snack, you would more than probably cause a large amount of offense; not because there is anything inherently wrong with a ham sandwich, but because these believers have spent their lives refraining from such food and will probably continue to do so even if they know they now have the freedom to do otherwise.



Having said that, it should be noted that in modern society someone will always find offense at something another does. There must be a point where the offended party has to simply grow up and stop being offended all the time. But tact and diplomacy over these matters comes down to love. And this is true from either angle, by the one exercising their freedom and by the one who is easily offended. In the end, the consideration of the situation from the angle of love will be pleasing to the Lord.

Life application: Use sound judgment towards others. If atheists are offended by a nativity scene, that is their problem, not yours. However, if a fellow believer is offended by your freedom in your style of worship while you are attending their church, then maybe you need to adjust to accommodate them. Make your considerations in such matters with Jesus as the example and love as the guide.

*Wonderful, beautiful Savior, thank You for the perfect life You gave on that rugged cross in payment of my sin debt. I know that eternity itself will never bring me to the end of the debt of praise and adoration I owe to You for the majesty of Your grace and mercy. Thank You, Lord Jesus. Please delight in my love and worship. Glory to You in the highest. Amen.*

**...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17**

Paul has probably used as much ink on the continuing subject as any other in all of his epistles. Since verse 1, he has remained on the same overall concept of externals in life and how they should not be a distraction in our Christian conduct. In other words, if it is not a specific mandate (either in the positive - "do this," or in the negative - "don't do this") then don't argue over it. This is the source of legalism which poisons so many teachers, pastors, and congregations and it is just as harmful as ignoring mandates through liberalism. Both are to be rejected. Taking from Scripture or adding to it are both violations of what belongs to God alone.

Remembering now the first half of the thought which continues in verse 17, in the previous verse it said, "Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil..." What we do with our diet can certainly affect our Christian testimony, but it shouldn't because "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking."

This is the first time in this conversation that "drinking" has been added into the overall concept of "food." The word used here is *posis* and simply refers to anything that can be consumed. However, it must be implying one of two things to even have been introduced.

The first would be something mandated under the law like not drinking blood or not consuming something at a particular time and for a particular reason, such as when one took a Nazirite vow (see Numbers 6). The second option would be something fermented or distilled - from beer to strong drink. The second is certainly what he is referring to here. Blood is forbidden even in the New Testament context (see Acts 15:20) and the Nazirite vow only pertained to Israel under the law. Therefore, other than blood, there are no drinking restrictions mentioned in the New Testament.

Understanding this, the consumption of drinking alcohol then falls under the "disputable matters" category just like types of foods and days of observance. Hence, to forbid it would be legalism because it is adding to God's word. However, to promote it to the point where it leads to drunkenness would be going in the opposite direction. Either way, there would be an abuse of what is considered acceptable. Rather than getting into a bad situation over this issue, just like the eating of meat or the observance of a particular day of worship, we are to not let our "good be spoken of as evil."

And the reason why is given as the final portion of verse 17. Rather than focusing on things which are temporary and passing away, we should be promoting "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Legalism is swept out of the house by proper doctrine when righteousness is pursued. However, the crowd who shout "do" and "don't" over disputable matters do not promote righteousness. Where there is bondage, it is certainly missing.

The same is true with "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." We cannot live under these precepts if we are attempting to please men. Instead, there is only a violation of the conscience, feelings of guilt, and a lack of being filled with God's perfect presence. And the reason goes back to what being "filled with the Spirit" entails. It is a passive action. A believer is sealed with the Spirit the moment they believe. They can never get more of the Holy Spirit from that moment. But the Spirit can get more of them. Through peace, contentment, and joy, the Spirit will radiate out of them. And this can only occur through obedience to God's word and His precepts, not the precepts of man.

Life application: We have been given the chance for heavenly joy, even in this life. Why would we waste that wondrous opportunity by being brought into captivity and bondage? And why would we ruin it for another by having them violate their own conscience? Let us endeavor to put disputable matters away from our interactions with others.

*Lord Jesus, You have offered joy, peace, and contentment in my life if I will but live in the Spirit and walk according to Your precepts. I can do this from the dirtiest prison cell or in*

*a hospital bed. So then why should I not do it when I am living out my normal life! It is available to me now and so I accept the offer and receive the blessing. I will be obedient to Your word and I will be filled with Your Spirit. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.**

Romans 14:18

Still building on the entirety of the contents of chapter 14, Paul again begins this verse with the connector "for." This has been one long and continuous stream of points and summaries in order to establish doctrine concerning "disputable matters." It is obviously something of profound importance to him and one which then begs the question, "Why?" The answer has several parts -

First, he had come out of the legalistic system which ruled the life of a Pharisee. He saw how it corrupted the already complex system of the law to the point that it became a crushing burden on the people. Jesus personally spoke against their conduct time and time again. Thus, Paul understood that legalism is destructive to the individual and displeasing to the Lord.

Secondly, adding to God's mandates through legalism invariably leads either to feelings of self-righteousness by those who impose them or to feelings of worthlessness to those on whom they are imposed, but who fail at meeting a requirement which is actually no requirement at all. And the opposite - liberalism, or the setting aside of God's mandates, invariably leads to immorality, license, and a weak and ineffective gospel message; one so watered down that it actually makes no change in the life and conduct of the one who hears it.

Finally, as the Lord's spokesperson for doctrine during the church age, his words are to be taken as the inspired word of God. Because they are, just like any other time in redemptive history, we are not to add to nor take away from what God prescribes.

Proverbs 30:5, 6 sums this thought up quite well -

"Every word of God is pure;  
He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.  
Do not add to His words,  
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar."

When man interferes in what belongs to God alone, he becomes a usurper of God's right to rule and His authority over His creatures. Think of it... what a slap in the face of God to decide that we know what is better than He!

Because of these, and certainly many other valid points, he says, "For he who serves Christ in these things is..."

- ✓ "Acceptable to God." Christ is God's standard for humanity. He is our example, and He is our guide. Our religious duties are to Him. Therefore, when we serve Him as rightly instructed, the inevitable result is that God accepts our conduct. He gave the instructions, and He gave the Son whom we are to serve.
- ✓ "Approved by men." Those who see our conduct and understand our relationship with Christ will approve of our actions in that capacity. Although this section is dealing with our acceptance of others' actions within the faith, this doesn't necessarily mean that those who see and approve will all be Christians. But even those who aren't will be able to say, "He is a good example of the faith he professes." How many times does a person look at a Christian and say, "If that guy is an example of being a Christian, then I want nothing to do with Christianity!" And why? Because they are either adding to what God expects through legalism ("Look at that self-righteous jerk!") or failing to act properly through a watered down, liberal faith ("Look at the perverted things that 'Christian' does!"). Our adherence to God's laws reflect on the One we profess to serve. If another maligns our Lord when we are faithfully obedient, then He will judge that person. But if someone maligns our Lord when we act unfaithfully, then He will certainly judge us.

Life application: We serve an infinitely wise God. What He ordains is right, whether we personally accept a premise or not. We may have a conscience about eating meat, but that is our problem, not His. Our conduct towards other Christians is to be in light of God's word, not our own pet peeves. And this certainly reflects on our relationship with the Lord. And those who view us from outside the faith are making value judgments on the Christian faith (and thus Christ) because of our individual actions. Let us remember this and act accordingly.

*Lord Jesus, I need to remember that it is You I serve. May my judgments about other believers be in line with Your word and not based on my pet peeves. Help me never to add to, or subtract from, those things that You have spoken. I'm not in a competition with them, but in a relationship with them because of You. Help me to honor You through my relationship with those who have also received You as Lord. Amen.*

**Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Romans 14:19**

And yet again, Paul begins with "therefore." This is actually a combination of two conjunctions which mean "so then." As always, such a statement requires a review of the previous thoughts for the sake of proper context. Going back to verse 14 is enough to get a good hold on this "therefore."

"I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men."

If "there is nothing unclean of itself," but the conscience can make something unclean, then the conscience needs to remain undefiled. This is because anything which is not of faith is sin. If we cause someone to work against their conscience in a disputable matter, we cause them to sin and we have become the cause of their sin. What Christ allows should never be brought to this state "because the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking." How clear Paul is; how easily we dismiss it!

Instead of robbing a fellow of a clear conscience over such trivial matters, instead "let us pursue the things which make for peace." The concept of pursuing is an on-going process. We don't just pursue until we reach a set point and then stop. Instead, we keep on pursuing, never tiring of chasing after those things "which make for peace." And the things which make for peace can be considered under two broad areas -

Ensuring that those things which are prescribed in Scripture are accomplished. In other words, pursuing proper doctrine. Conscience is not a consideration in this instance; God speaks; we obey.

Ensuring that the things which are doubtful are not improperly handled as if they were prescribed; if the Bible makes no prescriptive statement on the matter, then let others pursue it according to their conscience.

Adhering to these two broad categories will certainly make for peace. And at the same time, they will allow for "the things by which one may edify another." To "edify" means

to "build up." One cannot be built up in the faith if they are allowed to violate something prescribed by God. Likewise, one cannot be built up in the faith if they are coerced to act against their conscience in a matter which is not prescribed in Scripture. The goal for Christians is harmonious living within God's standards, not finger pointing, backbiting, gossiping, personal vendettas, or unauthorized judgments.

As noted in previous verses. Paul has discussed this matter for the entirety of Romans 14 thus far. This should be so immensely clear that we should never miss the point. He has come at it from every angle imaginable, and sometimes with repetition. Let us keep our fingers out of the lives of others in disputable matters... and yet we fail. Knowing the Bible and properly applying it will keep us from sinning against our fellow believers and it will keep us from being the cause of sin in them.

Life application: Romans 14 asks us time and again to know our Bible. Why? Because we cannot make right judgments on "disputable matters" unless we know what are and what are not disputable matters. We therefore sin when we don't read, study, and remember our Bible. It really is that simple.

*O God, giver of Your word - You have told me not to judge others in disputable matters. When I do, either I sin, or I may cause them to sin or both. And yet, unless I know what matters are not-disputable, I can't know which are disputable... How can I know unless I read and remember Your word? It gives me a whole new state of mind to realize this. Help me Lord to take this to heart. Help me to set aside time to read and know what You expect of me. Amen.*

**Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.** Romans 14:20

"Do not destroy the work of God..." What is this referring to? It is the work of God in Christ Jesus, fulfilling the law and its requirements so that we can live in newness of the Spirit. Jesus Christ is now building a temple with His followers as "living stones" in that building. The word Paul uses for "destroy" signifies to tear down a structure. When we use something such as dietary restrictions (which have been set aside in Christ) as a standard of judgment toward others, we in essence "tear down" portions of His temple. We either make believers ineffective or we keep people from becoming believers. Who would want to participate in a legalistic, finger pointing religion?

And so, "for the sake of food" we sin against our fellow man and diminish the glory of the Lord and "the work of God" in others' eyes. What a terrible price to pay over something which isn't even prescribed in His word! And this is absolutely certain

because Paul continues, "All things indeed are pure..." That statement could not be any clearer. He is talking about foods and then, even in the exact same verse, he makes this proclamation. And yet there are denominations by the score who put unscriptural burdens on their followers, "Don't eat, don't touch!" Instead of God's word as the standard, they promote their agenda. Instead of the freedom which is found in Christ, there is bondage and harsh rule.

And because of a mishandling of the word, the result then is that it becomes "evil for the man who eats with offense." If a Christian is told that drinking soda is wrong and then another Christian says that soda drinking is fine, there is now a dilemma in their mind. "Which do I believe?" If they go ahead and drink a soda when they feel it may be wrong, they have now committed evil because they are consuming the soda with a guilty conscience. This is the sad state of the neurotic believer who is swayed by every form of doctrine which blows their way. They actually sin through their own lack of knowledge and their guilty conscience over a matter which is really not an issue that should have ever arisen.

Life application: It is the word which prescribes what we can and cannot do. By knowing the word and understanding the work of Christ on our behalf, we will remain free from sinning against our guilty conscience. Don't ever stop reading and learning your Bible.

*Lord God, as the year is ending, I want to take a moment and thank You for all You have done for me in the past year. There were many joys and blessings. There was abundance and delight. Along with them, there were some trials and setbacks... but You never left my side and You carried me through each one. Thank You, O God, for this wonderful life You have blessed me with. Amen.*

**It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Romans 14:21**

Again, as Paul has done on several occasions in this chapter, he gives a very short, concise, and clear statement. If your brother is offended by your eating habits or by your wine drinking, then don't do them around him. Instead, that is what you have a house for. If we cause another to "stumble" or be "offended" or "made weak" we have sinned against a person for whom Christ died. Is it worth causing this type of disruption in another's life just to engage in eating and drinking? No.

The kingdom of God is not about meat and wine, but about righteousness, holiness, and glorifying God. He has given us these things during this life to enjoy but not at the expense of fellowship and harmony within the body of believers.

Life application: Use empathy towards those around you. Don't have a belligerent attitude over "doubtful matters" but rather live at peace with those who are of the faith. We'll be spending eternity together, so why should we be fighting about these things now?

*Lord Jesus, here we are at the beginning of a new year. Please help me to live out this year in a way which is honoring to You and helpful to those around me. Thank You for the life You have given me. May I use it to faithfully serve You. Amen.*

**Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.** Romans 14:22

Paul is speaking to believers. Therefore, he is speaking to people of faith. Because this is so, the logical conclusion is that his question, "Do you have faith?" Is not speaking of saving faith. Instead, it is speaking of the faith which is implied in verses 14-21. This is faith to act in disputable matters. For example, the person who has "faith" to eat all things as opposed to those who lack the faith to eat certain foods. In such an instance, when it will obviously harm another to exercise your faith, then restrain from doing so.

Many Jewish believers don't eat pork. Whether you feel that is right or wrong, would it be right to invite such a friend to your house and serve ham along with the other food? No! Nor would it be right to invite them over and, even without serving ham, argue the point that ham is ok thus insinuating that they aren't acting like mature Christians. These are the kinds of things that can only lead to unhappiness in them. In turn it will lead to unhappiness in you. Instead of such an attitude, exercise your faith before God, exercise your freedoms when they won't harm, and don't cause an air of animosity to arise over such disputable matters.

And Paul explains why - "Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." By acting in this manner, you are actually bringing condemnation on yourself. Again, this is not speaking of condemnation from salvation, as if such a matter could cause the loss of salvation. Rather it is speaking of condemning thoughts. Such thoughts are, as will be revealed in the next verse, what leads to sin. This is also revealed to us by John in his first epistle

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God."  
1 John 3:21

Life application: Just because we have the right to do certain things, and just because we have the faith to exercise that right, it doesn't make it right to follow through with



that thing if it will cause another to violate their conscience. By causing others to sin, we sin.

*Gracious Lord God, it's the beginning of a new day with unlimited possibilities ahead. I pray that I will use this day to Your glory and with all of the abilities You have granted me. Help me to not waste my time or the chances that come up, but to meet each challenge and opportunity with boldness. Thank You for the day ahead. Amen.*

**But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. Romans 14:23**

To complete the chapter, Paul finishes with this notable and to-the-point statement. The "but" is given as a contrast to what he just said in verse 22 -

"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."

If you have faith, exercise your faith before God. Don't lord it over others and don't cause others to stumble. Use your faith as a tool for sanctification, not destruction. If you have faith, eat without conscience and be grateful for what you have been provided.

On the other hand, where faith is lacking, there is doubt. As we are limited beings, we cannot know everything perfectly. There will always be areas where we are unsure. Therefore, doubt cannot be sin. However, doubt can be the cause of sin. This is what Paul will show us now. "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats." The clear understanding of this is that if someone feels that they shouldn't be eating something, pork for example, and they eat it in order to fit in or because they feel coerced, then they sin. Not because eating pork is wrong (as is clearly shown in chapter 14), but because they are in a state of doubt concerning what they are eating. And the reason for this is "because he does not eat from faith."

If you are eating something under any type of compulsion, then it can't be from faith. Faith, by its very definition, involves doing something which isn't forbidden, with a clear conscience, and without coercion. Calling on Jesus as Lord implies the exercising of faith in the fact that Jesus is Lord. If one is forced to call on Him, then they haven't really called on Him. The same is true with something as simple as having certain foods for dinner.

A Christian who has pork chops for dinner and who eats with a clear conscience, implies that he believes Christ has fulfilled the Levitical laws prescribed in the Old Testament (because these laws forbid the eating of pork). If one believes this, as the Bible demonstrates is true, then Jesus must be Lord. Why? Because if the law is fulfilled in Him, then it died with Him. If we are calling on Jesus as Lord and accepting His work, then we must believe that He rose again because one cannot call on a dead Lord. If the law was fulfilled in Him, and then He died under the law, then the law died with Him. If He rose again, then a New Covenant must be in place. If a New Covenant is in place which says that nothing is unclean of itself (Romans 14:14), then accepting that by faith implies that Jesus is Lord.

But... if one eats pork because he feels coerced, then he is not eating from faith. And "whatever is not from faith is sin." If someone doesn't understand the work of Christ in the manner described above concerning the law, then they may feel that dietary restrictions still apply. However, to fit in or for whatever other reason, they may feel pressured to eat pork. If they do so, even though there is nothing wrong with eating pork in and of itself, they are not eating from faith and thus they sin.

Pork has been the example here, but Paul says "whatever" is not from faith is sin. If one violates their conscience in a matter in order to be pleasing to others, they are not acting in faith. Is it better to be a man-pleaser or one who pleases God? God is pleased with faith. That is the lesson of the Bible.

As a final thought on this, although it is acceptable to not eat pork, it is not acceptable to teach that it is not acceptable to not eat pork. And there is a difference. The Bible has shown that eating it (or any other food) is now all right. Therefore, to teach that it is not okay is to violate what the Bible teaches. This then no longer is a matter of conscience, but a matter of doctrine. To violate doctrine through incorrect teaching is sin. Be careful to know the difference.

Life application: Romans 14 has shown that eating all foods and drinking anything one wishes is acceptable. To teach otherwise is sin. And to eat any food apart from conscience is also sin. However, to abstain from any food or drink is not sin. Know the difference and be prepared to defend your knowledge.

*Lord God, the day is brightening, and the heaviness of sleep is fading away. Once again, the day is set before me and my hands are ready for accomplishing the many tasks of life. I look forward to them and am excited to get out and get going. But first, please allow me just this... Allow me to tell You how much I love You. Ok Lord, out I go. Praising You along the way! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 15

**We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.** Romans 15:1

Chapter 15 begins with a note admonishing those who are strong in the faith - "We then who are strong..." This obviously includes Paul himself and he is speaking out in plea to those who are like him. Being strong in the faith is described in the previous chapter and he now brings the thought of those words into a request for harmony within the church.

Those who understand their freedoms and who aren't challenged by the "disputable matters" that arise should "bear with the scruples of the weak." Matters of diet and days of observance are not to be treated as if they were to be the end of fellowship and a source of division. Rather, the stronger in the faith have the onus on them to accept those who practice differently or who fail to see the complete freedom found in the finished work of Jesus. Instead of lording their knowledge and freedom over the weak, they are to bear with their habits and not merely please themselves. This is the heart of love which he writes about elsewhere, such as 1 Corinthians 13.

And as a case demonstration of this, Paul writes these words to the Corinthians in his first letter to them -

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

1 Corinthians 9:19-22

Throughout Acts, Paul is shown to be empathetic to those who were lesser informed or who were weaker in the faith. However, he also stood against heresy and those who would put confusion into the minds of believers. He had a balanced approach to his handling of such matters. When someone was not following the faith in a proper manner because of a lack of knowledge, he stooped down to their level and worked within their state to edify them and also instruct them. However, when someone wasn't following the faith in a proper manner but who should have known better, he challenged them openly (see Galatians 2:11-16 where he confronts Peter head on).

This is the proper way to conduct affairs, and this is what Paul appeals to.

Life application: Determine the situation concerning a challenge to right doctrine and act accordingly. If the person is ignorant of a matter, handle them as you would your own child - with love and instruction. If the person is aware of what is right and acts contrary to the truth, handle them as a troublemaker, with bold determination to not let them harm others' faith.

*Lord, what does it profit me to have all the knowledge in the world and to not have love? Help me to use Your word as an implement of instruction to those who are lacking knowledge, as a guide to those who have lost their way, and as shining light to those who grope in darkness. I know it has the power to open eyes, minds, and hearts. Give me the wisdom to use it sensibly. Amen.*

**Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.** Romans 15:2

To edify means to build up. Paul just introduced chapter 15 with a statement that the strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak; not to please themselves. Bearing with the weak is to tolerate their weakness, not find fault in it. Rather than following a course which picks away at their already weak foundation, we are admonished to work with them. And so, speaking to the body of believers, he asks that "each of us please his neighbor for his good."

A neighbor can be defined in the broader sense of our fellow man, and we should strive for the good toward all men it is true, but based on the context, he is asking us to evaluate our conduct towards our neighbors in Christ. It is to them that we should endeavor to be pleasing in a way which will lead to edification.

The idea is to build up the body, promoting harmony within the faith and to bear the burdens of the weaker without finding fault. The world at large is watching and evaluating Christ based on His servants. It's true that some profess Christ who aren't really in Christ, but to weed them out is where right belief and right practice are to be defined. We can't do this if we don't know our instruction manual. But by knowing the word and defining the parameters, we can then endeavor to bear with those who are weak within those confines.

Life application: Doctrine does matter. Once we have right doctrine, then we need to accommodate those whose practices are weak within that context. By doing so, we will build up, not tear down, our fellow believers.

*Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle!  
Thank You Lord that I am ready to face the day. You have prepared for me the armor of  
God to defend against the enemy and You have covered my feet with the gospel of  
peace. I am ready to face this day. Thank You for the chance to serve You. Amen.*

**For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.” Romans 15:3**

To give us an explicit example of how we should act in "disputable matters" Paul refers to the example of Christ Himself. He has just shown that we should "bear with the scruples of the weak" and not attempt to merely please ourselves. In essence, "Is our temporary gratification worth bringing discord between saved believers?" Rather, we should be willing to let these things rest and to instead serve for the sake of Christ and not self.

In substantiation of this, He cites the 9th verse of the 69th Psalm -

"Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up,  
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."

John 2:17 refers directly to this same verse and applies it to the time when Jesus cleared the temple. He was interested in the honor of God, not pleasing Himself. And this is seen throughout the rest of His ministry. When He was tired, He still served others. When He was hungry, He never failed to make sure others were fed. When He faced the agony of the cross, He asked that His Father's will, not His, would be done.

And throughout it all, He received reproach and contempt. If He was doing the will of the Father, then the contempt was directed ultimately toward the Father, but it instead fell on Him. This then is our example. If our actions and conduct are correct and in line with Scripture and yet someone finds fault in them, then, ultimately, they are finding fault in the One who authored Scripture. But in order to glorify the Lord, we should let the reproaches of those who reproach Christ fall on us.

By doing this, Christ was able to change hearts and minds. And that is exactly what we are asked to do. Through our willingness to not argue over these disputable matters, we will ultimately be able to change the weaker brother to understand what is right and acceptable. Paul will show us this in the coming verses. Our actions are to be with the intent and purpose of bringing the body to a place of harmony, agreement, and of being of one mind, even in disputable matters.

In Hebrews 10, we read the following -

"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:  
'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But a body You have prepared for Me.  
In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin  
You had no pleasure.  
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—  
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—  
To do Your will, O God.'" Hebrews 10:5-7

Christ Jesus came in a body of flesh to do the will of God. And it was this will of God that was His driving purpose and sole aim. Where "sacrifice and offering" (things mandated under the law) failed to please God, Christ was able to be pleasing. And this is what is expected of us. We can exercise our liberties in Christ and yet not be pleasing to God because of how it affects others.

Life application: Christ is our example. If we can continuously remember this in everything we do, then we can know how to properly conduct our affairs. Jesus never sacrificed doctrine in order to accommodate others. Nor did He excuse a violation of the law in others. However, He worked within the framework of the law to show us the heart of His Father. This is what we are asked to do within the framework of our Christian liberties.

*Lord Jesus, when it seems like the battle is lost, that is when You shine through all the more gloriously. When it seems like there is no hope, I suddenly find safety. And when it looks like only disaster is in my path, You always show something better is ahead. I see that time and again and it proves to me that my trust in You is never futile. Help me to keep my faith in such low times because I know it will be greatly rewarded. Amen.*

**For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.** Romans 15:4

Paul just quoted the 69th Psalm. Now as a way of showing that the Old Testament still has value and is to be relied on and consulted, he begins with "for." This ties us to the quote and is a way for him to remind us that we should rely on the wisdom found there in order to understand the work of Christ more fully.

In fact, the Old Testament Scriptures were the only Scriptures at Paul's time and they are what he and the other apostles relied on to understand and explain the work of

Jesus. Nothing has changed since the completion of the New Testament either. The Old Testament is not to be discarded in our pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

The quote from the 69th Psalm was speaking, in a large way, about the patient endurance of Christ during His ministry. In reading that, Paul's mind may have suddenly thought something like, "And isn't that what we are to find for ourselves as we search the Scriptures?" And so, he equates our journey through them as a journey of spiritual understanding, particularly in how it relates to our relationship with Christ.

And so, he notes that "whatever things were written before were written for our learning." These Old Testament Scriptures which took hundreds and hundreds of years to come forth, didn't lose their relevance when Christ came. Instead, they became relevant in an entirely new way. For us, they now, "through the patience and comfort" found in them might provide us hope.

Keeping this verse in context with the train of thought that he has been pursuing, this "patience and comfort" then is directly tied to our conduct among the brethren concerning "doubtful matters." Paul isn't suddenly jumping out of his previous discourse. Instead, he is tying this psalm and the application he has derived from it directly to the concept of the fraternal bonds of Christian fellowship. This will be evident from the coming two verses.

Life application: The Bible reveals a harmony between the New Testament and the Old. The two testaments contrast and yet they confirm each other. There is the law and there is grace. They contrast and yet they confirm the whole counsel of God. In order to understand the fullness of God's intent for us, we need to study and apply the entirety of Scripture to our lives.

*I look up and see the stars filling the night sky and I wonder how I fit into Your great plan. I feel small and insignificant... surely You have more important matters to consider than me. But then, I remember, Jesus came for me - even for me. I don't understand how I could be important in this universe full of other important things, but I know it is true. Jesus died for me too. Thank You for caring that much about me, O God. Amen.*

**Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ... Romans 15:5**

Verses 5 and 6 are as much a spontaneous prayer of petition as they are a request for harmony directed to those in Rome. The substance of everything he has penned since the beginning of the previous chapter has dealt with agreement between believers

resulting from unity over "disputable matters." Only through such unity will there be a like-minded attitude. And so, in order to promote this after his detailed discourse, he invokes God to be the One to bestow this divine favor.

"Now" - Based on these topics of discussion and in hopes of fellowship within the covenant community.

"May the God of patience and comfort" - God's patience is seen throughout the Bible. He is longsuffering with those who are going astray as he calls them back to Himself. A beautiful example of this is His sending of the prophets to Israel for even hundreds of years, asking them to be of one mind with Him. Instead of utterly destroying them as they turned away, he would send enemies to afflict His people in hopes that they would turn back to Him in faith. Only when there was no remedy would He send them into exile. But even exile had the intent of bringing them to repentance and fellowship once again. Through enemy attack, pestilence, famine, and exile, the God of patience and comfort was always there, maintaining covenant faithfulness to His wayward people.

"Grant you to be like-minded toward one another" - Paul's petition was that the same patience and comfort displayed by God towards His people would now be displayed between believers. God had set the example, taking many ages to complete His oracles to and through Israel. The prophecies continuously told of the coming Messiah and the prophets continuously re-directed the people in the interim. God asks us to have the same attitude. We are to keep telling of the great deeds of Christ who is the fulfillment of all that was previously written, and we are to work to re-direct wayward believers to proper doctrine while overlooking the "disputable matters" which only divert our attention away from a fraternal bond of fellowship.

"According to Christ Jesus" - Christ Jesus sought harmony between his followers and prayed to the Father for this (John 17:11). And this is what Paul now continues to proclaim. As he said in the previous chapter, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Rather than argumentation over disputable matters, there should be peace, harmony, and fellowship. These are the things which lead to godliness. In the book of Ephesians, Paul will summarize it this way -

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3



Life application: Life is short enough without wasting time on bickering and disputes. And our Christian life is far too precious to be spoiled by them as well. Let Christ and His perfect doctrine be your deepest desire, your highest joy, and your constant aim.

*Lord Jesus, when I'm worn out from the trials of the day, at the times that I fret over some argument or dispute with another person, when money is tight, and I wonder how my many bills will get paid - at times like these I still have a peace inside of me which comes from the sure knowledge that You are there with me through such things. I honestly don't know where I'd be without Your wondrous hand of grace upon me. Thank You, Lord, for always being there with me. Amen.*

**...that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Romans 15:6

The previous verse asked us "to be like-minded toward one another." And in the completion of the thought, the reason is given to us in verse 6. The ultimate goal of our lives and conduct should be directed to the glorification of God. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, and answers, as follows -

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Man's chief end is truly to glorify God, but how can we do this when there is divisiveness, backbiting, and finger-pointing over matters in which He has allowed us the freedom to choose. In the Bible are many directives we are asked to obey. These are given by God, both for our good and for His glory. When we fail in these things, we fail to glorify Him. And so, learning doctrine and applying it to our lives has the end goal of glorifying Him. And those issues which are not prescribed and have been left up to us to decide on are matters which will allow us to glorify Him through our freedom to express them as we wish.

And so, considering it from that perspective, how can we glorify God with a freedom we have been granted if it is turned into a mandate? We cannot. If one can think through such issues from this perspective, we can see how destructive legalism is. It is a system which actually denies God the glory He is due. This is why, "with one mind and one mouth" we should glorify God, not with the imposition of pet peeves on others, but with gratitude for the liberties He has granted us and obedience to the things He has directed us. In so doing, we will "glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Our family relationship in Christ is seen in a tender and beautiful way in Paul's statement here. God the Father accepted Christ and His death on our behalf, proving it in the resurrection. When we are found in Christ, we then are found to be children of God. As God's children, just like the children of any family, we honor our parents through obedience, but we also honor our parents through family love and harmony. When divisiveness rears its ugly head in a family, it reflects negatively on the parents; how much more so when divisiveness is a prominent feature of the church of God's people!

Life application: Paul is in no way compromising doctrine in his writings during Romans 14 and 15; he is upholding doctrine. But he is also showing us that those issues which are left unstated must be considered as freedoms for us to enjoy without divisiveness and in-fighting.

*O God, how long shall I wait on You and remain faithful to You? I will never stop waiting and I will never give up my faith! Even if enemies surround me or sickness eats away at me, I will remain steadfast in You and in Your promises. Only Jesus prevailed over the grave, so why would I put my hope in anything else. My debt is paid, my future is secure. I will wait on the Lord. Amen.*

**Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.**

Romans 15:7

"Therefore" asks us to again stop, consider, and then act. Based on the preceding 6 verses of chapter 15 as well as the entire scope of thought which was relayed in chapter 14 - all dealing with the same basic subject, we are to "receive one another." Concerning "disputable matters" some have failings, and some have strengths and they may be in differing areas so that the one who is strong in one area may actually be weak in another. And then there is the added context of the previous chapters of Romans which address issues more directly to either Jews or Gentiles based on their previous state.

The Jews came from a point of knowledge about the true God which the Gentiles lacked. However, the Gentiles came from a point of freedom in what are now "disputable matters" which were clearly forbidden under the law, but which are now set aside in Christ. And so, the stronger has actually become the weaker in many ways if they remain uninformed or conscious-stricken over the liberties we may now exercise. Because of this, we are asked to "receive one another, just as Christ also received us."

How did Christ receive the Jew? As a Jew who was observant to their laws. Paul, on the road to Damascus, wasn't told first to give up his identity and then Christ would reveal

Himself to him. Instead, He came in all of His glorious radiance to a man who was bent on punishing those of the faith. And the Holy Spirit didn't come down on Cornelius' house in Acts 10 after making them go through many rites of purification and instruction on what foods they could and couldn't eat. Instead, He came down upon them as a group of gentiles with no specifically recorded knowledge of the Jews' law.

In these and in every other instance in church history, Christ has received His people in the state they were in. Some have been miserable alcoholics, sexually depraved souls, arrogant finger-pointers, greedy money-grubbers, and etc. But there was a moment when Christ touched their hearts and changed them. Each of them came with all of their previous baggage and He converted their souls.

The things which required changing because they are mandated by Christ (such as drunkenness, sexual immorality, etc.) are the things they were told to leave behind. But there are other things that are not delineated in the word - what foods to eat, what day(s) to worship on, etc. In these things, and for Jew and for Gentile alike, there was a receiving of the person by Christ and no demand for change.

And so, we are asked to accept them in like manner. Who are we to judge what Christ has already accepted? Who are we to reject the one whom He has already received? Are we in the place of God? Some may think so, but the answer is "No." This has been the constant theme of chapters 14 and 15. We must allow what is not forbidden and we must forbid that which is not allowed, but we must know which is which and, therefore, we need to know the Bible as given to us by God. In doing so, and in acting in accord with its precepts, we will receive others "to the glory of God."

And this is the end goal of all of redemptive history - God receiving the glory that He is due. This is not a vain, self-seeking, glory. Rather, God is allowing us to share in His glory by seeing the Son in His rightful position at the right hand of the Father and our fellowshiping with Him for all eternity.

We can realize a small portion of that now by accepting others without dispute over doubtful matters. In so doing, we acknowledge the greatness of Christ who has already accepted them - from the jungles of Southeast Asia to the plains of Africa, from the large cities of Europe to the coastal hamlets of Latin America. People from all over the world are coming to Christ with unique languages, interesting styles of music and instruments, unusual foods they eat, and so on. And yet, they are members of the body of Christ. He is glorified through the diversity, and our acceptance of those things reflects this. What Christ has received, let us look at with great pleasure.

Life application: Instead of judging others for the things they do differently as worshippers of Jesus, let us look at their traditions and modes of worship as wonderful aspects of the overall splendor of what Christ has earned, purchasing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation - each with unique abilities and offerings.

*Jesus, You accepted me just as I was the day I heard the gospel. Since that time, You have continued to refine me and bring me in line with Your word, and yet you've allowed me to continue to be myself. My style of music, the clothes I wear, the activities I enjoy - I can go on enjoying. What a demonstration of love... You have accepted me for who I am. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, Romans 15:8**

In verses 8-12, Paul is going to make an observation concerning the all-encompassing work of Christ for and toward the people of the world, both Jew and Gentile. As he said in the preceding verse, we are to "receive one another, just as Christ also received us." This includes both Jew and Gentile and he will demonstrate this now. And so, he begins with "Now I say..." He is affirming in advance what he is about to relay. His words in Greek are comparable to "I say indeed..."

"Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision..." The word "Christ" in Greek means the same thing as the Hebrew word we translate as "Messiah." And both words literally mean "anointed one." Paul is saying that Jesus is this anointed one of God and in this role as the Messiah of the Jews, He became a "servant to the circumcision." The term "circumcision" specifically means the covenant people. The rite was initiated in Genesis 17 to confirm the covenant between God and Abraham. This covenant line went through Isaac, Jacob, and to the 12 sons of Israel.

Had Jesus not been born through the Jewish people, He could not have been the Messiah of the Jews because the covenant line was defined through them. But being born of this line, He was so qualified. And so, as a member of this covenant community, He became "a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God." He left His exalted heavenly position and, as Paul tells us in Philippians 2:7, 8 -

He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

This humbling of Himself had to occur in order "to confirm the promises made to the fathers." The Old Testament is filled with promises of One who would come to correct the fallen state of man. The first promise was made to Adam just after the fall. After him, they continued to be made to the fathers - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, etc. The promises continued in the prophets as their proclamations clarified the role of this coming Messiah. These promises are so numerous and so detailed that ultimately only one person could ever meet them all. This then is one of the purposes of the gospels. They show that Christ is the fulfillment of the promises.

The book of Acts continues to demonstrate this and then the epistles explain His work as the "servant to the circumcision for the truth of God." God spoke; God fulfilled. His word has proven itself both true and reliable. But the work of Christ did more than fulfill the promises to the people of the circumcision. There was another group to be included in Messiah's work. Paul will continue to explain the details in the verses ahead.

Life application: If the Bible is from God, then it will be reliable, infallible, and inerrant in all it proclaims and teaches. The things it claims will happen will surely come to pass. Because it meets these standards, it demonstrates that it is truly the word of God. And so, what it expects of us is authoritative. It is to be the guide for our life and doctrine. Let us continue to apply its precepts to our lives, to the glory of God.

*Lord Jesus, it seems as if trying times are never far away. For each day of joy and happiness, one comes along that reminds me this isn't really my home. I know that You have something better in store for us than the ups and downs of this daily life. And because of that, I will keep my eyes on You and my hope and heart in what lies ahead, not in the temporary and quickly fading pleasure of this world. I long for the day You gather us to You. Amen.*

**...and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name." Romans 15:9**

In the previous verse, Paul showed that "Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers." But now, he will demonstrate that even the Old Testament, which was predominantly directed to "the circumcision," also showed that Christ would come to be glorified among the Gentiles as well. He begins by quoting a portion of David's writings. The quote is actually found in both 2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49. Paul amends it for the purpose of explaining the gospel. The original is recorded as -

"Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles,  
And sing praises to Your name."

Romans 15:8 & 9 are actually one unified thought which have been divided into two verses. By linking them together as he did, Paul is showing that Jesus is God's truthful fulfillment of the Old Testament to the circumcision as well as the merciful embracer of the gentiles apart from the law in the New Testament. In this then, praises should flow to God through Christ from the Jew for His fulfillment of their law and praises should likewise flow from the Gentiles for His grace upon them apart from the law. There should be a harmonious chord of rejoicing that both Jew and Gentile are saved by the work of Christ and freed from the constraints of the law. Both can now participate in the covenant community by faith in His work alone without reverting to that which He has fulfilled.

It is evident that what God did in Christ completed two different actions - one towards Jew and one towards Gentile, but it doesn't result in doing two different things. Rather, it results in one gospel. This is why Paul said in Romans 10:12,

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."

The intent of God's work in Christ was not a resulting Jewish community of believers who would continue to failingly adhere to the Law of Moses and a separate Gentile community who would be granted heaven's access completely apart from the law. Rather, the work of God in Christ is the fulfillment of the law for both Jew and Gentile. And so, the Jew is told to not remain under the burden of the law, but to rest in the work of Christ alone. In Hebrews 13:12, 13 the Jew is thus instructed -

"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach."

There can be no "one foot in the law and one foot in Christ." It is all Christ, or it is no Christ, for Jew and for Gentile. As obvious as Paul's writings are, many fail to see and receive the pure gospel which is the work of Christ on behalf of all. The re-imposition of the law on Jew, or the imposition of the law upon Gentile, can only lead to condemnation. There is no longer a sacrifice from the law which is acceptable because Christ is the end of the law for all who believe.

Life application: It has become popular in many circles today to place the stress back on the law as a necessary part of one's Christian walk. This is particularly so in many Messianic communities. But this is not the truth of God in Christ. Christ is our rest and in Him alone can we rest. Do not be led astray by those whose terminology twists the purity of the gospel of Christ.

*O God, today I want to reaffirm the principle tenets of my faith: I stand on the Bible alone as the word of God and no other teaching or church tradition is necessary to my faith; I stand by faith alone in the work of Christ with nothing added to it for my justification; the grace of Christ is my only plea before You, my hands are empty and I will boast in nothing but the cross of Christ; my hope is in nothing more and nothing less than the work of Jesus Christ. Thank You, O God, for the all-encompassing and all-sufficient work of Jesus. Amen.*

**And again he says:**

**"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"** Romans 15:10

This is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 32:43 which comes from the Song of Moses. This is the last verse of the Song of Moses which is a poetic snapshot of the coming history of the nation of Israel. In particular, this song is actually a scathing indictment on the apostasy Moses foresaw would come upon them. It speaks of their rebellion, turning away from the Lord, and His resulting judgment. And after all of the strong words of condemnation and doom, the song ends with restoration -

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people;  
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,  
And render vengeance to His adversaries;  
He will provide atonement for His land and His people." Deuteronomy 32:43

What is clear is that God is faithful and covenant keeping, even when His people turn away from Him. He will never reject them or utterly destroy them, thus violating His promises to them. This glorious God who is truthful to His covenant people Israel (verse 15:8) is also merciful to the Gentiles (verse 15:9). And so together, Jew and Gentile are asked to "receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God (verse 15:7). The idea is that truly, in Christ, there is no favoritism. He is the Lord of Jew and Gentile and therefore we are to receive each other just as Christ has received us.

It is important to not separate what Paul is trying to tell us from the overall context of what he has been giving instruction on. Throughout chapter 14 and the opening of chapter 15, he has been educating the church on "doubtful matters." These come about

based on who we are as individuals coming into the body of Christ. Jews may find some things difficult; Gentiles may find other things. We are to accept one another's shortcomings just as Christ has accepted us. If He has received someone, then how can we reject them? And so, Jew should not look down on Gentile nor should Gentile look down on Jew over doubtful matters. Instead, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." Together, we can all give glory to God for His truth and mercy.

Life application: Instead of tearing others within the body down over "doubtful matters," let us glorify God who has called us, despite our failings, into the body of Christ. Let us glorify God for His bestowal of favor upon His people.

*Lord God, You received me despite my many years of failing. I walked a crooked and unsound path in life and yet You washed those years and those many sins away. And even now today, how often I fail You! But in Your rich mercy You sent Jesus to cover it all. In Him is pardon and in Him is full redemption. I have no fear, just gratitude... immense gratitude. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

**And again:**

**"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles!**

**Laud Him, all you peoples!"** Romans 15:11

In the previous verse, Paul used the Torah (the Law) to demonstrate that God's attention was directed toward the salvation of the Gentiles as well as the Jewish people. Here, he will cite another section of the Jewish Scriptures, the Ketuvim (the writings) to witness to the same fact. As a major portion of the writings are to be found in the psalms, he chooses a verse from there. But more than just an arbitrary psalm, he goes to the 117th Psalm. This is a psalm which is notable for several reasons.

The 117th Psalm is the shortest chapter in the Bible. It is simple and direct in its purpose and intent.

The 117th Psalm is a part of the "Hallel." This includes Psalms 113-118 and is the portion of the psalms which are openly recited at the time of the Passover.

In the New Testament, we read this about the night of the crucifixion -

"Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from



now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."  
Matthew 26:27-30

This "hymn" would have been a portion of the Hallel; the psalms which they would have completed during the Passover meal.

After completion of the New Testament, the 117th Psalm is the very center of the Bible. It is as if it is an axis upon which Scripture pivots.

In using the 117th Psalm, and this particular verse from it, we are shown that God's heart is as equally directed to the salvation of the Gentiles as toward the Jews. This is even more clearly understood when considering that Jesus' singing of this hymn occurred before His crucifixion. It was as if He were trying to wake the world up to the fact that the cross was intended for all people.

The Israelites were selected for a mission and were set apart for a purpose, but they are not the end of God's redemptive plan, they are the means in which He would bring it about for all people. In setting Israel apart, God used them to usher in the Messiah, thus bringing Himself glory from both Jew and Gentile.

And so, because of God's great work in Christ, all people can recite the Hallel, knowing that they were included in Jesus' thoughts as He went to pray at Gethsemane and then was nailed to that tree. Let the world sing of God's great act - "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"

Surely the LORD (Jehovah) has done great things for His people in the Person and work of Jesus.

Life application: God has done the work, but it is incumbent on each person to accept that work. Call on Jesus, be reconciled to God, and Praise the Lord for His mighty deeds.

*Heavenly Father, surely Your word testifies to Your love for all people. Both Testaments show Your heart, eyes, and mind are focused on Jew and Gentile alike. You have done the work through Christ, now we must either accept or reject the offer. Me... I receive Jesus - His cross for my sin. What a bargain! Thank You for the cross of my Lord. Amen.*

**And again, Isaiah says:  
"There shall be a root of Jesse;  
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,  
In Him the Gentiles shall hope." Romans 15:12**

So far in just two quotes, Paul has demonstrated from the Torah (the Law) and from the Ketuvim (the writings) that God has always had an intent and purpose for the Gentile peoples as well as the people of Israel. Now, Paul cites Isaiah, a prophet, to make the same point. The prophets form the third section of the Old Testament known as the Nevi'im. In essence, what Paul has done is to demonstrate God's purposes for the Gentile people from every section of the Old Testament. Collectively, they are called the Tanakh, an acronym comprised of the first letter of each of these subdivisions - Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim; TaNaKh.

This may seem trivial or without purpose, but it is not. He has woven together these quotes to show that the concept is sure, founded in the whole body of Scripture, and thus a principal tenet of God's redemptive plans.

He selected a quote from Deuteronomy; written by Moses, the great Lawgiver, and in the book which provides practical living and instruction for the Israelites who are about to enter the land of Canaan.

He selected a quote from Psalm 117, part of the Hallel, which is sung every year during the Passover by all faithful Jewish families.

He selected a quote from Isaiah, "the prince of the prophets," whose chapters and words form a "mini-bible" of 66 chapters, often showing interesting parallels to the 66 books of the Christian Canon.

Whether Paul intentionally selected these quotes of his own will, or whether he did so without thinking of the greater pattern he was forming, the quotes are a perfect demonstration of God's plans and intents for the Gentile church. And so, quoting Isaiah, he says that "There shall be a root of Jesse..." Jesse was the father of King David. David was told that his throne would be eternal. Scripture notes that the Messiah would come from the house of David, thus being the fulfillment of the promise that he was given.

But this verse from Isaiah shows something different. It shows that "there shall be a root of Jesse." Paul has already shown that the root supports the tree and the branches, not the other way around (Romans 11:18). Therefore, the "root of Jesse" isn't speaking of

someone after Jesse, but before. It is an indication of the eternality of Christ. This is similar to the words of Micah -

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,  
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me  
The One to be Ruler in Israel,  
Whose goings forth are from of old,  
From everlasting.” Micah 5:2

It is this "root of Jesse" who "shall rise to reign over the Gentiles." The prophesied Messiah would not just be the Messiah of the Jews, but of all people. This is actually prefigured in the book of Genesis in types and pictures such as the life of Jacob and the life of Joseph. What God is doing in human history through Christ has effect for all people.

These, and many other quotes from the Old Testament, were missed by the Jewish people though. Instead of realizing that God was using them to bring salvation to all people, they couldn't see beyond their own national identity. Paul is reminding them, and us, that Jesus is the hope of all nations. And so, he finishes his quoting of Isaiah with, "In Him the Gentiles shall hope."

"Hope" doesn't even hint at harsh rule. Instead, it is a term of eager anticipation and even longing. The Jewish people expected the Messiah to come forth, rescue them, and rule over the world from Jerusalem for their sake and for their exaltation. Rather, Paul shows that His coming wasn't one of harsh rule over a disobedient people, but one of joy at the reign they would be under.

It is true that after the church age, Christ will physically return to earth and rule from Jerusalem and amidst His people Israel, but that is another dispensation which will come after the church age. During this time, Christ is our ruler and in Him many Gentiles have placed their confidence, their trust, and their hope.

Life application: The whole body of Old Testament Scripture - the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets, testify to the work of God in Christ for both Jew and Gentile. Christ Jesus is the hope of all people. Make every effort to pass on the good news to those around you today.

*Lord Jesus, all of Scripture points to Your work in human history. The Law, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament all show Your love for people of every persuasion.*

*Because this is so, help me to look at all people with the same love. Give me the undying desire to spread the word of hope and redemption found in Your cross and resurrection. Amen.*

**Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13**

As Paul does at times during his writings, at the end of a formal exposition on a particular matter, he ends with a benediction before moving on. This treatise, which really began at Romans 14:1 is no different. He has gone through several over-arching issues with one ultimate goal.

He addressed the difference between the weaker and the stronger of the faith. After this, he instructed one to not show contempt for the other. He followed directly with the matter of not judging one another over "disputable matters." He also went on to implore one to not cause another to sin over such things. Following that, he showed the need to make allowances for one another in a Christian manner, focusing on the spirit and bond of love. The example for this was next identified - the Person and work of Christ who willingly bore reproach. And finally, he demonstrated that all, both Jew and Gentile, should glorify God together.

Considering the length of his epistles, Paul has put an immense amount of time and consideration into this issue. It is one then which should be considered as the highest importance in maintaining fellowship between believers. In hopes that his instruction will take root and be effective, he now makes his short invocation for divine blessing, guidance, and help.

"Now may the God of hope" is noted by scholars as having two applications. The first is that He is the God who provides hope; the second is that He is the God in whom we hope.

The God of hope doesn't just provide hope at certain points during our walk, but He provides a continuous stream of it for those who keep their thoughts and minds on Him. There is never a moment that the hope He provides is either lacking or insufficient to calm His child in the storm.

The God of hope is the eternal God. He isn't just our hope the day we call on Him for salvation and forgiveness, but He is the same God who arranged the universe at the beginning and the One who will be there for His people for all the ages to come. No matter what our station at any given moment; no matter what trial we face; no matter

what loss we have encountered - He is the true Source of our hope. Nothing in creation can separate us from Him and therefore our hope is grounded in what is eternal.

It is to this beautiful Creator that Paul makes his petition for us. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." May you be filled with the continuous knowledge that your faith is grounded in that which doesn't perish and may that thought bring you constant and complete joy. It is from this wondrous state "that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." The God of hope, who provides hope and who is our hope, is petitioned to bring us to a hope which abounds. And this is, in fact, possible. Because he has sealed those who believe with the Holy Spirit. The key to unleashing this joy and peace then isn't external but internal.

We are granted access to it upon belief. The Spirit from that moment resides in all His fullness in the believer. However, the Spirit can get more of the one who believes. This is the state that Paul is praying for. He has given the instruction on how to achieve this. Now, by applying what he has taught, the Holy Spirit can accomplish this condition in the obedient soul. By expecting an external demonstration of the Spirit to come upon the believer, the joy is far too often missed. Only by reading, understanding, and applying Scripture in a right manner will the Spirit effectively accomplish His work in us.

Life application: Paul's benediction is directed to those who already have believed and been sealed with the Holy Spirit. They have full access to the power of the Spirit already. The way to receive the joy and peace is to apply the instructions of the Bible as given. This is how the Spirit works in us; filling us as we yield to Him. Be sure to read, understand, and apply the words of the apostle and you too will be filled with all joy and peace in believing. In this state, you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Heavenly Father, having called on Jesus I know that possessing a life filled with joy and peace is already available to me. Through belief in Him, I have been sealed with Your Spirit for the day of redemption. So, in what should I worry? In what should I fear? In what way should I be distressed? The end is sure, and my hope will not go unfulfilled. Thank You for the promise of everlasting life because of Jesus. Amen.*

**Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Romans 15:14**

For the most part, Paul has given the bulk of his epistle of doctrine and he has given his words of instruction. His benediction of verse 13 has been uttered and now he begins a lengthy closing statement. However, it is not without further instruction or doctrine. It is

mingled, among other things, with special reflections, personal requests, and words of encouragement and greeting to individuals.

Having spent so much time on the issue of "disputable matters" and the necessity to develop and maintain harmony within the church concerning those things, he tactfully provides the words of this verse. "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren..." He has heard of the church, he has given them instruction, and now he is encouraging them by acknowledging that they are capable to handle all the points of doctrine they have received as well as being able to handle the "disputable matters" which exist. To these "brethren" and in full confidence of this, he tells them that you are

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"Full of goodness." They will be willing to properly and tactfully respond to the weaknesses of others without judgment in matters which are not of doctrinal weight and importance. Instead, their goodness will shine forth and make adjustments in these issues.

"Filled with all knowledge." They were already established in Christ (Romans 1:8) and now Paul has instructed them in the issues necessary to elevate them to right knowledge in the areas they may have been lacking. As an apostle (Romans 1:1) he has carefully submitted a thoughtful and majestic epistle of instruction on how to handle matters of both doctrinal weight and importance and those of lesser weight which are disputable in nature. This knowledge is sufficient to the task of building them into an effective and mature body of believers.

"Able also to admonish one another." Through their knowledge, and with the assistance of a written epistle which they can hold on to and refer to for instruction, they are now able to correct one another in doctrinal deficiencies and also to decide what matters are doubtful. Knowledge in those matters which are weighty in nature will keep the congregation on sound footing and away from heresy, licentiousness, and apostasy. Those matters which are of less moment (importance) can be addressed from a loving standpoint where the weaker will grow to a state of strength and the stronger will be kept from haughtiness or arrogance when dealing with the weaker in the body.

In essence, the "goodness" in them will keep from damaging the faith of the weaker as well as inciting egotism in the stronger. At the same time, the "knowledge" is their source of correct instruction for the weaker in the faith. The "admonishment" is the effective means of instruction in a way which should avoid the pitfalls he has so carefully and exactly warned against.

The example of Christ is to be remembered in it all and that example, as he summed up just before his benediction, is one which is equally bearing on Jew and Gentile. With God, there is no favoritism and only through acceptance of the state of one another, and a loving display of that acceptance, will the congregation truly reflect His example.

Life application: Doctrine matters in tenets of weight; acceptance of differences matters in disputable issues; goodness is a bridge to effectively use knowledge; and admonishment should come with that attitude of goodness. In all of this, remembering the example of Christ is paramount.

*Lord God, in Your word I find Jesus and in Jesus I find Your very heart as He reveals You to me. Without Your word, I can't know Jesus and so knowing You intimately isn't possible. Shall I trade such wondrous knowledge for TV, internet, football, work, play, shopping, and a million other things until there isn't time for You? No! Help me to make and use a portion of my time rightly Lord. Help me to learn Your word every day. Amen.*

**Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, Romans 15:15**

Paul had just said this to the Romans in the previous verse -

"Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another."

Having said this, he now states, "nevertheless." He will make a firm addition to the kind words which he just spoke in the thought he is about to impart. In essence, "Despite my confidence in you and your abilities, I have to say the following..."

"I have written more boldly to you on some points..." He acknowledges that despite their knowledge and ability to discern what is correct and to pass it on to others, he has engaged in some very strong and weighty issues in a way which was quite forthright and which could possibly even be considered overbearing to the recipients. And he did this "on some points." The term used here is *apo meros* and is actually debated as to what he is referring to. Two options are considered -

Some of the points noted in his epistles were direct and forthright, or he was direct and forthright to a portion of the letter's recipients (i.e., Jew or Gentile, or possibly the "weaker in the faith" and the "stronger brethren").

Either way, Paul's words were not intended as a bold rebuke, but rather as bold instruction. Were they a rebuke, he certainly wouldn't have been as generous in his wording of the previous verse. Though bold, he desires it to be known that his words were simply a way of reminding the Roman church "because of the grace given to" him by God.

He had stated his apostleship, defended his calling, and noted that as the appointed "apostle to the Gentiles" he was serving in a priestly role to them. He was providing the instruction of God to the people of God, including clarification of spiritual matters. This was the role of the priestly class in the Old Testament, and he had been called to this role in the New.

It should be noted that in times past he could not have been given these duties because he was of the tribe of Benjamin and priestly duties were once given only to the tribe of Levi. But in Christ, who descended in his human genealogy from Judah, a new order of priesthood had come about. As John states to the believers in Revelation 1:5, 6, without distinction of tribe or nationality, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

Paul certainly then filled this priestly role within the confines of the New Covenant, and he did so by "the grace of God given to" him. In this position of grace, and in fulfillment of his priestly duties, he imparted his knowledge boldly in an effort to keep the body of believers on the right track concerning their doctrine and practice.

Life application: Paul is the New Testament's appointed "apostle to the Gentiles." It is his instruction to which the church is to adhere to during this dispensation. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for our instruction and edification, but Paul's writings are the authoritative standard for church-age doctrine and practice. We dismiss his words at the expense of a properly operating and effective body of believers.

*Lord Jesus, I am so truly thankful that You were patient with me, allowing me time to have a change in heart and a desire to follow a different path than the one I pursued for so long. Instead of saying, "This one isn't worth my time" You waited and continued to offer Your peace. Now Lord, use me to get this same message out to those around me. Surely all are worth that same opportunity. Yes, use me in this task, to Your glory. Amen.*



**...that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:16**

Paul provides an enormous amount of detail in this verse. He just stated that he has been bold in some points as a reminder to the Romans and then he said this was due to "the grace given to me by God." He now explains that grace; its substance and how it is worked out. He shares that this included that he "might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles."

The word he uses for "minister" isn't the normal one that we might think of, *diakonos*. Rather, the word is *leitourgon*. It is a word used only five times in the New Testament. One example is Romans 13:6 which is speaking of the "governing authorities" in the civilian world. Another example is found in Hebrews 8:2. In this instance, it is referring to Jesus, the High Priest and "a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man."

Paul is showing that his apostleship is a ministry of such weight for the gentiles. He is a superintending governor in doctrinal matters and his ministry is executed in the form of a priest on behalf of the gentiles. This is evident from the context which he will continue to reveal.

In his priestly role, his work is for the purpose of "ministering the gospel of God." Again, a word is introduced which provides the context where "ministering" is the word *hierourgounta*. This is its only use in the New Testament and refers to doing temple work or performing sacred rites. These are duties only a priest of the Old Testament would accomplish, and yet he - from the tribe of Benjamin, has been granted this rite. This demonstrates the certainty that the previous covenant is set aside in Christ and a new order of priests and priestly duties has been initiated.

Paul's ministry then is the "gospel of God." The work of God in Christ is the very thing which makes the Gentiles acceptable to God. They are justified and sanctified, not through temple sacrifices and offerings, but through the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary's cross. It is through His work and the ministering of Paul that the "offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable."

Here again is another word demonstrating the greatness of what has occurred. The word "offering" is *prosphora* - an offering to God. This would be comparable to a sacrifice or offering made in the temple during the law. In Hebrews 10:8, this same word is used in a manner referring to those Old Testament offerings in which the Lord "did

not desire, nor had pleasure in them." And then in Hebrews 10:10 it says that believers "have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." In this verse, the word prosphora is used referring to the body of Christ.

As can be seen, the Gentiles have now actually become an offering to God because of the work of Christ, sanctified through what He has accomplished. It is through this great work that the Holy Spirit is available to do exactly that, the part of sanctification. Although it would appear to the Jews coming out of the Old Covenant that this would be impossible, it is the very heart of the work of Christ. That together, Jew and Gentile, are found acceptable through Him.

As an object lesson in this, the book of Acts notes the conversion of Cornelius and his household. When the Holy Spirit came down on them, it seemed incredible to the Jews, but in the end, it notes, "...they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'" Acts 11:18

Life application: Through the work of Christ, Gentiles are now an acceptable offering to God. The sealing of the Holy Spirit is evidence of this. The Spirit is given upon belief and without any other thing being necessary. If God has justified the sinner and sanctified him by the Holy Spirit, then how can we argue against what God has done?

*Heavenly Father, when I think of what Jesus went through for me, I can scarcely believe it. And yet, we were told it was coming all along. In Him is redemption, in Him is full pardon from sin. Everything written points to Him and everything is accomplished in Him. May I never boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ my Lord, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Amen.*

**Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.**  
Romans 15:17

In the previous verse, Paul clearly laid out his ministerial service as one of a priestly role. In this capacity and because of it, he now states "therefore." In essence, "Because of that, therefore this." And then he moves directly into his explanation - "I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God." In this thought, he uses the exact same Greek term, ta pros ton Theon, "in things which pertain to God" which is later used in Hebrews 5:1 -

"For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."

This then shows that what he was referring to in verse 16 is to be interpreted as pertaining to functions of a priestly nature. His ministry, which is directed to the Gentile people, has been specially instituted "that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." And because it is, Paul has a reason "to glory in Christ Jesus."

The word "to glory" is variously translated as "boast," "be enthusiastic," "have pride," "brag," etc. But despite the personal nature of the word, it is a boasting which is not for himself, but "in Christ Jesus." Ultimately, Christ made the selection, Christ gave the strength, Christ endowed with the wisdom to convey, and so forth. He is the "author and finisher" of our faith and thus whatever is our boast, it ultimately belongs to Him. As Paul will later state in 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31 -

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"

To personally boast in what one hasn't earned is self-seeking and conceited. And the premise of our salvation, sanctification, duties in Christ, glorification, etc. is that it is all God's work in and through us. And so, to God be the glory. Without the cross, none of it would be possible. Because of the cross everything else in the process then comes by His grace.

Life application: When we accomplish a deed for the Lord, be it small or great, we must ultimately give God the glory for it. We wouldn't be in the Lord if it wasn't for the Lord's work. Likewise, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have been granted without the Lord's work. And the deeds could not have come about without either. It all inevitably goes back to the glory of God.

*Lord Jesus, only You are worthy of the honor and boasting which come from my Christian service. Without the cross, there would be no church. Without the resurrection, there would be no hope. Without Your Spirit, I would still be separated from You. And so, whatever things I do, be they great or small, the credit is Yours alone. Use me then according to Your wisdom and for Your glory. Amen.*

**For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— Romans 15:18**

In the preceding verse, Paul stated "Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God." In substantiation of this, he begins this verse with

"for." There was sufficient reason for him to glory in the matters related to his ministry for God and to demonstrate his apostolic authority based on Christ's effective working in him. Because of this he says that he "will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me."

And so, when he notes his accomplishments, the words and the deeds were brought about not by his own power, but by the power of Christ. In Acts and in his epistles, there are evidences of miracles and signs being brought about through him and yet they aren't the main focus of his ministry. If they were, one might think that they were either made up or that he was somehow endowed with these in his own right, but because they are noted incidentally, it is evident that they were the result of Christ working in him.

In fact, there are times when the miracles were lacking. In 2 Timothy 4:20, he said he "left Trophimus sick in Miletus." In 1 Timothy 5:23, he told Timothy to "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities." If Paul were the one to wield these powers, or if he had authority over the Spirit of Christ in him, he could have "claimed healing in Jesus' name" and taken care of both of these. Even more to the point was his own affliction. He asked for it to be removed from him three times and yet the Lord left him with it saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9.

By these things, it is manifest that what is noted and the healings that were wrought were solely by the work of Christ in Him. Because this is so, there was no boasting in him, but rather glorying in Christ Jesus. And what is the purpose of these things? It is that "in word and deed" Christ was working through Paul "to make the Gentiles obedient." Paul's ministry was unique in that he was the "Apostle to the Gentiles." Christ worked through him to secure for Himself a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

What is apparent from this is that the church is dependent on the letters of Paul for its direction and edification. What he writes is our doctrine. At some point, the church age will end and Israel will again be the focus of God's attention, but until that occurs, we are to rely on the directives given by Paul - not because they are from him personally, but because they are from Christ through him and specifically designed for this dispensation - the Church Age.

Life application: Paul never claimed anything as his right - healing, miracles, wonders, etc. Instead, he allowed the Lord to work through him. Let's use this as an example in

our own lives. By claiming something in the Lord's name to which we are not entitled, we bring embarrassment on ourselves and discredit upon His name.

*Heavenly Father, help me to understand the times when my prayers aren't answered. I know that I ask from a state of not seeing the whole picture. But You see all and know what is best. Help me always to trust in this and to not question You in Your judgments. Thank You that even though my wants aren't always met, my needs always are. Amen.*

**...in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

Romans 15:19

This verse is the second half of what Paul stated yesterday. In context and in its entirety, it says, "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

Paul's boasting was in what Christ accomplished through him, not in his own deeds. Christ's work was manifest "in mighty signs and wonders." A good example of this type of deed is found in Acts 19:11, 12 -

"Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them."

Unlike so many charlatans who fill the halls of Christianity with false workings which have nothing to do with the Spirit but are often acts engaged in for the profit of those employed in the tricks, these were truly manifestations of the work of Christ "by the power of the Spirit of God." They are attested to in God's word, and they were given and confirmed in order to establish the apostolic work of Paul.

Endowed with this power in which Christ worked through Paul, he made a circuit "from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum." Although his ministry didn't actually begin in Jerusalem, he uses Jerusalem as the center of his discourse because it is the center of the gospel message from which Christ's word has gone out. Paul, like the other apostles, carried this message from Jerusalem outward. Paul's ministry was in a circular route and he uses Illyricum as a destination because it was in the outward part of the arc of the circle, being in the area of modern-day Croatia.

Whether he actually went into Illyricum or not isn't known, but he travelled at least to its borders. In his travels, he covered an immense amount of land and came into contact with many cultures and people. He was a tireless servant of the Lord and in all that he did, he "fully preached the gospel of Christ." This gospel message and those endowed with its witness are noted in his first letter to the Corinthians -

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Life application: Paul's ministry was one bearing apostolic authority. The apostolic age ended with the completion of the Bible. The foundation of the "prophets and apostles" which proclaim Christ has been laid. The Bible bears witness to the work of God in Christ and through the apostles. Now it is our job to use this witness, the Holy Bible, for the building up and edification of the church.

*O God, when I'm tired and feeling used up, all I need to do is think of Jesus. His ministry was a continuous stream of looking to the needs of others. He endured sleepless nights, long days of ministry, and so many trials and difficulties. And above all, He endured Gethsemane and then the cross. How can I not pick myself up and follow suit? Give me strength, O God, to endure the race set before me - to the glory of Christ my Lord. Amen.*

**And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, ... Romans 15:20**

In his previous thoughts, Paul has said that it is Christ working through him in the things which pertain to God. Endowed with this ability and with the gift of this ministry he went "from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum" fully preaching the gospel of Christ.

In this capacity (and so he states here), he lets the Romans know that "I have made it my aim to preach the gospel..." The Greek word translated as "made it my aim" reflects an earnest desire or ambition. It has been his heart's goal to preach "not where Christ was named." Paul saw his ministry as a foundational one. He set out to establish churches rather than move into those areas where one was already established and thus "build on another man's foundation."

God has endowed all people with certain desires and abilities. There are those who are missionaries, telling the gospel for the very first time. There are others who will establish churches, thus bringing together those who may already know Christ but not have a place of worship. There are preachers, teachers, and congregants. Everyone has a place within the body and at times the duties or missions overlap.

Paul's goal was preaching and teaching to new converts. He didn't just give the gospel and move on, but after receiving converts, he would disciple them. This is seen, for example, in Acts 19:9, 10 -

"But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."

He was there to evangelize, and he stayed and taught daily for two years. But he also wrote letters of instruction and encouragement such as the epistle to the Romans. There in Rome was a group of believers who had already come together, probably without any apostolic leadership. These converts might have been from the group who came to Christ in Jerusalem, such as those recorded in Acts 2 at the first Pentecost of the Church Age. However, they were established, Paul was writing to them for the sake of both exhortation and doctrine.

He hoped to eventually go to Rome and meet with them, but without violating his precept of preaching "not where Christ was named" but rather as a stop for fellowship on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24).

Life application: In order to be an effective member of the church, one needs to decide what it is they can do to benefit the body. If sitting in church listening to instruction is all you wish to do, make sure to leave a gift or offering. If you wish to go overseas and be a missionary, it takes planning and funding. First think about what you wish to do and then determine to do it through reasonable planning and in a way which will benefit the church.

*Lord, thank You for the church where I attend. Thank You for a place of fellowship where we can worship You and edify each other. Thank You for each person who comes, for the services, studies, and special gatherings that make it a home. Thank You for the abilities You have given each person and for those who use their abilities to benefit all within the church. Amen.*

**...but as it is written:**

**“To whom He was not announced, they shall see;**

**And those who have not heard shall understand.”** Romans 15:21

Once again, and for the last time in his epistle, Paul turns to Scripture to confirm the validity of his apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. He begins with "but as it is written."

The "but" is given as a contrast to what he just said, "And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation..." Instead of building where others had already laid a foundation, he was determined to go to where the word had not yet been preached. As Israel had already received the news about Jesus, this then implies that the word was to go beyond Israel - to the Gentiles. With this thought in mind, he says, "as it is written."

Paul returns to the Scriptures to substantiate the going forth of the gospel beyond Israel and therefore there must be a herald of this message, an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul saw himself as this instrument of God. The final portion of Scripture that he will cite in Romans comes from his often-used prophet, Isaiah. Here he cites the intent of Isaiah 52:15 which reads in its entirety -

"So shall He sprinkle many nations.  
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;  
For what had not been told them they shall see,  
And what they had not heard they shall consider."

This is from the "Suffering Servant" passage of Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 which speaks of the work of Jesus as the Messiah on His first advent. From the un-cited portion of the verse, we see that Isaiah was speaking of Christ sprinkling "many nations." This implies that His blood would be shed not only for Israel, but all of the Gentile people as well. Next Isaiah said that "Kings shall shut their mouths at Him." Again, "kings" is in the plural. This indicates that the rulers of many nations will be silent before Him, acknowledging His Lordship.

Paul's citation then begins at this point. He amends the verse for the context of his epistle, but he doesn't substantially change the meaning. This message about the Christ whose blood would be shed for the Gentiles would be carried out to them. They would go from a state of unknowing to that of perceiving what God had done. They would go from having not heard, to clarity of understanding. And the only way this could come about was if someone actually went and told them. Paul understood this and is conveying the message that he is that messenger.



If he went where someone had already laid the foundation, then they would already have had the word announced; they would already see; they would have heard; and they would have understood. But Paul's ministry was one of carrying the word to ears that had never heard. Imagine his thoughts as he wrote to the Romans, "God was speaking about me through the words of Isaiah..." It must have been a humbling notion. About 700 years before his birth, God implied that Paul would be God's herald of the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations!

Life application: In a way, when we participate in mission work to have the gospel message carried to those who have never heard it, we are actually participating in the fulfilling of prophecy. Without boasting or thinking too highly of the part we play, we can tenderly look at the words of Isaiah and say to ourselves, "God knew that I would be a part of the fulfillment of this great plan of His." It is a humbling thought.

*Lord God, how great You are. You spoke through the prophets of things that would come, often thousands of years later. And then, sure enough, one by one, they have come to pass. You told of the coming Messiah, and He came. You told of Israel's exile and then return, and it has happened. You have spoken that Jesus will return again... and so I know it will happen too. May it be soon! Amen.*

**For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.** Romans 15:22

In Romans 1:9-15, Paul explained his desire to come to Rome and fellowship with them. And in verse 1:13, he said this -

"Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now) ..."

Since that verse, he has given his discourse on the many issues which were on his mind. Finally in verse 22, he has stated that, "For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you." It is as if that opening statement all the way at the beginning was the impetus for this masterful epistle. Only after explaining the many issues of the faith, has he now returned to explain why he was hindered. In other words, this concern was his "foot in the door" for explaining the many doctrinal matters that he wanted to impart.

In his statement "I have been hindered" he uses a word which is in the imperfect tense. This denotes that it was a continuous problem which implies that he had one hindrance after another as he strived to reach his desired goal of visiting the Romans. Those

hindrances are a part of his thought in verse 15:19 when he noted that "from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ."

In his travels, in his evangelistic endeavors, and in his preaching of the gospel where it had not previously been preached - in these actions he was held back from actually making it to Rome. This then shows Paul's dedication to the ministry to which he had been called. Despite his great desire to fellowship with the Romans, the call of preaching the gospel had to be of paramount importance. In this, he hoped the Romans would understand the reception of a letter rather than the welcoming of the person into their presence.

Life application: As followers of Christ, there are things we should be doing and there are things we wish to be doing. These will at times conflict with each other. Using Paul's example in the book of Romans, we will find what is right and pleasing to the Lord. Paul strongly desired to visit those in Rome, but he knew that the preaching of the gospel was of supreme importance and so he placed his desires on the back burner and proceeded to continue walking on the path laid before him, proclaiming the gospel to those who needed to hear it.

*Lord Jesus, there are things I should be doing and there are things I desire to do - and they don't always sync. In such cases, please give me the strength to put my personal desires aside and to follow Your word and Your chosen direction for my life. In this, I know that You will be pleased, and I will be found an obedient servant of Yours. Thank You, O Lord. Amen.*

**But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, ... Romans 15:23**

Speaking of his ministry which went in a circle from Jerusalem around to Illyricum, Paul felt that he had covered the entire area in a manner sufficient to say that there was no longer any place that wasn't evangelized. Considering the amount of area and the immense number of towns and people, he was making quite a claim. But it should be remembered that he certainly instructed those he evangelized to continue on with the effort just as he had. Therefore, along with his work, those he brought to Jesus would have continued the process.

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, though written later, give his instructions on the establishment and conduct of churches. When writing to Titus, he says this -

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you..." Titus 1:5

So, it is not at all improbable that the message, either directly by Paul or by those he trained, got to the entire region just as he claims here. And because of this, he now tells the Romans of his yearning to come to them. He had set aside his desires for the sake of spreading the gospel and he now felt that he could follow through with what he so long wished to do without compromising anything in the process.

Life application: Stick to what is necessary first and foremost. Only when that is accomplished should we endeavor to follow our other, less important desires. There is a world full of people who need to hear the good news. Don't let TV or fun parties dull you to what should be the first priority in life.

*O God, in my time of distress, You are there to comfort me. Friends come and go, people promise and fail to deliver, and those who were once near and dear to me no longer count me among their associates. But You O Lord... You are always faithful. In the morning, I can rise and feel You near. In the darkest night, I know You are watching. You are my Rock and my Comfort, and in You I place my trust and hope. Amen.*

**...whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.** Romans 15:24

Paul's intent, which is expressed in the previous verse, was to come to Rome for a visit, but this was not the purpose of coming there. Rather, it was only to be a stop on the way to Spain. Once again, Paul's life was directed to mission-type evangelism. He desired to preach the gospel where it had not yet been preached and to establish churches as he went. His desire to visit Rome was merely to fellowship with them, encourage them, and as a point of stopping for help along the way.

In this verse, he uses the Roman term for Spain, Hispania, rather than the common Greek term, Iberia. The Iberian Peninsula included the entire region of Spain and Portugal. This was Paul's next goal in his work. It is not clear if he actually ever made it to Spain. He was imprisoned in Rome, but some early writings state that he was released for two years before being imprisoned again. In these two years, it is claimed that he actually went to Spain.

Regardless of whether he made it there or not, he stated that he hoped "to be helped on my way by you." This sentiment is found at other times in the New Testament. A notable one is found in 3 John -

"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well..." (5, 6)

It was incumbent on the established churches to assist missionaries because there was little help to be expected from the gentiles. This wasn't because of the coldness of the gentiles so much as it was a policy of the missionaries. The less burden on those being evangelized, the better. Paul remained a tent maker during his working years in order to not be a burden on those he ministered to. This is still seen in the mission world today. Support normally comes from the sending churches, not from those who receive the missionaries.

And so, in order to receive their help and to fellowship with them, he desired to visit them in Rome that he might "enjoy" their company for a while. The term he uses implies being gratified or satisfied in their fellowship. He was looking forward to coming to them in need of their encouragement and leaving fully encouraged.

Life application: The need for missionaries has never ended. The world still has many places which haven't heard the gospel. But mission work is not an end in and of itself. It should be a means of establishing churches and then moving on. Too often, mission work devolves into a constant state of externally supplied ministry. Rather, our missionaries should encourage self-sufficiency among those they evangelize.

*Lord Jesus, it is a big world with many people in need of hearing the gospel message. I would hope to be a part of this. Send people into my path that I can help to encourage and support in missionary work that are capable, responsible, and sure to spread the good news in a worthy manner. And then Lord, give me the desire and ability to help them in their work. Amen.*

**But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.** Romans 15:25

Before he makes any anticipated visit to Rome on his way to Spain, Paul notes that he first intends to go "to Jerusalem to minister to the saints." This is one of many internal clues that the epistle is authentic. In Acts 19:21, we read this -

"When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'"

Acts supports Paul's words in Romans and his words here and in other epistles support the account in Acts. The Bible is a unified work which internally validates itself again and again. As we read its pages, we can have the confidence that there truly was a guiding Hand of inspiration as the Holy Spirit breathed out God's word through the various authors.

In both 1 & 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem and he will explain the necessity for this collection and ministry a bit more in the verses ahead. It must be remembered that Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and therefore, in order to maintain harmony between the Jewish believers and the Gentiles, whatever he could do for the Jews in Jerusalem would help in that endeavor. And so, he painstakingly and meticulously prepared his collection for them and wanted to be present when it was transferred to those in need in Jerusalem.

Life application: Gifts and offerings are still as important today as they were in the early church. They should be considered carefully and given in a way in which the most beneficial use of the money is made. Why would anyone give to a church which supports issues such as abortion or sexual perversion, either locally or within the hierarchy? We are accountable to the Lord for what we do with our gifts, so just as Paul did, cautiously consider how you will handle your giving.

*Lord, I have really benefitted from so many others as I've studied and learned Your word. Translators, commentators, pastors, and teachers have all been a part of getting Your word to me in a way which I can understand and grow. Today I thank You for those who have so meticulously handled this precious book for my use and benefit. How blessed I am in this way. Thank You for these faithful souls! Amen.*

**For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. Romans 15:26**

As the book of Romans supports the book of Acts (and vice versa), what Paul writes here also supports his other writings in many ways. In this verse, he notes "a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem." This in turn supports verses such as 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (which then refers to something he said in Galatians 2:10).

And the gift, when being prepared, is later noted in the following two passages from 2 Corinthians -

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

"Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; <sup>2</sup>for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority." 2 Corinthians 9:1, 2

Time and again, these letters and the other books of the New Testament refer to, and rely on, one another. There is ample evidence that they are a harmoniously tied-together body of work which is consistent and reliable. We need not worry about those false scholars who attempt to interject doubt into the reliability and authority of Scripture.

Having noted that, the verse being analyzed begins with "For." It is based on what he had just said to the Romans in the previous verse - "But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints." His reason for going to minister there is explained now. And that reason is that "it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make" their contribution. This was a voluntary and even joyous offering for the needy saints in Jerusalem. The Macedonians are referred to in the verses from 1 and 2 Corinthians noted above. "Achaia" is the area where Corinth was the capital.

These willing people had prepared an offering which Paul would personally oversee in order to ensure that it arrived in Jerusalem for its intended recipients. Paul took great care in ensuring that everything concerning the money was handled openly and honestly during this process.

Life application: Again, as is the case throughout Scripture, the Bible confirms itself internally and it ensures us that it is a unified whole given to us from the wisdom of God and breathed out by His Holy Spirit through chosen prophets and apostles.

*Lord, if ever I am asked to deny my faith or lose my life, I would rather die a thousand deaths than breathe a single word of denial. What could the executioner do to me but*

*hurry me into Your presence - the very place I wish to be! Thank You for the promise of eternal life which is truly life, and which comes through my Lord, JESUS. Amen.*

**It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.** Romans 15:27

Referring to the donation from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, Paul says that "it pleased them indeed" to give this offering. And then he explains that in fact "they are debtors" in this regard. The offering is something that, although not compulsory, was still an obligation. In his explanation, he states that "if the Gentiles have been partakers of spiritual things" then they have a responsibility to the one(s) who imparted them. This responsibility and "duty is also to minister to them in material things."

There was a great need in Jerusalem where the Jewish saints resided. Paul felt that resolving that need was something incumbent on the Gentiles who had received their spiritual heritage from those Jews who had brought the message to them. This sentiment is seen in Galatians 2:7-10 -

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do."

"The poor" in this passage from Galatians included those in Jerusalem from whom the spiritual heritage first came. Paul notes that they are "debtors" to them, but it isn't Paul's way of subordinating them in a heavy-handed manner. Rather it is acknowledging what is right and proper. We can tell this for certain because he spoke of himself in exactly this way in Romans 1:14 - "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."

Paul felt himself a debtor and he worked tirelessly to pay the debt he felt he owed. So, for him to call those Gentiles who had received their spiritual heritage from the Jews in Jerusalem "debtors" was in no way an attempt to lord his ministry over them. In other passages, he makes this same connection. Here are two for consideration -

"If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?" 1 Corinthians 9:11

"Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches."  
Galatians 6:6

Life application: From whom do you receive your spiritual things? Who is your teacher in the word of God and in Christian living? According to Paul, there is a debt which is to be paid in these matters. Take time to remember them in 1) prayer; 2) kind words and a gracious demeanor; 3) material things which will benefit them; 4) other assistance to them and their ministry.

*Lord Jesus, today I want to take time to thank You for those You have placed in my path who have properly instructed me in the Word of God and in other spiritual matters. Thank You for their advice and counsel in my times of need and for their patience in explaining to me the many intricacies of the spiritual matters I have grown in. They have glorified You and I want to acknowledge my thanks to You for them. Amen.*

**Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.** Romans 15:28

"Therefore" encompasses the thought which began in verse 22 and continued until verse 27. Based on what is stated in those verses, "Therefore, when I have performed this act..." This is the carrying of the offering from the gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the needy saints in Jerusalem. He was determined to see this through personally. When the offering was placed in their hands, he will "have sealed to them this fruit."

Sealing in this case means the completion of the act. He will have faithfully performed his promised duty and will, in essence, have sealed it with a signet ring as a king would seal a decree or a noble would seal a letter. To seal something is to secure it. This is what he is implying. Only after that did he plan to "go by way of" Rome to Spain.

In Acts 20:4, we find that Paul had a large number of people from the various churches who traveled with him at times to ensure that all was handled circumspectly and openly-

"And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia."



Life application: When we begin a task in the Lord, it is right, fitting, and proper to see that task through to its completion. Likewise, the effort should be done openly and without any hint of impropriety. It is incumbent on all to ensure that the name of the Lord is glorified, not brought to dishonor, by our actions.

*Lord God, help me to be circumspect in my life and actions so that when others see me, they will see one whose sole aim and desire is to glorify You. Help me to never bring discredit upon Your great name, but instead to bring You the praise and glory You deserve. In my own strength, I know I'll fail, so I ask You to keep me on that straight and narrow path of righteousness. Amen.*

**But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.** Romans 15:29

Paul, writing to the Romans under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, stated that he knew that he would come to Rome. It was his hope that he would go on to Spain, but it was imparted knowledge that he would meet with the Roman church and that it would be "in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

In the book of Acts, it is exactly detailed from chapters 21-28 concerning how he finally made it to Rome. He went to Jerusalem as he anticipated and was subsequently arrested. Through a long and weary process, he was eventually taken in chains to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. There, still under guard in a type of house arrest as he awaited trial, this is how the book finishes out -

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."  
Acts 28:30, 31

The question is, "How could Paul's words have been fulfilled?" How could arrest and imprisonment be a "part of the blessing of the gospel of Christ?" The answer is that suffering for the gospel is one of the greatest blessings of all. On several occasions, Paul speaks of the honor of such affliction. In writing to his young protégé Timothy, he gave this note of encouragement -

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God..." 2 Timothy 1:8

And he wasn't just writing this as a mark of piety. He himself had suffered greatly for the gospel, including several imprisonments. Two examples of note make a direct connection between his chains and the advancement of the gospel -

"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Philippians 1:12-14

"Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained." 2 Timothy 2:8, 9

The astonishing thing isn't that Paul made it to Rome in chains when he was anticipating doing so in the "fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." What is beyond belief is that we would miss the fact that our suffering is often God's way of being glorified and His way of advancing the gospel. Our suffering for Christ is a grant and an honor, not a mark of despair or disgrace. Should it come, remember the words of Paul to the Philippians -

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me." Philippians 1:29, 30

How easy it is to forget these things as we sit in latte-filled churches with cozy chairs and noisy bands to drown out the week's troubles.

The Bible, and the gospel message, turns the world upside down concerning what is expected and what is just, pure, and noble. The soundness of the Bible is demonstrated in the unexpected. When we ponder the stories that are written in Acts and then compare them to the words of the epistles, we can note how things were anticipated and how they actually occurred. And these two would otherwise be at complete odds with each other unless they occurred by the divine hand of God. As Godet says, "Would a forger of this epistle, in the second century, have drawn a picture of the future so opposite to the way in which things really came to pass?"

Life application: If you are expecting an easy life in Christ, then you probably aren't expecting to do very much for Christ.

*Lord God, I could pray for ease, prosperity, and abundance in my life, or I could pray for You to be glorified through my life. I know that if I pray for the latter, the former probably won't happen. But guess what Lord... I pray that You be glorified through me above all else. Any blessing I receive, including suffering and chains, will be worth the high calling of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, Romans 15:30**

Between two thoughts which reflect his desire to come to Rome (verses 29 & 32) Paul stops abruptly and requests "prayers to God" for him. This shows an extreme concern about his trip to Jerusalem which is resulting in no little consternation. He seems to know that things could go badly down there, and he indicates as much explicitly in the following verse.

Because of this tenuous situation, he now begs the brethren "through the Lord Jesus Christ" to take action. The wording here can be interpreted in a variety of ways, such as "for," "through," or "by." If it is "for" then it is speaking of the honor of the Lord and the sanctity of His name. "Through" would indicate that the prayers were to be submitted to God "through" Jesus Christ as our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) and the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

Either way, Paul is invoking the name of Christ in the process of prayers for safety. In addition to this, he also requested those prayers to be made "through the love of the Spirit." Again, a couple possibilities in meaning exist here. One is speaking of the love which the Spirit has endowed in the believer (which should certainly be the case in those who join in prayer) or he could mean the love which the Spirit feels toward the believer just as the Father and the Son love those who have been saved by the blood of Christ. In either way, the Spirit, like Christ Jesus, is to be invoked in the prayers. As often occurs, this is another implicit hint at the Trinity where Jesus, the Spirit, and God are all named in one verse.

It is through and to this Godhead that he now asks those in Rome to "strive together with" him "in prayers to God" for his mission to Jerusalem. The word for "to strive together with" is used only this once in the New Testament. It speaks of wrestling or agonizing together or sharing in a contest. This is what Paul is requesting - an honest struggling in prayer for the sake of his coming dealings in Jerusalem.

Throughout his writings, Paul holds the process and power of prayer in the very highest esteem. And he notes that when it is conducted in a group manner it is of great weight before God. This is noted, for example, in 2 Corinthians 1:11 -

"...you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."

Life application: Is there an important matter ahead of you or someone you fellowship with? Make an effort to join together with them in prayer concerning it. When you do, remember that your prayers to God are to be submitted through Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to God. Our heavenly Father is pleased to receive such prayers and to respond to them according to our needs and in accordance with His perfect will.

*Heavenly Father, You have shown us in Your word that the prayers of the many are powerful and effective when they are aligned with Your will. And so, for those who join with me today, I pray that You will be glorified among Your people. Be glorified through their praises, be glorified through the meeting of their needs, and be glorified in the thanks You receive for every good and kind blessing which is received. Be glorified in Your people, O God. Amen.*

**...that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ... Romans 15:31**

Paul just previously stated, "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me..." This then sets up what continues in verse 31. He is asking for these prayers so that he "may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe."

Before being called by Christ, he was a persecutor of the church. He was given letters to arrest those who followed in this new faith and he was even in attendance at the stoning of Stephen, Christianity's first recorded martyr. His standing in Judaism was well known and he was a Pharisee who had progressed beyond many around him. But with his conversion, all of that was over. Those Jews whom he once fellowshiped with would have considered him an apostate from the faith and would certainly intend him harm.

This is one reason he requested such fervent prayer. Along with this, even the believing Jews may have considered Paul a rogue. He was out ministering to the gentiles and in Acts 21:20-25 rumors had spread that he was teaching "all the Jews who are among the

Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." (Acts 21:21)

Because of this, even those Jews who had accepted Christ were most assuredly wary of him. In order to alleviate such concerns, he had taken a vow under the Old Testament Nazirite system and was intending to complete the customs associated with that vow when he arrived in Jerusalem. This would help to dispel the notion that he had rejected his Jewish roots or that he would speak contrary to the customs of the Jewish people.

But in this verse, along with what has been noted so far, is another reason for his requesting of prayers. It is that "my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints." Because Paul was chosen as the "apostle to the gentiles," and because he had been slandered among his people, the saints in Jerusalem might very well not accept his offering to them. He also might not be sure if they would consider charity from the gentiles as an acceptable means of support. Further, even if they accepted what gentiles offered, they may not receive it because of Paul's position. These things probably weighed heavy on him as he prepared to depart for Jerusalem.

It should be noted that even today, 2000 years later, old habits die hard. Within the body are many who are "weak in the faith" because of a lack of proper upbringing in Christ, or because they carried a lot of baggage along when they came to Christ. All people are at different levels of maturity and all people are prone to different types of failings. Because of this, what may be perfectly acceptable to one, may be shunned by another. We need to be empathic with those who have limitations which differ from us.

Life application: When facing a coming challenge of whatever sort, it is always best to precede meeting that challenge with prayer. Depending on the weight of what lies ahead, it may even be good to reach out to others for their prayer as well. Paul's letters show us that this is the preferred method of handling such things.

*Lord Jesus, I thank You for those around me who remember me in prayer during my times of need. And I thank You that I can be there for them during their tough spots as well. You have given us each other to build up and support one another. What a great encouragement and comfort that is. The world is a tough place, but with You among us as we petition You for help, we can make it through any trial. Thank You Lord. Amen.*

**...that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Romans 15:32**

Taking the entire thought of verses 30-32 together we find the necessary context for this verse –

"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you."

The "prayers to God" for Paul were requested in the immediate sense that he would be "delivered from those in Judea" and also that his service to the saints in Jerusalem might be acceptable. If those two things occurred, he was certain that in the long term he would be free to go to Rome and meet with the saints there "with joy by the will of God."

These things in fact happened. He was delivered from those in Judea. The account in Acts is an amazing read. His life was threatened several times, almost coming to bodily harm. There was a plot to have him assassinated. He was imprisoned and spoke before rulers and even a king. But he was delivered, albeit in chains as a prisoner, from those in Judea. In those chains, he was taken to Rome to face trial before Caesar. Certainly, none of this was expected, but "the will of God" was realized.

The book of Acts ends with the note that, "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." Acts 28:30, 31

Though bound under house arrest, he was "refreshed together" with those in Rome. The anticipated and prayed-for meeting did come about, and God's will was realized.

Life application: He is there... God is there even when it seems He is far distant. Because God is Spirit, we don't see Him, and we often wonder about the events which happen around us. But if we truly live in the Spirit, remain obedient through the trials, and keep our thoughts and eyes fixed on Jesus, we can always have the certainty that everything is as it should be.

*Heavenly Father, Your word says that no man has seen You or can see You. But I know my faith isn't tied up in a fable. You truly are a very present help in times of trouble. When things are looking bad, I only need to think of what You did for me at Calvary. Jesus prevailed over that trial and so whatever I face now will be defeated and forgotten.*

*The light affliction of the moment is working a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.** Romans 15:33

In verse 15:13, Paul used the term "God of hope." This followed directly after a citation from Isaiah about Jesus, the Hope of the Gentiles. Thus, He is the hope of both Jew and Gentile. Now in this final verse of chapter 15, which closes out the major portion of his doctrinal statements and his future intentions, he calls on the "God of peace." He has just asked for prayers and deliverance from possible trials ahead and in hopes of coming to Rome that they "may be refreshed together."

The concept of peace to the Hebrew is more than quietness. Rather it is a state of wholeness. It includes contentment, health, and even prosperity. This is what he was looking for their prayers to accomplish for him. In anticipation of that, he offers his own for them, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

The God of peace is also the one to grant us His peace. He is the one who fashioned us and the one who knows our every need. Only in Him can true peace be found. Paul understood this and reflected it in his requests from those in Rome and has stated it in this short prayer for them as well. But another aspect of this petition must be considered based on the content of the epistle.

Throughout this letter, Paul has spoken about the various ways the gospel is directed toward Jew and Gentile. He has also shown how Jew and Gentile come to the gospel with their own backgrounds and so they will apply it to their lives based on that. Rather than this being a point of disharmony between the two, he has shown that God has accepted both and therefore there should be peace between them, not conflict or strife.

This state is explained very clearly in Ephesians 2:11-22 and it is well worth the time to read those verses in the light of Romans 15:33. In that portion of Ephesians, he will say this -

"And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father."  
Ephesians 2:17, 18

As you can see, Paul is very consistent in his use of wording, terminology, and doctrine. The same "God of peace" mentioned in Romans 15:33 is the one that is both explained and exalted in Ephesians 2.

Life application: Paul's comments are consistently directed to both Jew and Gentile and he never mixes the two, nor does he indicate that one would somehow "replace" the other. He never teaches that the church has replaced Israel, nor that Jew and Gentile are now the same. It is true that there is no distinction between the two in Christ, but there is a difference between the two as members of Christ, just as there is a difference between male and female.

*Lord God, I am so thankful that I can come to You just as I am. You didn't ask me to change my language, my national identity, my hair style, or the food I eat. But the things You did ask me to leave behind are the things which only harmed me as a person and separated me from You. I have gained heaven, forsaken my wicked ways, and yet am still a unique individual in Your church. Thank You for this wonderful life in Christ! Amen.*



## CHAPTER 16

### **I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea...**

Romans 16:1

The last chapter of Romans begins with Paul's introduction of Phoebe, one of approximately 35 people that he will mention in the verses to come. His note, "I commend to you Phoebe our sister" is used as a way of highlighting her as a member of the church. Because she was travelling with the epistle, she was either specially chosen or volunteered for the duty. Thus, she was a woman of note and so Paul includes the thought "I commend." As a believer in Christ, she was thus to be treated in a worthy manner. In Galatians 3:28, we read that -

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Being a woman in the empire at this time and with a number of Jewish people in the church at Rome, without Paul's commending her to them, it is possible that they would have treated her in a manner of less weight than she was so entitled. Based on her name, we know that she was a Gentile. And because she is traveling with the epistle, she was most likely a widow. Women who were never married, or who were currently married, would not be given such freedom to travel. Therefore, being a widow is an obvious conclusion.

Next Paul notes concerning her, that she "is a servant of the church." The Greek word for "deaconess" is used here and so many try to interject that she was an instructor of the church or one who performed some type of ministerial function. It should be noted though that Scripture will never violate one of its own precepts. In 1 Timothy 2:12, it is explicitly noted that a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man. Therefore, any role she held would have been in a capacity which would not violate this precept. There would have been a specific order of women in the church for the service of other women.

As Albert Barnes notes concerning this, "Reference is made to a class of females whose duty it was to 'teach' other females, and to take the general superintendence of that part of the church, in various places in the New Testament; and their existence is expressly affirmed in early ecclesiastical history. They appear to have been commonly aged and experienced widows, sustaining fair reputation, and suited to guide and instruct those who were young and inexperienced."

In this, there is nothing intended to diminish the value or importance of women, but there is - just as in the family unit, a hierarchy which has been established and which is intended for the overall good of those within it. This precept has been neglected in modern churches and doctrine has suffered because of it. When one precept is violated, it quickly leads to the violation of others.

Lastly, Paul notes that her position was at the "church in Cenchrea." Cenchrea was a seaport near Corinth and so it can be deduced that the epistle was probably written by Paul there in Corinth.

Life application: When evaluating Scripture, such as this verse where Phoebe is called a "servant" or "deaconess," the entire body of Scripture must be considered. Just because the title "deacon" is used in certain ways when speaking of others, it does not immediately mean that all people mentioned with that title bore the same level of authority or responsibility. Scripture will never violate Scripture. One must be careful when making assumptions to include a detailed analysis of everything the Bible intends for us to see.

*Gracious and wonderful God! What an honor it is to know that You who set the stars in their places and who started them into motion also have care for me. Surely this is true because You sent Jesus for humanity, of whom I am counted. And so, I know that even I am considered in Your mind. It is a truly humbling thought as I look to the vast sky which is filled with an uncountable number of stars. Amen.*

**...that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.** Romans 16:2

Speaking of Phoebe from the previous verse, Paul continues his thought. He commended her to the Romans because she was a "servant of the church in Cenchrea." Because of this he desired that they would "receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints." In Christ, the once limiting or exalting distinctions of "Jew," "Gentile," "male," and "female" are set aside and all are one in Him. Therefore, it was his desire that she be so noted and treated.

In addition to receiving her, he wished them to go even further and to "assist her in whatever business she has need of" from them. If this meant time, resources, or money then Paul would desire them to go to those lengths in order to accommodate her. It is certain that if men had been sent on this mission, they would have received such things and Paul was establishing now that the same courtesies should be extended to women.

As Paul's letters are doctrine for the church, this precedent is intended to be carried out in all subsequent generations.

Finally, he gives another reason for his request. It is because "indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also." The word here for "helper" is *prostatis* and it indicates a female guardian, protector, or patroness. This is an honorable title and so it is Paul's way of saying she is deserving of their assistance because of the position. This word *prostatis* is used only here in the New Testament. The verb form of it is always used with some sort of leadership position and so modern and liberal scholars make the unfounded supposition that she was therefore in such a leadership position.

This is inappropriate handling of such a word because elsewhere Paul has stated that women are not to be in such positions of authority over men. Therefore, the translation "helper" is certainly appropriate. To translate this as a "leader," particularly in the context of Paul's surrounding words, would lead to exceptional confusion in doctrine and disorder within the church. The title, as given here, means that she probably was one who greatly helped Paul and others by providing meals, lodging, etc. She was probably also one to visit the sick in the congregation and to help others at the expense of herself; a tireless servant of the Lord.

As she was probably a widow (as noted in the previous verse), she would be the ultimate example of one, such as is described in 1 Timothy 5:9, 10. Paul recognized her importance, used her in the significant cause of transmitting the epistle because of this, and desired others to recognize her and reward her as well.

#### Life application:

- Stop. Ask yourself, "Have I been a tireless servant of the Lord? Have I used my time and energy in the most effective way in serving Him?"
- Consider. What can you do to improve upon the negative answer you just gave to yourself?
- Determine. Resolve to develop your service for the Lord.
- Act. Put your resolution into action.
- Honor. Don't let your future service become a point of boasting. Instead, give God the glory for whatever you do in the name of Jesus Christ.

*Heavenly Father, today I want to consider what I have actually done for You with my life. What would You consider of value when I stand in Your presence for the judgment of my deeds? As I consider this, I know it hasn't been very much and so I ask You now to*

*redirect my thoughts and actions to Your glory and for the sake of the exalted name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

### **Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ... Romans 16:3**

Priscilla and Aquila are noted in several places in the book of Acts and in Paul's other epistles. To get a full grasp of who they are, here are the verses which speak of them -

"After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers."  
Acts 18:1-3

"So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him." Acts 18:18

"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." 1 Corinthians 16:19

"Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus." 2 Timothy 4:19

These comments show the nearness of them to Paul's heart. They met Paul after having been ordered out of Rome. When they met him, they immediately became friends. They worked together because they shared the same profession, tentmakers. In Acts 18:11 it says that Paul remained in Corinth for "a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." And then in Acts 18:18 (above) it says that "Paul remained a good while" after that. In other words, they spent several years of their lives together at Corinth and became fast friends.

It should be noted that some scholars (and translations such as the Latin Vulgate) place her name here as "Prisca" rather than "Priscilla" as it is written in 2 Timothy 4:19 (above). They claim that this is the true reading of it. Probably, the different spelling of her name is given as a term of familiarity, like a nickname.

When writing to Timothy, who was Paul's protégé and who doubtless knew her very well, Paul used the more endearing term "Prisca" because Timothy would use that name too. However, in Acts and in Paul's other formal greetings the name "Priscilla" is used. This then would be comparable to saying "Greet Jim Blanchard for me when you see

him" when speaking to a mutual friend, but saying "I and James Blanchard greet you heartily in the Lord" when writing an official letter to another church. This easily resolves the confusion which scholars and translators pick up on when speaking of Priscilla.

Another point concerning these two is that Priscilla is mentioned first, thus leading many scholars to state that she was "probably as being the more prominent and helpful to the Church" (Jamieson-Faucet-Brown), or that it "seems to imply that she was the more efficient" (Peoples New Testament), etc. This is an unnecessary conclusion. In 1 Corinthians 16:19 (above) the salutation reads, "Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord." The chosen order by Paul probably reflects 1) the person who was most on his mind at the time, 2) the linguistic style for the situation. In other words, we would say "Tom, Dick, and Harry" rather than another order because it is the customary use of the names. To Paul, it appears that the order is less important than we tend to infer.

Understanding who these two are and their importance in the life of Paul, we can then understand his greeting to the Romans. He says they are "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." Together they had spent at least several years working and sharing in the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul remembered them with affection and noted them first out of all of the people he will refer to at the church at Rome.

Life application: In our generation today, the art of letter writing has almost been lost. Before the advent of the internet, correspondence was transmitted slowly, and care had to be taken to contemplate the words that would be written. Letters began with salutations appropriate to the intended recipients and it ended with carefully worded thoughts, reflections, or greetings. Today, emails between even the closest of friends often disregard simple greetings. Make an effort to slow down and use care when writing notes. There is a last time for all things, including sending letters to others. Someday either you or your correspondent will be gone. Consider this as you send your heart and feelings across the miles and through the airwaves.

*Lord, in this busy world, I have lost some of the affections I once had. I used to take time to write letters to those I love. Now, a short and abrupt email or a text with careless abbreviations suffices. Help me to remember that an extra moment of typing can mean a great deal in the life of another - "Dear," "Sincerely," and "With love" don't take that long. You spent 1600 years of history to author Your love letter to me. Help me to spend a few extra seconds on others. Amen.*

**...who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Romans 16:4**

Speaking of Priscilla and Aquila, Paul says that they "risked their own necks for my life." The Greek term is literally rendered, "placed under" their necks. In other words, they had risked their lives, even to the point where they could have been placed under the axe, thus having their heads chopped off at the neck. What they did for Paul isn't recorded, but he was in trouble so often and out of favor with so many, that just being around him would inevitably lead to danger. And so, those near him could point and say "there he is," or they could risk themselves for his sake. These two chose the latter.

How unlike them were those who Paul later writes about in 2 Timothy 4:9-16 -

"Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them."

Priscilla and Aquila were steadfast in their friendship and devotion to their beloved companion, and he desired them to be so noted. For this, he wanted them recognized individually, but he knew that many others had been there for him in the past as well. And so, he notes "also all the churches of the gentiles." Wherever he went and wherever churches were established, the gentiles had understood the gospel, received Christ, and emulated Him in their care for Paul. The message was going forth by his hand and he was grateful for their concern as it went out.

Life application: What kind of friend will you be to those Christians who stand on the gospel when it becomes more and more unpopular to do so? As the times progress, persecution will only increase for those who stand fast on the word of God. Will you be noted like Priscilla and Aquila, or will you abandon those who are willing to give their life for the truth contained in the Bible? Decide now and be ready.

*Great God Almighty - I know that tougher times are ahead for those who stand on Your word. The message about sin, perversion, and unrighteousness is no longer considered "tolerant." It is also not popular to hear Jesus' claim that He is the one and only way to be right with You. Give me strength to stand on what You have stated and not to waffle on what is just, right, and holy. Amen.*

**Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.** Romans 16:5

After first noting Priscilla and Aquila, Paul takes the time to ask that those who receive his letter to, "Likewise greet the church that is in their house." If Paul is writing to the saints in Rome, then why would a separate address be made to these two and the church that met in their home? The answer is that, as Vincent's Word Studies notes, "The expression here denotes, not the whole church, but that portion of it which met at Aquila's house."

At this time, there were no established buildings used specifically for churches. Although there may have been an overall church, among whom there were all known members, there were individual locations where people would go to meet, one being the house of Priscilla and Aquila. They were tireless in their approach to spreading the word and teaching the truth. Wherever they are noted, they are always shown to be instructing and accommodating others. In Rome, instead of their house being a private sanctuary away from the commotion of life, it was a place where believers would come and share in the Lord. The same is true when they lived elsewhere. In 1 Corinthians 16:19, Paul noted this concerning them -

"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."

Paul's next greeting was to his "beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ." He certainly had dear affections for this person and yet this is the only time that he is specifically mentioned in the Bible. However, he could be mentioned elsewhere under a different name. Epaenetus is a Greek name, but often (noted several times even in the New Testament) Jewish people had two different names, one Hebrew and one Greek. Epaenetus means "praised" which in Hebrew would be the name Judah. So, he could have been known to Paul by this, or another name.

Regardless of the certainty of this, he is called "the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ." The term firstfruits comes from the Old Testament. At the beginning of a harvest season, the first ripe grain was cut and then taken as an offering to the Lord. This offering was to acknowledge God's provision and looked forward to the greater harvest which was soon to ripen. When this was presented, the following ritual noted in Deuteronomy took place -

"And it shall be, when you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some

of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the country which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.' Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall answer and say before the Lord your God: 'My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, "a land flowing with milk and honey"; and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O Lord, have given me.' Then you shall set it before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God. So you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you." Deuteronomy 26:1-11

This firstfruit offering then was made to God in gratitude for how He has cared for His people. The implication is clear. Epaphroditus is that offering, being of the first of the converts, and he was offered "to" Christ. This then implies the deity of Christ because the offering is made to Him as Lord. But Jesus is also called the "Firstfruits" in 1 Corinthians 15:20. Thus Christ is the fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:9-14) in His resurrection. After that the harvest then continues in Him to God (Leviticus 23:15-22) as began at Pentecost in the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Epaphroditus is that first offering of the area of Achaia. But it should be noted that even though this is so, Paul also uses this term in 1 Corinthians 16 -

"I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us." 1 Corinthians 16:15, 16

Because the term is used of the household of Stephanas, it is very possible that Epaphroditus was of this household and this would explain why Paul singles him out in this



way. This cannot be determined for certain, but it would clarify why the same term is used of both.

Life application: Priscilla and Aquila were tireless servants of the Lord, opening their home to the saints in their area as a church. Epaphroditus was the "firstfruits" of Achaia. Paul has noted these people for their impact upon his life. In this we can learn these two things –

- 1) We should take note of, and acknowledge, those who are faithful and tireless in their work for the Lord;
- 2) Those who are faithful and tireless in the Lord are not forgotten by others and their deeds are, in fact, remembered. If this is so, then how much more does the Lord remember their deeds!

*Lord, it is so good to read through the comments on Facebook or to turn on the news and to see that there are still people who are willing to honor You openly and without timidity. Today, I'd like to say a special prayer for each of them who is willing to do this. Give them an out-of-the-ordinary blessing and make Your presence known to them so that they will continue the good work! Amen.*

### **Greet Mary, who labored much for us. Romans 16:6**

Paul asks now for a special greeting for Mary. Her name comes from the Hebrew "Mariam" which means "Rebellion" or "Obstinacy." Rather than being a rebel though, she "labored much for us." A different source text renders "for you" instead of "for us" and so many modern versions read it this way. "Us" is probably the better choice though because Paul hasn't yet been to Rome and so it is unclear as to how she would have come to Paul's note. But if she was previously in Greece with Paul like Priscilla and Aquila, then he would know first-hand about her labors.

This is the only time she is mentioned in Scripture although there are a total of six "Marys" of note in the Bible. Like other faithful and hardworking people, this one sentence is what defines her for all time in God's word. A similar person of note is found in Nehemiah 3.

As the walls around Jerusalem were being built, individuals took care to work on specific sections of it. Some erected the gates, others cared for sections close to where they lived. Nehemiah records who worked, where they worked, and he also gives insights into their job performance. Out of the blue, a man mentioned nowhere else in the Bible is highlighted -

"Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest." Nehemiah 3:20 (NIV)

Baruch, whose name means "Blessed," didn't stay home and watch through the windows. Nor did he head out for fishing and camping with his family. He went to work on the wall. And as Nehemiah observed him, he didn't say, "Baruch slacked along at a snail's pace." Instead, he was given an A+ rating by the Bureau of Better Wall Builders. His report card notes that he "zealously repaired another section of the wall." He, together with Mary in Romans 16 who "labored much for us," are rewarded in God's eternal word with notes of praise for their efforts.

Life application: If you were to receive your evaluation for your labors in the work God has assigned you today, what would the report card say? Think on this because we all have a day of evaluation coming up as we stand before the Lord. Be like Baruch and Mary and be noted as zealous laborers for the Lord!

*Lord God, were I to be recorded in Your word, what would be said of me? Would I be called a "Hard Worker for the Lord" or would the verse say I was "A Slacker in Need of Improvement"? Would I be seen like David who was a champion for Your name, or like Job's wife who cared little for it? Help me to consider this because a report card of my life will be coming. I pray it will be one which reflects diligence, perseverance, and honor for Your great name. Amen.*

**Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.** Romans 16:7

In his next request for greeting, Paul singles out Andronicus and Junia. They are listed nowhere else in Scripture and so many things are uncertain about them. The name Junia is feminine, but some versions convert it to masculine Junias in order to avoid confusion; something which only leads to more confusion! The reason for the change is because of the use of the word "apostle" in the sentence. That will be evaluated in a moment. It is probable that these two were either married or siblings and so he notes them together as he did with Priscilla and Aquila.

First, Paul calls them "my countrymen." This is the word *syngeneis*; it means "kinsmen" and it has one of two possible meanings concerning their relation to Paul. The first is that they are Jewish as he is, thus they are "kinsmen according to the flesh." This would be comparable to what he says in Romans 9:3 when speaking of the Jews -

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh..." Romans 9:3

The second possibility is that they are actually his relatives. This is a strong possibility because in this long list of people he is greeting, there are other Jews mentioned and he doesn't call all of them his "kinsmen." He will again use the term in verses 11 and 21 though. In verse 21, he is certainly speaking of those listed as "Jews" and not as "relatives." So, this could go either way.

After noting this, he then calls them "my fellow prisoners." Regardless of whether they are immediate family or only related as Jews, they had an intimate bond with Paul who was often imprisoned (see 2 Corinthians 6:5 or 2 Corinthians 11:23 concerning this). They were willing to be imprisoned for the name of Christ as Paul was and he wanted this to be known to those he was writing to.

Because of their life for Christ, they were "of note among the apostles." Again however, this could have one of several meanings. The first is in the context of their service. They are "of note among the [other] apostles." This would mean that they weren't noted only by Paul, but by all of the apostles. The second possibility is that they were actually apostles, and they were "apostles of note." If this is the case, it would then have one of two possibilities.

- The first is that they were actually designated "apostles" as were Peter, James, John, et al.
- The second is that the term "apostle" is used in a broader sense with its original meaning - "sent ones." They were merely people sent to proclaim Christ, but not numbered among the actual witnesses of the work of Christ. Thus "apostle" here is a designation of service and not one of office.

The most likely option of these three is the first. They were noted "by" the apostles rather than being noted "as" apostles. The reason for this is that the title isn't used in the sense of designation as it is used elsewhere by Paul, such as in his introductory comments of Romans and his other epistles.

The term "apostle" as a designation is incorrectly applied. The apostolic age ended with the completion of the Bible and therefore, there are no actual "apostles" in the church. There are many who claim the title, but none who have earned it. It is reserved for those who directly bore witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Finally, as a note of their long service, he states that these two were "in Christ before me." This means that they had received Christ before he had. It almost sounds as if he envied this. He had walked contrary to Christ and worked against Him. And not only that, he needed a special calling and a visible, tangible manifestation of the Lord before he was converted. These two had come to the Lord by faith. Paul notes this as exemplary and worthy of note.

Life application: When noting others, a good way to highlight their life or deeds is to do so in comparison to yourself when they excel you in one area or another. There is nothing which diminishes you when you exalt another. Instead, it shows a properly placed care for what they rightly deserve.

*Lord, there are so many noble people who have gone before me and who are currently serving You now. They are faithful custodians of what You have entrusted to them. I thank You that I can see their lives in print or in person and learn from their examples of how to be a better servant of You. In the end, You are my first example, but You have placed them in my path to learn many additional aspects of how to be a strong and faithful follower. Thank You for this. Amen.*

### **Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.** Romans 16:8

Various texts state "Ampliatius" in place of Amplias. Regardless of the actual spelling of his name, or if Amplias is simply a shortened nickname of Ampliatius, this is the only place in the Bible where he is mentioned, but he is given an especially endearing description by Paul, "my beloved in the Lord." Four times in this chapter the term "beloved" is used by him. Out of approximately 35 names, this then shows that there was more than just a passing friendship, but one of intimacy.

It could be that Paul led him to Christ or that they worked together for the gospel. Whatever the situation, Paul is using up the writer's ink with memos of affection as he progresses through his list of notables.

Life application: Time moves steadily forward, and we don't know when our last day will come. Nor do we know the end of those around us. Because of this, it is good to take a moment and recognize those who are near and dear to us. Take a minute today to send a note of encouragement to someone who is dear to you.

*Heavenly Father, I am so grateful for those You have placed in my path. Old friends show up again after many years and new friends come my way. And it always seems to be at a*

*time when I need them to bless me, or they need to be blessed. I can see Your hand in these things. You are there working to build up Your people. How great You are. Amen.*

**Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.** Romans 16:9

Paul next takes the time to note a city boy and a country bumpkin. Urbanus means "belonging to the city" or "city-bred" and Stachys means "ear of grain." Urbanus was a rather common Roman name and was even the name used by 8 different popes of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, Stachys is a Greek name and references to it are far less common in ancient literature.

Extra-biblical writings note that both of these men continued on in their work for the Lord. Urbanus is believed to maybe have been an early pastor of the church in Rome, and Stachys is said by John Gill to have been one of the original 70 disciples mentioned in Luke 10:1, and that he further became a bishop of Byzantium.

However, these two are only noted here in Scripture. Urbanus is noted by Paul as "our fellow worker in Christ." Whatever his work, he was there with the apostles or others helping out behind the scenes. Stachys is noted as "my beloved" which indicates a special note of friendliness and devotion.

Life application: God uses people of all sorts to accomplish His work. Regardless of where you are from, what has occurred in your past, or what your social standing is, or even what you do for a living, there is always a use for you. Allow the Lord to become your driving motivation in all things.

*Heavenly Father, since receiving Jesus as my Lord, I've had many different jobs. Some were menial and some were stuffy, but I was able to use my surroundings to tell others about You. I would pray that anyone who feels they have no value or ability in spiritual matters to put such notions aside and to realize that they are exactly where You want them and that You have a good plan and purpose for them. Amen.*

**Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.** Romans 16:10

Paul next requests greetings be extended to Apelles. Like many others, this is the only time he is mentioned in Scripture, but what an honor to be singled out of a congregation, recognized by the hand of the great Apostle, and be eternally recorded in God's superior word! But not all mentioned in the Bible are mentioned favorably. In

fact, many times the opposite is true. And so, the honor to Apelles is even greater because he is noted as one "approved in Christ."

The Greek word used to describe him is *dokimon*, meaning a type of approval which indicates "testing." His faith was tried, it was tested, and he proved faithful in the test. We can speculate all day as to what type of test he was given - loss of family or work, torture or imprisonment, etc. But whatever it was, it was enough to have Paul single him out as having passed the test. May we be found so worthy and so noted!

After Apelles, Paul next requests greetings for "those who are of the household of Aristobulus." This may seem curious, but there are several possibilities that would precipitate such a comment as this -

- Aristobulus, though not being a believer, could have been extremely well known in Rome. Those in his household then would be those who were either family or slaves who had received Christ.
- Aristobulus, whether a believer or not, could already be dead. If this is the case, then greeting only those who are of his household would make sense.
- Aristobulus could be a noted Christian evangelist or missionary from Rome, but living away from Rome. If so, then it wouldn't make sense to greet him along with his household.

For one of these, or whatever other reason, the household of Aristobulus is singled out for a hearty greeting while not greeting him specifically.

Life application: Paul took time to remember those who were under other's authority even if he didn't mention them by name. Pastors have families, missionaries have children, etc. If you are greeting one, then take time to greet all. They will remember and take to heart that someone cared enough to think of them as well.

*Glorious and perfect Savior. Should I face a test of my faith, will my conduct be found acceptable in Your sight? Do I have the strength to live out the life I have claimed? You have said that those who follow You will face trials and hardships and I want to be ready each time they come. Strengthen me now Lord for those trials which lay ahead so that I will only bring You glory in the eyes of others. Amen.*

**Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Romans 16:11**

Continuing on with his greetings of so many in Rome, Paul now directs his attention to Herodion stating that he is "my countryman." This means he is a converted Jew, but possibly even of the same tribe, Benjamin, as Paul was. This can't be certain, however. The name Herodion also may lead to the family of Herod mentioned in the Gospels. This also is only conjecture, but the name may imply this.

After Herodion, Paul next asks for greetings for "those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord." Again, speculation must enter into exactly what this means, but a good guess is that Narcissus was either dead, famous, or otherwise noted. In his house, and in such a state, some of the people there were believers, but not all. Whoever he was or whatever his state, he was well known enough by name to generate this type of note.

Life application: There is nothing wrong with identifying people who are close to you in an elevated manner. This doesn't mean they are somehow better than others, but they are of note to you. Paul has been careful to make mention of others in a way which brings people to mind while still not diminishing anyone that he may fail to acknowledge.

*Lord, You have given me many tasks to accomplish throughout my days. Help me to prioritize them in a way which will make the most effective use of my time. But help me to remember that each thing I do should bring honor to Your name. May I not be slack in fulfilling all the things that I should. I wish to use this one life to serve You to the utmost. Help me in this, Lord. Amen.*

**Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.** Romans 16:12

Paul has more people to send greetings to in verse 12. Three names are given and, again, speculation is mostly what abounds concerning them as nothing else is noted about them in Scripture. The three of them may actually be those mentioned in the previous verse which said -

"Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord."

Paul may be singling out those who are "of the household of Narcissus." Or he may be going on with a new listing. The names "Tryphena and Tryphosa" are believed to be slave names, but they also may be the feminine of the Jewish name Tryphon. The two names are similar enough to arouse the thought that they were closely related, probably sisters, and possibly even twins. Whatever the truth of their situation, they

were noted as having "labored in the Lord." They were diligent in their duties and model examples of what a Christian should be.

Paul next addresses his desire for the Romans to "Greet the beloved Persis." As she is a woman, he was careful to use the word "the" in place of "my." In so doing, he was eliminating unnecessary speculation concerning any type of close relationship, which would certainly come about. Some ancient heretical writings and even modern scholars try to find inappropriate relationships between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. In the same way, they would also perversely attempt to do this with Paul if his words could be so manipulated. But he was careful in what he conveyed concerning her.

He notes that she was one "who labored much in the Lord." The added "much" for her may be because the first two women were named together which would form the thought of a competent team. In the case of Persis, he then might have added in "much" to distinguish that her efforts were notable through her actions alone. Again, almost all that we can guess about these three is mere speculation.

Life application: In today's world of social media and easy communications, we can easily make a comment which could be misconstrued. Photos can also be seen as inappropriate if the context isn't known concerning what happened. Let us endeavor to use our words wisely so that we don't somehow make others feel that we are acting in a way contrary to our Christian calling. However, it is also true that anyone can find fault for any reason, so be ready to defend yourself when your words and actions are in line with the Bible.

*Lord Jesus, it is so easy in today's world to have people misunderstand a photo, a post, or a comment made on social media. When the context isn't known, people can find fault over anything. I would ask that if this happens, You will help me to resolve the issue in friendliness and love. If what I do or say isn't contrary to Scripture, then let that truth be known. I never wish to bring discredit upon You with what I do. Amen.*

**Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.** Romans 16:13

Paul's words are now directed to a greeting for "Rufus, chosen in the Lord." The name Rufus means "red." This implies red hair, and it was a common name of the time. But what may make this particular Rufus exceptional is what is found in Mark 15:21 -

"Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross."



Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Christ and his two sons are specifically noted by Mark which indicates that they were probably well-known by him at the time he wrote his Gospel. This then brings in the great possibility that this is the son of the man who was there at Calvary. Paul says he is "chosen in the Lord." This is a way of saying that he is approved of by Christ and set apart as a saint. The same type of terminology is found in Ephesians 1:4 -

"...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

When one calls on Jesus Christ as Lord, they become members of Christ. God knew the selection from "before the foundation of the world" but it isn't known to us until the moment we come to Him. There is a marvelous synergism going on when a believer is directed from before creation itself to the moment where they call out to God in Christ. This Rufus was one such person, now noted by Paul.

Along with Rufus, Paul extends his greeting to "his mother and mine." It certainly doesn't mean that they were brothers, but that the mother of Rufus acted as a mother to Paul. He is tenderly noting her as if she were his own mother. This is similar to what Christ did for John when He was on the cross. This unnamed woman was a mother to Paul just as Mary became a mother to John.

Life application: The Bible is full of wonderful patterns and details. But we can't find them if we don't study it. Never tire of remembering every name, number, and location. Eventually, patterns will arise to help us see a greater picture of God's wonderful hand in redemptive history.

*Lord God, as I read Your word, I feel closer to You than at any other time. Because Your Spirit authored its contents, it is a direct connection to Your very heart and mind. I know that You have given us this great treasure to search and to study, so please give me the strong desire to take advantage of what it has to say. I simply love Your word, O God. Amen.*

**Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.** Romans 16:14

Five more names are given in this verse. Nothing more is known about any of them except a few extra-biblical sources which may or may not be accurate. However, it does note that Paul asks for greetings to them "and the brethren who are with them." This then could mean that they were leaders of individual home churches or gatherings. If

this is so, it would be like writing a letter to the people of Sarasota, Florida and recognizing individual churches by noting the pastors.

This isn't uncommon even today within larger denominations or among non-church organizations and so it is a distinct and even likely possibility. Because Paul knew them individually, he may have met with them and encouraged them to start a home church or group as they traveled back home to Rome. Whatever the case, Paul wanted them to be greeted.

Life application: Taking note of the leader of an organization often implies greeting the people within that organization. Should you address a group however, an additional few words such as "those who meet with you" will make those within the group feel welcome. Paul was careful to be attentive to such things and we should make a note of it and apply it as well.

*Lord God, in the town I live in are many churches with different styles and approaches to teaching Your word. I would like to pray for those churches who hold sacred its contents, faithfully proclaim its truths, and are willing to stand on the doctrines it clearly proclaims. Thank You for providing such faithful preachers and teachers to cover my town with the wonder of Your superior word. Amen.*

**Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.** Romans 16:15

As with the previous list of names, none of these are mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. "Philologus and Julia" are probably a married couple, or they could be otherwise related. The name Philologos comes from the Greek words *philos* - "beloved" and *logos* - "word." Thus, his name means something like "fond of talk." This is probably a name he acquired later in life, unless he was a noisy baby at birth...! Along with these two, Paul mentions "Nereus and his sister." Because of stating this, the conclusion that Philologus and Julia are married, rather than siblings or of some other family-type relationship, is the most likely. Next the address is made to Olympas.

These are all singled out because Paul had befriended them somewhere along his travels. But along with them, he notes any that he hasn't met or who he is unaware of with the all-inclusive "and all the saints who are with them." In this statement, he is ensuring he doesn't miss someone and thus offend.

Having now gone through the entire list of names that Paul is familiar with, this is a good point to note that the church is up and running in Rome and there is no mention of

Peter in the entire list. Thus, it negates the Catholic view that Peter was there and in charge as the "first Pope." There are many other such confirmations throughout the New Testament that Peter was not ever granted such authority. It is only by misusing Scripture and individual verses that such a concept could be held to. Rather, the church was organized, efficient, and without the need of an everlasting dynasty. Instead, the saints were the church, and it is to them that Paul has made these many greetings.

Life application: Tradition is often based on a misuse of Scripture or it is entirely the invention of man. Either way, overuse of church tradition and a lack of adherence to the words of Scripture are two of the most destructive impediments to sound theology and proper doctrine. The more tradition, the less the Bible is needed. Let us not error in this way, but let us hold firmly to the Bible as our final authority on all matters of our religion.

*Lord, help me to remember that Your word is where my doctrine and practice must come from. Help me not to get so caught up in traditions and men's teachings that I miss the wonder of the word of instruction that You gave. Help me to learn, accept, and apply this marvelous gift from You to every aspect of my life. And as I do, I know I will continue to be more pleasing to You. Amen.*

**Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you. Romans 16:16**

Paul has completed his long and meticulous list of those he singled out for personal greetings. Now, in the same thought in order to promote the general good of the congregation, and to continue the warm and deep-seated display of love, he tells them to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This was, and still is, the custom in many parts of the world. The kiss is intended as a greeting just as western nations today shake hands or possibly hug, depending on familiarity. In the Far East, a deep and respectful bow is given in substitute of this.

Although Paul's letters are prescriptive, intent must always be considered. Is Paul mandating that all people in all churches meet one another "with a holy kiss?" The answer is "No." The reason why this is important is because there are small pockets of churches that mandate this even today and even in western societies, such as the US. However, the intent of the kiss of greeting is cultural, not merely biblical. Proof of this follows from the first kiss noted in the Bible in Genesis 27:26 when Isaac blessed his son Jacob before he departed to Padan Aram.

From that point, the kiss is seen among the covenant people and among those who aren't yet in the covenant, thus demonstrating the cultural nature of the greeting. It is

used in the same way we use a handshake. When Jacob met Rachel, without knowing her in any familiar way yet, he kissed her. In 2 Samuel 20, the following exchange begins with a kiss of greeting and ends in death -

"Then Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died."  
2 Samuel 20:9, 10

In 1 Samuel 20:41, David and Jonathan, close male friends, gave a fraternal kiss in accord with the culture before departing. And Proverbs 27:6 notes the following -

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend,  
But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Proverbs 27:6

This demonstrates clearly that the kiss is cultural because even enemies will kiss rather than shake hands. This is seen in these parts of the world today when leaders who are at war with each other still greet with a kiss. Exchanging "kisses" with "shaking of hands" in this Proverb would hold exactly the same meaning and intent.

And as a premier example of this, read this exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee –

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Luke 7:43-47

And of course, the most famous kiss in history is recorded concerning Judas' betrayal of Jesus and reflects the sentiments of Proverbs 27:6 (above) perfectly.

It is important then to understand the cultural nature of this admonition by Paul lest we get swept up into legalism over something which is actually not intended for all cultures and in all situations. If a person with an immune deficiency were to use this verse in a prescriptive manner, he could soon be dead from receiving the germs of others.

Finally, the kisses in these and other verses throughout the Bible which are between men and men (such as David and Jonathan noted above) are not in any way intended to convey the perverse sin of homosexuality as modern liberals often imply. They are merely cultural and welcoming displays just as handshakes are today. To imply this in their writings shows a disregard for God's order in the natural world.

Paul ends this thought with, "The churches of Christ greet you." This carries on the warmth that has been transmitted so far. He has gone from personal greetings, to personal recommendations for continued harmony and love, and has finished with extended greetings from many others. He has been careful to show that the bonds of Christian love extend out in all ways and to all those who are believers.

Life application: If you are in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you are in Japan, do as they do. It wouldn't be appropriate to go to church in the Far East and attempt to hug, kiss, or even shake the hands of another unless they first offered. If you are in a mid-eastern area, a fraternal kiss may accompany a greeting. In America, a hearty handshake and maybe a friendly hug is the custom. The intent of Paul's words is promoting warmth and harmony between believers, not causing offense.

*Lord God, how grateful I am to travel the world and to see so many different cultures that worship You in their own way while still exalting the wondrous work of Jesus. It shows me that You truly are the God of the nations and He is Lord over all people. The songs differ, the layout of the meeting places varies, and the way prayers are conducted are unique, but when the Son is exalted, You O God are glorified! Amen.*

**Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.** Romans 16:17

After his many greetings in this chapter, and then his note to "Greet one another with a holy kiss," Paul now introduces a stern warning. He begins with "Now I urge you..." This is his way of saying, "Pay heed, lest this becomes a real problem." And his urging is to "note those who cause divisions and offenses." This is an obvious problem within any church where there are jealousies, backbitings, feelings of intellectual superiority, or a host of other prideful issues which arise. It has been the impetus for the destruction or division of countless churches over the millennia.

He has been writing throughout this epistle of the need for harmony between Jew and Gentile and the need for the stronger brother to accommodate the weaker one. His points of doctrine have been given to show us the correct path to righteousness and sanctification, among many other issues. Violations of these prescriptions are what he is

referring to now as he says that those who cause the divisions and contentions do so "contrary to the doctrine which you learned."

In other words, this has nothing to do with those who uphold and defend the principles of the Bible. In fact, in such cases, the use of the Bible in an offensive manner is expected. The church isn't meant to wait for troubles to arise and then defend against them. They are to proclaim doctrine clearly and without restraint. However, if someone comes in with contrary doctrine, the church should already be able to recognize it and weed it out. They are to "avoid them."

Vincent's word studies, speaking of the "divisions and offenses" says that "the article with each noun points to some well-known disturbances." In other words, he was warning against what had already entered into the church, hence, the strong words given throughout his epistle. They are expected to use his letter as a basis for their actions against the offenders. Now that the epistle is written and in the Bible, we should be using it in a proactive manner. No church should fail to preach on doctrinal issues consistently and with the intent of keeping the body pure. Paul speaks in exactly this manner to his protégé Timothy -

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself."

1 Timothy 6:3-5

On the other hand, in Philippians 3:17, he gives a helpful way to be proactive in such matters, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." And so, we have been shown both the right way to walk and the way to avoid heading down the wrong path. Both of them illustrate a reliance on the word of God and proper instruction. Failure to adhere to these will inevitably lead to disorder, disharmony, and divisions.

Life application: The Bible is an instruction manual for life. Anyone who would start up a lawnmower and then intentionally back it over his own foot would be considered a dolt. The instructions and the little warning labels clearly show that this isn't a good option for toenail clipping. But this is exactly what we do with the Bible. We ignore its instructions and march headlong into life's troubles because we fail to heed the manual

we have been given. Pull out the manual and read it daily. For best results, repeat several times each day.

*Lord God, what would people think about me if I lost my foot in a lawnmower while trying to clip my nails? What would they think if I were to try to shave with a hammer-drill? Lord, what must You think when I try to conduct my life's affairs without using the Manual which You have given us? You have provided exactly the right instructions and yet we ignore them. No wonder our lives are such a mess. Help us return to Your word to avoid error. Amen.*

**For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. Romans 16:18**

"For those who are such" takes us back to the previous verse - "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."

These people have motives that are intentionally self-directed and destructive of the church. They "do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ." The people Paul speaks of here are comparable to the "Judaizers" he mentions elsewhere. These people were coming into the churches and teaching that one had to be circumcised and follow the law of Moses in order to be saved.

This is stated or implied in several epistles. It is also noted explicitly in Acts 15:1 -

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"

They were preaching a false gospel of works rather than grace in order to steal away the brethren for themselves. If you think this was just a warning for the church in Rome, think again. It is one of the most common heresies perpetrated in churches today. Legalism and adding to what Christ has done infects almost all churches in one way or another. And it is usually introduced from within.

Those who teach such things serve "their own belly." They are directed to the lust of the flesh as if they were feeding on those they pull astray. Factions within the church are very often started by such perverse people. They hear something they don't like and, regardless of the truth, they countermand it with their own inventions of piety and supposed honoring of God.

And Paul tells how they do this. They do it first with "smooth words." This is the Greek word *chrēstologias*. This is its only use in the New Testament and is directly translated "good speaking." Regardless of the truth, they utter words which sound authoritative, honoring of God, pious, and noble. But in fact, they are words which are contrary to any of these. They have no authority because they countermand what the Bible teaches. They don't honor God because they call into question the truth and veracity of His word. They aren't pious because true piety would be honoring of God, not reviling of His word. And they lack any sense of nobility because they fail to give God the true glory He deserves. Instead of glorifying Him through the reception of grace, they dishonor Him by proclaiming a righteousness of self, not of Christ.

In addition to the smooth words, they utter "flattering speech." This is the Greek word *eulogias*. It means adoration or praise. When we eulogize someone at their funeral, we put aside their faults and failings and heap praises upon the departed. This is what they do to those they want to capture. With pats on the back, smiles from the lips, and hearty praises, they pull away the unsuspecting for themselves and heap up condemnation in the process.

It is through these wicked devices that they "deceive the hearts of the simple." The word "deceive" is *exapatōsin*. It doesn't just mean to make a false impression, but to intentionally lead another astray. It is to beguile them. The implicit warning here is that we are to be well-versed in our doctrine and well trained in proper theology, lest we are swept up in their lies. As Paul warns in Ephesians 4:14, being properly trained is vital so that "we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."

Instead of remaining "simple" we are to be well-trained, ready to defend, and on the guard against the devices of the people Paul warns about.

If we look at the church as if it were planet earth, we could see how these people disrupt. On the surface of the planet are storms, floods, famines, and the like. These would be comparable to those outside the church who attack and harm. But inside the earth are other forces, much more destructive - volcanoes, earthquakes, and other uncontrollable things. These come unexpectedly and cause massive harm. This is what we see in the people Paul is speaking about. They appear to be a part of the church which has a good purpose, but they spew forth only destruction.

Life application: We are saved by grace through faith. If we are saved by grace, then what can we add to that? Nothing. If we attempt to do so, then it is no longer grace and our salvation is to be questioned. "Have I truly trusted Christ alone for my salvation?" If



you feel obligated to do something to merit God's favor apart from trusting Christ, you are heading down a bad path. Hold fast to what Jesus did and be ever-so grateful for His glorious provision.

*Lord, if You are our righteousness, as Abraham discovered before ever being circumcised, then what could I possibly add to that? You consistently demonstrate in Your word that we are saved by Your grace and clothed in Your righteousness alone. May I never trust anything but the work of Jesus Christ for my righteousness. The pressure is off, the deed is done, and I can rest in His wondrous work. Great stuff God... great stuff. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. Romans 16:19**

"For" refers back to the previous two verses. What he said about "those who cause divisions and offenses" precipitates this admonition. By staying away from such ungodly people, they had thus far been able to keep free from stain and they had grown in Christ, being faithful and obedient to their calling. In order to keep them on that track, the words of this doctrinal epistle were shared with them. We know this is certain because in Romans 1:8, he said this -

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."

Their "faith" was "spoken of throughout the whole world" and now he states that their "obedience has become known to all." He is tying the two together. Being obedient is to remain faithful. Thus, the epistle was given to them to bolster their faith and keep them on a sound path. Every portion of the letter is directed to faith. Even those things which could be considered "works" are not works of obligation, but works of faith. This is the attitude that Paul desired in them always.

In order to spur them onto this, he states "therefore." This word asks us to go back and review what it is there for. In this case, it is referring directly to the first thought of the verse - "For your obedience has become known to all." Because of this, "Therefore I am glad on your behalf." He is rejoicing in the recognition that the Romans had earned through their faithful obedience.

His words here would be comparable to a letter from, for example, Billy Graham. In the letter he applauds the church for its high rate of conversions to Christ. This would be most notable because Billy Graham is an evangelist. Being noted for great evangelistic

efforts by a great evangelist would be a note of high commendation. This is similar to what Paul is saying to the Romans.

However, despite his happiness, he adds in a warning... "But I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." Hence, he gave them the warning in verses 17 & 18. By highlighting these ungodly people with their perverse agenda and then contrasting it to the recognition of those in Rome, he was hoping to instill in them how to not let their faith diminish or get sidetracked. In his admonition, he uses the same type of thought as Jesus used when speaking to the disciples he was sending out in Israel -

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Matthew 10:16

Like them, Paul desired the Romans to be wise in all things good, but be harmless and simple in faithful obedience.

Life application: Our work can be summed up in one verse from the Lord's mouth - "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). Everything that we do in Christ and for Christ is either based on our faith in Him and what He has done, or it is not a work that can be credited to our account. Have faith in Him and set your heart and attitude on doing those things which are based on that precious faith.

*Heavenly Father, my confidence in coming to You is based solely on the merits of Jesus my Lord. I know that there is no thing I can do to add to His work. My hope, my trust, and my heart belong to Jesus. What could I add to make me more right with You? Notta thing. He is my all-sufficient Savior! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. Romans 16:20**

"And" connects this verse directly to Paul's imperative for the Romans to "be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." By doing this and following the instruction given in the epistle "the God of Peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." Paul uses the title "the God of peace" to show that even among those who are contentious, self-serving, and who cause divisions, God is still in control and He is our peace. Where those filled with Satan come against the church, He is our safety, our hiding place, and our calm refuge in the world that rages around us.

The thought that He "will crush Satan under your feet" goes right back to Genesis 3:15 -

"And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel."

The work of Christ as the Suffering Servant is past. The church is currently engaged in the spiritual warfare which rages around us (see Ephesians 6), and the work of Christ will be completed when He returns and vanquishes Satan forever. Eventually, he will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10).

And this will occur, as Paul states, "shortly." It is the same word used in Revelation 1:1 & 22:6 when speaking of the things which must occur "shortly." Because of this terminology, the church has picked up on the notion that it must have happened already. But "shortly" from our perspective can't be applied to God. To Him, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day (2 Peter 3:8). So "shortly" doesn't have to mean that God has failed if it hasn't happened yet, almost 2000 years after the epistles and Revelation were written. Further, the Greek word for "shortly" is *tachei*. It is often translated as "quickly" rather than "shortly" in other verses where it can only mean "quickly," and also in these referenced verses by differing versions.

Why is this important? Because those who believe the church has replaced Israel attempt to justify their stand by saying that these things are already accomplished. One way to do this is to state that "Satan" here isn't speaking of the proper name of the devil, but rather it is a collective term speaking of those false teachers mentioned in Romans 1:17, 18. However, this is unreasonable and doesn't represent the Bible's continuous use of "Satan" as a proper noun; it is stretching for a reason to justify why the word "shortly" and not "quickly" is correct.

Another wholly unfounded explanation used by preterists is that this is speaking of either the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in AD70 or the establishment of Christianity by Constantine within the Roman Empire. Again, these are completely unfounded explanations because Romans is a part of the Christian Bible and therefore applies to the entire Christian era which is on-going today. We still have Satan actively working against us. There are dividers within and foes without. To claim that Satan is crushed under our feet is completely contradictory to the truth of the world around us; it is really crummy theology.

Be assured and comforted - Christ is coming again and he will shut up Satan for 1000 years and then He will eventually toss him into the Lake of Fire. Until then, we will suffer

trials, woes, and tribulations, but we also have our refuge in the God of Peace. Because of this comfort, Paul finishes the verse with a thought which is extremely close to John's final words at the end of Revelation, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

No matter what our headache or affliction, no matter who the enemy is who comes against us, and no matter what we do which is contrary to the salvation we have once-for-all-time received, we are secure in the grace of Jesus Christ. We have the absolute confidence that He has our eternal souls securely in His capable hands. Paul desires us to remember this and then finishes with "Amen;" so may it be.

Life application: Preterism does not align with either the Bible or with the events in the world around us. It is faulty and causes us to divert our eyes from what God is doing in redemptive history. Israel's disobedience in no way negates God's faithfulness. When the church age ends, Christ will rule from Jerusalem and from among His people, Israel. Pray for them. The tribulation is coming, and they must endure many hardships before they are refined and purified.

*Heavenly Father, I stand with Israel. You have remained faithful to them and You are readying them for the time when You will send Jesus to rule among them, just as Your word proclaims in the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, and in the New Testament. Be their safe refuge in the troubled times ahead and be glorified through them, O God. Amen.*

**Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. Romans 16:21**

In the first portion of Romans 16, Paul greeted many in Rome. After this came his thoughts concerning the need to avoid divisions and strife by avoiding those who would otherwise tear apart the harmony within the church. With that thought complete, he now extends greetings from those with him. First noted is the famous Timothy who is seen throughout the New Testament and to whom two epistles were written.

Timothy is first introduced into the Bible in Acts 16 -

"Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew

that his father was Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily." Acts 16:1-5

After this, Timothy seemed to never be far from Paul. He is noted in the introduction of five of Paul's letters as being there with him. In Philippians 2:19-23 he is mentioned in a most honorable way when Paul calls him "a son with his father" –

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me."

In Hebrews 13, we learn that Timothy had even been imprisoned for his faith at one time. He was eventually ordained as the first bishop of the church at Ephesus and is a person never noted as anything but firm and resolute in his friendship with Paul and his integrity and endurance in his work for the Lord.

After mentioning "Timothy my fellow worker" Paul goes on to note Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Some teach that Lucius is actually Luke who wrote Luke and Acts, but Jamieson-Faucet-Brown disagree. They say that "the fuller form of 'Lucas' is not 'Lucius' but 'Lucanus.'" He is probably the same person noted again as Lucius of Cyrene in Acts 13:1 among a list of "prophets and teachers."

Jason is mentioned in Acts 17:5-9 in connection with a disturbance at his home where they met to share the gospel. This occurred in Thessalonica. And Sosipater is most likely known as "Sopater of Berea" in Acts 20:4. Collectively, these three are called "my countrymen" by Paul. They were of Jewish descent and therefore of the same stock as Paul. They each had extended their greetings to those in Rome and at the same time added both note and credibility to the letter Paul penned to them.

Life application: Consider how faithless many people are. When trials or troubles come along, they fly off like a bird. But Timothy held to Paul like a son to his father. If your church goes through a bumpy patch which isn't involving wrong doctrine, will you just get up and leave or will you stick with it through the trial? And what about those you are close to as friends and associates? How willing are you to stand with them in their own

times of need? Be faithful like Timothy who stayed with Paul through the most amazing trials and difficulties.

*Lord Jesus, from time to time we find out how faithless many friends and colleagues are. When difficult times come, they are gone like birds out an open window. I would pray for that not to be how I am remembered by others. Instead, help me to be there for them in their time of need and to be remembered as a faithful friend. But Lord, be with me and remind me of this. With You, I know I will remain faithful to those around me. Amen.*

**I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.** Romans 16:22

We find in this verse much more than might be at first apparent. "I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle" tells us that Paul used an amanuensis or "penman" who wrote what Paul had either first written, or what he directly dictated to Tertius. Paul's writing was unusually large as is noted in Galatians 6:11 –

"See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!"

It is believed because of this, and several other pertinent clues, that Paul's vision was poor. If he wrote with such large letters, the epistle delivered to Rome would be many pages long and rather unwieldy. Further, it wasn't uncommon for people to use a scribe to pen their letters as they let their thoughts out. Some people think more clearly as they speak, and this may be the case with Paul. It is certainly not the case that Paul first spoke in Hebrew, Aramaic, or some other language and then Tertius translated the epistle into Greek. Paul was fluent in Greek as is seen in Acts 21:37.

Further, it was his custom to sign each epistle that was sent in his name even if he used a scribe. He notes this in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 - "The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write." The unusually large letters and the style of his penmanship ensured that an epistle from him was easily recognized.

The words which state "who wrote this epistle" are *graphas ten epistolen*. It means "wrote" not "translated" or "interpreted." The substance of the letter is Paul's entirely. Tertius simply put the words down as he received them.

His name, Tertius, is a Latin name and some have tried to connect it with "Silas" who is noted 13 times from Acts 15-18. This doesn't seem likely because Silas is named so prominently in Acts by that name. For him to change to the Latin name when Jews were also being addressed in Romans seems quite a stretch, but it's not impossible.

This "Tertius" then has been given the liberty by Paul to make his own greeting to the Romans. When he does, he says "I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord." Two possibilities for "in the Lord" arise. One is that he "wrote" the epistle in the Lord, meaning under divine inspiration. The second is that "greet" is being tied to "in the Lord." This would mean that his greeting is as a Christian and with brotherly love because of it. The second is certainly more likely. It has already been indicated (as noted above) that Paul is the author and Tertius is the scribe.

However, ... in this sentence he becomes the author and therefore, under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he has the high honor of being one of the authors of the Bible, even if it is for a short thought or two! It is an amazing thing to contemplate. This honor is not unlike that of Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, in the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 45, after so many trials and with the future very uncertain, the Lord took the time to address Baruch personally. The entire chapter is devoted to this exchange -

"The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the instruction of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 'You said, 'Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.' 'Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh,' says the Lord. 'But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.'" Jeremiah 45:1-5

Tertius and Baruch were both given high honor regardless of how they may have felt about what they were doing. They are noted in God's word and are no less important than those they served.

Life application: Tertius is known for doing only one thing for the Lord, being a scribe for someone else who is writing a letter. It seems menial, but the Lord honored Tertius with the signing his name and giving a greeting. Thus, he became a partial author of God's eternal word. Like Baruch and Tertius, if you are in Christ, you too are a valued member of God's community and what you do will never go unnoticed by Him. He will reward you for your acts of faithfulness and your name will be eternally inscribed on heaven's rolls.

*Lord God, I sometimes feel that what I do in life isn't of great value. I know there are preachers, teachers, missionaries, authors, scholars, professors and the like who are*

*dedicated to serving You faithfully. But when I read Your word, I see that You also favor the common man and look upon the work of his hands with delight when it is done for You. I will serve You in my duties and I am confident that You notice my efforts. Amen.*

**Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother.** Romans 16:23

This verse is most probably a continuation of Tertius' greeting which began in the previous verse, but it could be a return to Paul's thoughts. Under the assumption that it is Tertius, in addition to his own greeting, he includes greetings from:

- 1) "Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church." The word "host" carries the thought of a person who accommodates another in his house at his own expense, without charge or expected return. He simply opened his house and welcomed others in. This sounds much like Priscilla and Aquila whom Paul noted earlier in this chapter. The whole church met in their house.

The name Gaius (although not necessarily the same person) is first seen in Acts 19 during a time of trouble in Ephesus. A "Gaius of Derbe" is seen in Acts 20. Paul notes him in 1 Corinthians 1:14 as someone he personally baptized. And, Gaius, if the same individual, has the high honor of a letter being written to him which is included as a book of the Bible. 3 John 1:1 says, "To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth." To be so prominently displayed in the pages of the Bible, and to be so faithfully noted, is both rare and honoring of his Christian service.

- 2) "Erastus, the treasurer of the city" is noted in Acts 19:22. He was sent by Paul, along with Timothy, to minister in Macedonia. The treasurer of the city would be a high distinction within the Roman Empire, and he would be considered a noble. This shows that Paul was probably speaking of him when he wrote this to the Corinthians -

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29



Saying "not many" implies that some were. Paul may have had him in his thoughts as he wrote about the varying types God has chosen. He is also mentioned one more time in 2 Timothy 4:20 - "Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick." Other than these things, nothing more is said about him in Scripture.

- 3) "Quartus, a brother." There is something rather unusual here. The name "Tertius" means "three" and the name "Quartus" means "four." At times, slaves were given no real names, but were simply numbered - "Hey Six, go get me some coffee."

Because of this, it is possible that Tertius and Quartus were from the same household and either real brothers, born as slaves in the flesh; or brothers in Christ, reborn as slaves to Him. If this is so, then Paul's words above (1 Corinthians 1:26-29) have all the more ring of truth about them!

Life application: Status, amount of wealth, type of employment, and other social identifiers don't mean a thing in regard to our relationship with the Lord. The only thing that matters is whether we have received Jesus and what we are doing for Him. Don't ever feel that you are somehow unworthy of His favor. He has accepted you and He is pleased with you.

*Lord, Your word says that You have chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. I certainly feel weak at times - weak in my body, weak in my spirit, and weak in my faith. But I know that You have accepted me just as I am. I know Your grace is sufficient and Your love is eternal. Thank You for choosing even me. Amen.*

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Romans 16:24**

This verse is another internal clue that all of verses 22-24 were penned by Tertius the scribe and not by Paul. In verse 20, Paul wrote, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." It seems unlikely that he would repeat himself so closely in wording at such a close interval. But for Tertius to make the same comment would be natural and even expected. This salutation was probably a common one among the saints from the earliest days of the church and would have been repeated often.

In fact, these words of Tertius are a mirror of John's final words in the book of Revelation which also say, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Tertius, though a mere scribe, was granted the high honor of being a part-author in the eternal word of God. As his greeting to the Romans has become a part of this word, he is reaching across space and through time to greet you personally! Think of that as you again read his words and reflect on the wonder of the Bible.

Life application: What things do you think will survive your evaluation by Christ? As believers, we will all stand before Him and receive from Him our rewards. Some things will be burned away, some will survive (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). The process will be perfectly fair, and we will be thoroughly satisfied with what He decides, but we may not be happy with our reflections on the life we lived. Endeavor now to do those things which will be pleasing to the Lord so that your rewards will be many, and your cup will be large and eternally blessed with overflow.

*Lord God, I'm excited about the life You've given me. There are so many opportunities to reach out to others in their times of need, there are many chances to share Your word or to tell those around me about Your gospel of peace, and there are even times where I can just sit and be still in Your presence and feel Your Spirit of comfort and peace. Thank You for Your constant hand upon my life. Thank You... Amen.*

**Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began... Romans 16:25**

Paul now begins his closing verses of the epistle with a doxology. This is actually the only epistle that he ends with one. Others contain one or more doxologies, but this one is unique in this way. And so, he begins with "Now to Him..." This is speaking of Jesus Christ as noted in verse 20, just before Tertius' insert greetings. It is He "who is able to establish you." This sentiment is found in Ephesians 3:20 -

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us..."

The work that Christ has begun in us as recipients of His offering of grace, He is fully capable of establishing and continuing in us. Back in Romans 1:11, 12, Paul wrote these words concerning this very precept -

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."

His hope was to "impart some spiritual gift that you may be established." Now he notes that it is the Lord who in fact is able to so establish them. And this is "according to my gospel." In other words, the doctrines which were set forth in this epistle, written by him. This gospel is entirely Christ centered: We were predestined for salvation, because God foreknew us (Romans 8:29); our calling is of the Lord (Romans 8:30); salvation is of the Lord (Romans 10:9); justification is of the Lord (Romans 3:24); sanctification is of the Lord; this came through the work of the Holy Spirit who testifies to the work of Christ (Romans 15:16); and glorification is of the Lord (Romans 8:30).

After noting that the Romans can be established through the words of his epistle, he adds "and the preaching of Jesus Christ." Paul was personally instructed by the Lord. He also had the testimony of the other apostles concerning the words of the Lord. But care must be taken here to understand what Paul is speaking of. The majority of Jesus' recorded words in the gospels were spoken to Israel, under the law. There is a separation between these words and the words which speak of the church age. The two are not to be mixed. If what Jesus said under the law was enough to establish us, there would be no need for New Testament epistles. But there is because the church age and the kingdom age as spoken to Israel are, in fact, separate dispensations. Mixing these two then often leads to erroneous doctrine.

And this is absolutely certain because Paul's "gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ" mentioned here are "according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began." This is how God does things in redemptive history. He progressively reveals His intentions for us. Until Paul revealed these mysteries (and those in his other epistles) they were entirely unknown. Paul, being the apostle to the Gentiles, wrote back and forth in this letter to Jew and then to Gentile, showing that both are acceptable to Christ, and both are in need of Christ. This mystery, or hidden truth, is revealed through Paul. Before that, it was unknown "since the world began." The word used here literally means "in times eternal."

There were in fact hints of the dispensational model given all the way back in Genesis, such as clues that the Gentiles would, for a certain time, assume the banner of redemption, meaning the Church Age. But these hints were concealed until the events came about. Only in hindsight can we fully grasp what the allusions we were given back there actually meant. The mystery was secure until it was fully revealed after the coming of Christ. This concept of hiding and revealing things is actually noted right in Deuteronomy. There it says -

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Deuteronomy 29:29

God, in His infinite wisdom, has taken man through various dispensations in order to show us that in any situation we are utterly dependent on Him and His open hand of grace and mercy.

Life application: All hail the work of Jesus Christ which reconciles us to God.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is beyond compare. Though we have searched it carefully for thousands of years, still new insights and hidden truths are revealed as the days go by. How wonderfully glorious is this superior Word which You have given us. Help us to not forsake it for life's trivial pursuits, but to search it out and hold fast to it all our days. Amen.*

**...but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—**  
Romans 16:26

This thought continues from the previous verse which spoke of the "revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began." It is this mystery which is now "made manifest." What was concealed, is now revealed; what was hidden, is now openly seen; what was secret, is now made evident. This begs us to ask, "How was this accomplished?" And the answer is found in the Bible itself. It is "by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations."

The Hebrew Scriptures were eventually translated into Greek, the main language of the empire at that time. Thus, they were accessible to "all nations" because they could then be retranslated into regional dialects or surrounding languages very easily. What God had kept for so long among a small and almost isolated group of people in an obscure tongue was now ready to be "made known to all nations." This Greek translation is known as the Septuagint (or LXX), and it is the most quoted text of Jesus and the apostles.

But just as important as it was to have the Scriptures which testified to the coming Messiah and the work of God in Christ, it was just as important that he actually came in fulfillment of the prophetic word. Through His coming, those hidden mysteries which told of Him could be clearly understood. As Jesus said to the Jews of His day when speaking of their Scriptures (the body which comprises the Old Testament), "You search

the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me." (John 5:39)

Everything within the Old Testament Scriptures testifies to the coming Christ and God's plan of redemption in history. Everything now found in the New Testament Scriptures testifies to the accomplished work of Christ and God's continued plan of redemption in history. It is all about Jesus. The mysteries have been made known and even those mysteries which are still future are explained in some part (such as the rapture of the church).

And all of this is "according to the commandment of the everlasting God." It is God, timeless and eternal, who issued the decree that these things should be. In the Old Testament, He is called El Olam. He is eternal and unchanging and thus His commandments, when issued from eternity past, are eternally relevant. Nothing He has decreed can fail to transpire. The word He has given is breathed out within the framework of time and thus all things that occur in time happen in accord with the accomplishment of His word. Nothing is outside of His knowledge or control.

And the reason for the issuance of His word which is in accordance with His will is that it is "for obedience to the faith." This thought ties us directly back to Romans 1:5 which said, "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name." The Scriptures are what testify to Christ and bring about "obedience to the faith."

Before Christ came, there were five distinct dispensations: Innocence, Conscience, Government, Promise, and Law. The OT Scriptures came about under the dispensation of law and set up a temporary system of government until Faith was revealed. When Christ came and fulfilled the law, the plan of redemption moved from "obedience to the law" to "obedience to the faith." As Paul says in Romans 6:14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

This is where we stand, and in our faith we are to be obedient. And Jesus is the object of that faith. It is the greatest act of grace we could imagine. And yet, far too often, we trade the grace of Jesus Christ for a return to the law. Let us not make such an error, but rest wholly in His finished work.

Life application: The commandment of the everlasting God is summed up in believing in the One whom He has sent. If we have this sure faith, then we are truly saved. It is a gift, and it cannot be earned. Let us thank God for His wonderful, beautiful grace.

*Heavenly Father... Thank You for having forgiven me for a lifetime of failure and of rejecting You. You pulled me out of the dirty pit, wiped my face clean, and allowed Your grace to flow around me like a warm blanket. You have granted me the righteousness of Your own Son and taken away my sin. How can I not praise You for the wondrous grace You have bestowed. Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Thank You for Jesus! Amen.*

**...to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.** Romans 16:27

This is the final verse of the book of Romans. It has taken 433 days to get here, and it has been a wonderful journey of discovery and edification as we have learned from the hand of Paul. In this verse, he finishes his doxology with the reverent and exalting words "to God, alone wise." Through His wisdom, He fashioned the heavens and the earth. Through His wisdom, He created man. And through His wisdom, He gave man free-will, knowing that this was needed for a true heart-felt relationship.

Man fell, but God initiated the plan that was in His mind before creation; Jesus Christ would come to reveal His very heart and to be the One to restore us to Him. And so, it is to this wondrous Creator, who alone is wise, "be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen." Jesus is, as Colossians 1 tells us, "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." In Jesus Christ, the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.

When we look out into the stars, and even to the furthest galaxies, or when we look into the smallest subatomic particles, we see the wisdom of God displayed in the work of Jesus Christ. And further, He is the Mediator between God and man, thus we offer our glory "through" Him, and we behold the glory of God "through" Him as well. Paul has shown us, time and again in this epistle, that Jesus is our meeting point with God. Thus, in order to be reconciled to Him - whether Jew or Gentile - it must occur through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, from this epistle, we discern the heart of the gospel and the way to be reconciled once again to God -

- ✓ There is none righteous, no, not one. Romans 3:10
- ✓ All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23
- ✓ For the wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23
- ✓ But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23
- ✓ That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

God sent Jesus to live the life we cannot live; He lived the perfect life, never sinning; He gave His life in exchange for our sins; and God raised Him from the dead as evidence of His sinless perfection. The offer is made; receive Jesus and receive His righteousness. Choose wisely. Choose Jesus!

Life application: Romans shows us the love of God in Jesus Christ. His work is fully capable to save us and reconcile us to God. Now, because of Him we stand justified before God apart from deeds of the law. Let us never forget that we are saved by grace through faith and let us never attempt to set aside that grace by attempting to be justified by our deeds. Let us rest wholly upon the work of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, today, I want to praise You for Your wondrous work through Jesus. A lifetime of rebellion and sin was washed away at the cross of Calvary and the proof is in His resurrection. I need not worry if I "might" be reconciled to You. Through Him, I am one hundred percent saved! Thank You for Jesus. Thank You, O God. Amen.*