

# **New Testament Studies**

## **Romans** *(RVS Notes)*

|                                    |           |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>                | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Book Synopsis &amp; Outline</b> | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Romans Notes</b>                | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Bibliography</b>                | <b>71</b> |

## Romans Introduction

**In general**—This book is Paul’s magnum opus—the most systematic presentation of the gospel he preached. One writer has described it as “the cathedral of the Christian faith.” Martin Luther wrote: “This epistle is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel ... It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” Luther's associate, Philip Melancthon, described the book as a timeless treatise, “a compendium of Christian doctrine” that transcends time.

Romans has impacted countless people through the years. There's John Wesley's story. On May 24, 1738, he reluctantly went to a service at Aldersgate Chapel in London. It turned out to be a life-changing experience. The preface to Martin Luther's commentary on Romans was read at this meeting. Wesley recorded his reaction in his journal: “About a quarter before nine, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sin, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” Wesley went on and had an incredibly far-reaching ministry. He was a key personality in the Great Awakening that swept over Great Britain and the United States in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The same Holy Spirit who so utilized Romans to teach and transform these giants of faith and do the same for us.

**Author and Occasion**—Romans was probably composed while Paul was in Corinth in the late 50s, probably around 58 at the close of his third missionary journey. It may have been written during the three-month stopover described in Acts 20:3. He may have been staying with Gaius (16:23) at the time of the letter’s composition. The mention of Erastus, Corinth’s commissioner of public works, and the commendation of Phoebe, who belonged to the church at nearby Cenchrae, further confirms the Corinthian origin of the letter.

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he was writing to a church with whose founding he had nothing whatsoever to do. He did not have previous personal contact with the Roman church. This is very different from almost all of Paul's other letters. Likewise, it is different in another way. Paul's other letters, with perhaps the exception of Ephesians, were driven by the circumstances in which the church addressed was enmeshed. Romans, of all Paul's letters, comes closest to a theological treatise.

He desired to utilize the Roman church as a base of operations in the western portion of the Empire. He wanted to spread the gospel west, as far as Spain. He wrote this letter, setting out the very essence of the gospel he preached, in order that he might find in Rome a sympathetic supporting church for his intended work in the Western Empire.

The believers at Rome were a mixed lot, both Jew and Gentile, albeit primarily Gentile. The church in Rome was composed of many house churches at Rome. Large basilicas that populate various European cities did not begin to appear until the third and fourth centuries of our era.

Romans reflects the way ancient letters were commonly composed:

- Greeting (Rom. 1:1).
- Prayer for the health and welfare of the recipients (Rom. 1:7).

- Thanksgiving (Rom. 1:8-15).
- General contents of the letter (main body of Romans).
- Special greetings at the end (Rom. 16).

Likewise, when we say Paul penned this letter, we must not see him as sitting quietly at a desk carefully polishing each sentence as he writes. Paul did not ordinarily pen his own letters. He typically dictated them to an amanuensis (a secretary with leeway to capture the author's thought). Picture him striding across a small room somewhere in Corinth, pouring out a torrent of words, that his amanuensis is scribbling to get down. In Romans 16:22, Tertius identifies himself as Paul's amanuensis when he slips in his own greeting to the Romans.

**Purpose**—Paul had a threefold purpose for writing Romans:

- To announce Paul's plans to visit Rome after his return from delivering relief from Gentile believers to the Jerusalem church (15:24, 28-29; Acts 19:21). Paul may have intended to use Rome as a base of operations for the evangelization of Spain and the western part of the Roman Empire, much as he used Antioch as a base for the missionary journeys through Asia Minor and Greece.
- To present a complete and detailed statement of the gospel he preached to people who did not know him and yet may have heard charges against him by various Judaizing groups or other of Paul's detractors.
- To address an underlying tension between Jewish and Gentile segments in the Christian community. In Romans 9-11, one senses that Paul is addressing a very definite undertone among Jewish believers that questioned God's goodness, wisdom, and justice as revealed in His salvation plan, particularly as it bore on the Jew.

**Guiding Concepts**—

***Righteousness***—The grand theme of Romans is a righteousness of God revealed in the gospel and appropriated by faith from first to last (1:17). This righteousness is not one of human self-justifying merit but a right standing with God which the Lord Himself provides. It is imputed to human beings by grace through faith (justification) and then imparted in the believer resulting in a progressively transformed lifestyle (sanctification). The grand hope, expressed so sublimely in Romans 8, is that our lifestyles will one day be perfectly in accord with our righteous standing before God (glorification).

Protestants have traditionally stressed justification by faith, a doctrine emphasized in Romans and Galatians. However, it is important to understand why Paul needed to emphasize this. Most Jews believed that the Jewish people were saved by divine grace. Jewish Christians recognized that this grace was available only through the Lord Jesus. By what terms would the Gentiles become part of God's people? In arguing for the ethnic unity of God's body, Paul contends that all people come to God on the same terms, no matter what their ethnic, economic, educational, or religious background. He stresses justification by faith, a doctrine most of his readers would know and utilizes it to emphasize reconciliation with one another, a reality that they still needed to learn.

***Nature of God***—Righteousness necessarily brings God's mercy and justice into sharp relief. This is

elaborated upon throughout the letter. God is indeed merciful and gracious and longs to forgive and restore us to a relationship with Himself. The Scriptures say: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4-5a). And again, it says: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Mercy is unmerited favor from God to erring people who can do nothing to earn it except to hold out our hands.

However, God is also holy and righteous and cannot ignore our sinful state and our constant violation of his commandments. This theme is a dominant one in Scripture. The Apostle Paul writes: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18). Righteousness is that attribute of God by which God’s nature is the eternally perfect standard of what is right. His judgment is not arbitrary or capricious, but principled and without favoritism. All will be judged fairly. No breaks. No payoffs. No inequity. He is the standard for a moral universe and if there is no consequence for doing wrong, then doing wrong becomes all right. The ultimate consequence of wrong not judged is a lawless universe, a hell here on earth in our present order.

***Human sin dilemma***—Humanity’s fundamental problem is more serious than a few “boys will be boys” peccadilloes. Romans 1-3 develops the theme of human depravity – sin has twisted every aspect of our being. Humans may not be as bad as they can be, but we are wrong at the root in every facet of our being. The licentious pagan (1:18-32) as well as the moral Gentiles and self-righteous Jews (2:1-3:8) are all on the same plane—lost in sin with no humanly devised way out (3:9-20). Paul develops the theme of original sin in Romans 5, implicating the entire race in Adam’s fall.

***Jew-Gentile integration***—Roman Christians were amid what we would now call ethnic reconciliation and cross-cultural understanding. Paul reminds his Jewish readers that they are lost without Christ just as the Gentiles (Rom. 1-3); that spiritual, not ethnic, descent from Abraham is what matters (Rom. 4; 9); that Jews are also descended from Adam and share his nature (5:12-21); and that the law (i.e. Torah) does not and never did justify Israel (Rom. 7; 10). He also reminds the Gentiles that they were incorporated into Judaism and should avoid any anti-Semitic tendencies (Rom. 11) and that they must respect Jewish practices (Rom. 14). Christ (Rom. 15:1-13) and Paul (Rom. 15:14-33) are agents of reconciliation and unity (Rom. 16:17-20).

The Jews had a problem with Jesus as the Messiah and with the shift from the Old to the New Covenant. Paul answers the critic who asks why God’s chosen people had failed to respond to their Messiah’s claims by delineating God’s purposes for both Jew and Gentile.

***Election***—In discussing the problem of Jewish rejection of their Messiah, Paul asserts the doctrine of divine election. Human beings, Jew or Gentile, have no claim on God, but God is faithful to His promise and His covenant, though we be faithless.

***Function of Law***—The Law was never meant to be a means for people to achieve righteousness before God, but rather a means of showing people the impossibility of such a feat. The Law’s revelation prevents people from “dummying down” what it means to have fellowship with a holy God so that they may cast themselves upon God’s grace alone.

## Book Synopsis and Outline—

The structure of the letter falls into four main divisions:

- Chapters 1-8 deals with the problem of righteousness. The first part of Romans traces the significance of the gospel from condemnation (1:18-3:20) to justification (3:21-5:21) to sanctification (6:1-8:39) to glorification. In this development, the book focuses on the doctrines of sin and salvation.
- Chapters 9-11 deals with the problem of the Jews. What happened here? Is there an undertone among Jewish believers that questioned God's goodness, wisdom, and justice as revealed in His salvation plan, particularly as it bore on them? Did God give up on His covenant and abandon His Old Testament people?
- Chapters 12-15 deals with practical questions of living. Paul provides practical exhortation for the outworking of righteousness in the daily lives of the Roman believers. He also included his own plans for future missionary work.
- Chapter 16 is a letter of introduction for Phoebe and a list of final greetings. The chapter is something of a problem. Paul greets by name far more people in this chapter than in any other letter. Yet, he had never set foot in Rome.

Romans begins by taking you into a courtroom. Paul calls both Gentiles and Jews to the stand and grills them, finding them guilty before God's impartial judgment (Romans 1-3). Then he presents and explains God's marvelous salvation by faith, how he makes us right (Romans 3:21-5:21). But if we are made right by faith in God's substitutionary atonement and not by our behavior, why not go on sinning. It is what we do best and, according to your argument Paul, it shows the rightness of God's law. This leads Paul to explain our ongoing experience of being made right in sanctification—our victory, liberty, and security (Romans 6-8). Then he takes an excursus in Romans 9-11. What about the Jews and God's fidelity to His covenant? Then, in Romans 12-15, he deals with the practical outworking of being made right with God and others in the daily life of the believer. Finally, in Romans 15 and 16, Paul explains his future plans and greets his friends at Rome.

Our working outline for our study of Romans is as follows:

### **I. Introduction (1:1-17)**

- A. Salutation (1:1-7)
- B. Thanksgiving for the recipients (1:8-15)
- C. Theme stated (1:16-17)

### **II. Need for Salvation: Plight of Humanity Lost in Sin (1:18-3:20)**

- A. For the riotous pagan (1:18-32)
- B. For the moral pagan and the religious Jew (2:1-3:8)
  - 1. Impartiality of judgment (2:1-16)
  - 2. Jewish advantages to no avail (2:17-3:8)
- C. All fall short (3:9-20)

### **III. Justification: Imputation of Righteousness (3:21-5:21)—How we are rightly related to God**

- A. Justification described (3:21-31)

- B. Abraham as illustrating justification by faith (4:1-25)
  - 1. Basic case stated (4:1-8)
  - 2. Promise apart from circumcision (4:9-12)
  - 3. Promise apart from the law (4:13-17)
  - 4. Abraham's faith as the standard for every believer (4:18-25)
- C. Benefits of justification described (5:1-11)
- D. Applicability of justification: death in Adam/life in Christ (5:12-21)

#### **IV. Sanctification: Imparting Righteousness (6:1-8:39)—How we are set apart to God**

- A. Believer's union with Christ in death and resurrection life (6:1-23)
  - 1. Know—what we need to know to live right (6:1-10)
  - 2. Consider/count/reckon—moving out on what we know (6:11)
  - 3. Present/yield/offer (6:12-14)
  - 4. An exchange of masters (6:15-23)
- B. Believer and the law (7:1-25)
  - 1. Deliverance from law (7:1-6)
  - 2. Law and sin: what is the gig? (7:7-25)
- C. Life in the Spirit (8:1-39)
  - 1. Liberation from the law of sin and death (8:1-11)
  - 2. Additional ministries of the Spirit—groaning (8:12-27)
    - a. Children of God led by the Spirit (8:12-17)
    - b. Creation's renewal patiently awaited (8:18-25)
    - c. Spirit's intercession for us (8:26-27)
  - 3. Security and permanence of life in the Spirit (8:28-39)

#### **V. Jewish Rejection of Messiah: Righteousness Vindicated (9:1-11:36)—Is God Faithful to His Covenant? Is He Trustworthy?**

- A. Paul's sorrow over Israel's condition (9:1-5)
- B. God's choice of Israel based on election not pedigree (9:6-13)
- C. God's sovereign right to act (9:14-29)
  - 1. Mercy on whom He will (9:14-18)
  - 2. Potter and the clay: objection met (9:21-23)
  - 3. God's purpose and justice (9:22-24)
  - 4. God calls a remnant (9:24-29)
- D. Israel's failure due to reliance on works rather than faith (9:30-10:21)
  - 1. Jewish stumbling (9:30-33)
  - 2. Misguided zeal (10:1-4)
  - 3. Fulfillment of the covenant (10:5-13)
  - 4. Call to all; failure of Israel (10:14-21)
- E. God not finished with Israel (11:1-36)
  - 1. Remnant of grace (11:1-6)
  - 2. Stumbling with a purpose (11:7-12)
  - 3. Gentiles as ingrafted branches: Temporary rejection of Israel (11:13-24)
  - 4. Israel's future salvation (11:25-32)
  - 5. Theology concludes with doxology (11:33-36)

**VI. Spiritual Service: Practice of Righteousness (12:1-15:13)—What do right relationships look like in shoe leather?**

- A. Dedicated lifestyle (12:1-2)
- B. Practice in the body of Christ: Varied ministries (12:3-8)
- C. Principles of Christian conduct (12:9-21)
- D. Submission to civil authority (13:1-7)
- E. Obligation of love in light of the end (13:8-14)
- F. Questions of conscience upon which Christians differ (14:1-15:13)
  - 1. Refrain from judging one another (14:1-12)
  - 2. Avoid offending one another (14:13-23)
  - 3. All charged to follow the example of Christ (15:1-13)

**VII. Conclusion (15:14-16:27)**

- A. Past labor, present endeavor, future plans (15:14-33)
  - 1. Ministry among the Gentiles (15:14-22)
  - 2. Delivery of love offering and future plans (15:23-29)
  - 3. Open-eyed to danger: Prayer requests (15:30-33)
- B. Personal greetings, warning, and doxology (16:1-27)
  - 1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)
  - 2. Greetings to individual Roman believers (16:3-16)
  - 3. Warning against dissension and spiritual obstacles (16:17-20)
  - 4. Greetings from Paul's companions (16:21-24)
  - 5. Doxology (16:25-27)

## Romans Notes: Righteousness by Faith

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written:*

*“The righteous will live by faith. (Romans 1:16-17)*

**I. Introduction (1:1-17)**—Romans reflects the way ancient letters were commonly composed. It opens with the author identifying himself and greeting his recipients (1:1), continues with a prayer for the health and welfare of the recipients (1:7), followed by a thanksgiving for them (1:8-15), before moving to the theme of the letter (1:16-17). This opening is unique among Paul's letters because of the extended elaboration on the apostle's call and on the gospel he preached (1:2-6).

**A. Salutation (1:1-7)**—Paul describes himself and his role (1:1), the gospel he preaches (1:2-6), and greets the recipients of the letter (1:7). The salutations that introduce New Testament letters are what the people of the day called *ethos*. They introduced letters and speeches of a persuasive nature by establishing the writer's credibility to address the subject matter. They did not prove the writer's point but attempted to incline the audience to a respectful hearing. Why should they listen to what he had to say? That is the question Paul is answering in the opening verses of Romans 1.

Roman 1:1 and 1:7 summarize Paul's opening greeting: Paul, a bondservant of the Lord Jesus to all in Rome who love God; grace and peace to you. Why the expanded greeting? Because he wants to lay out what the Gospel is. It further defines his own role (1:1, 5) and claims the entire world in its embrace. It is about what God has done in Jesus, the Messiah, Israel's true king and the world's true Lord. Jesus is the son of God, coming from a royal house older than anything Rome can claim (1:2-4).

**1:1**—Paul describes himself as a servant (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ. That word describes at the same time an obligation of a bonded person who is honored to be so bonded. He also describes himself as an apostle (*apostolos*), a sent one who had been set apart for a particular task (to preach to the Gentiles (1:5)).

**1:2-6**—Paul describes the nature of the gospel he preaches. The good news is the message that the Lord Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and is now able to save to the uttermost those who trust in Him. The prophetic Scriptures promise this. This is more than a prediction in advance. It is a commitment by Almighty God to make good the promise of a redemptive word.

This gospel is all about God's Son. Paul focuses on two things:

- The incarnation—Jesus is by human nature a Davidic descendant and by divine nature God's incredibly unique Son. Irenaeus, a second century bishop of Lyons, once remarked: “He became what we are, to make us what He is”.
- The resurrection—Jesus' unique person is proven by His physical resurrection.

Interestingly, this initial statement about the gospel is all about the person of the Lord Jesus. Nothing is said of His redeeming work, albeit much will be said later in the letter (see 3:21-26; 4:25; 5:6-21).

**1:5-6**—He was a missionary to the Gentiles. Missionary is the Latin form of apostle, one who is sent. Paul was called to a special work to the Gentiles, and it was in pursuing this calling that he was intending to travel to Rome.

The “we” of this verse has occasioned discussion. Is this a literary “we,” referring to Paul's unique ministry to the Gentiles (see 15:16, 18) or does “we” have a wider reference to all the apostles taking the gospel to all nations and all people? However understood, the desired result is obedience that comes from faith among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

**1:7**—Paul finally gets around to identifying the recipients of this letter. The Romans are beloved of God, called to be set apart for Him, to whom he extends the greeting of “grace and peace”. Paul desires his readers to have a continuing and deepening experience of spiritual blessing that only God can bestow. “Greetings” (*charein*) was a Greek term related to “grace” (*charis*) and Jewish letters frequently opened with the salutation of “peace.”

Jewish Christians were the primary founders of the Roman church (see Acts 2:10). The emperor Claudius expelled the Jewish community from Rome (see Acts 18:2; and recorded by historians Suetonius and Dio Cassius). The Roman church was composed of Gentiles until Claudius' death. After Claudius died, the edict was repealed and the Jewish Christians returned to Rome. Jewish and Gentile believers had distinct cultural ways of expressing their faith. Paul was addressing a church that was experiencing tension between these cultural groupings.

**B. Thanksgiving for the recipients (1:8-15)**—Thanksgiving for the readers was customary in the openings of ancient letters. Paul acknowledges the sincerity of their faith (1:8-9), his intercession for them (1:9-10), his longing to visit them (1:11-13) and to preach the gospel he was called to preach (1:14-15). The tone is quite complimentary of the Roman Christians. One commentary describes this thanksgiving as the “courtesy of greatness.” We get far more out of people by praising them than by criticizing them. People who get the best out of others are those who insist on seeing others at their best.

So how was the Roman church founded? According to early Christian tradition recorded in the second century, Peter had gone to Rome after his narrow escape in Acts 12 and preached the gospel to the sizable Jewish community there. Christians met in the homes of individuals for worship, prayer, teaching, and to celebrate the Eucharist. N.T. Wright thinks that there were approximately one hundred believers in a city that was approaching one million inhabitants. The Christians were a suspect sect of Judaism and a sect that made other Jews angry. Claudius had banned the Jews from Rome in 49, but the Jews were allowed back after Nero ascended to the throne in 54. So, in the last years of Claudius' reign, the church was composed predominantly of Gentiles until the Jews and Jewish Christians returned. Rome became a microcosm of the kind of Jewish-Gentile tensions in the early church.

**1:12**—His thanksgiving for the Romans is based on their faith in Jesus Christ. He aspires to provide guidance and support to them, fostering their growth in faith. This desire has a mutuality in it. There is ample room for mutual encouragement and edification.

**1:14**—Paul feels obligated to both Greeks and non-Greeks. But he is writing to the Romans. What is this Greek stuff about? The following phrase clarifies. He is obligated to both the wise and the foolish.

By this time, “Greek” had lost its racial sense. The conquests of Alexander had taken the Greek language and thought throughout the world. To be a Greek was to be of a certain mind, spirit, and culture. The Greeks fancied themselves the wise, and the non-Greek barbarians, the foolish and uncultured. Paul ministered to the wise and the simple, the cultured and the uncultured, the educated and the uneducated.

The obligation to preach the gospel hints at Paul's desire to use the Roman congregation as a springboard to take the gospel further west to Spain. He will develop that later in the letter (15:23-24).

**C. Theme stated (1:16-17)**—Paul is ready to challenge the prevailing philosophies and religions of Rome that vie for people's attention. The Gospel is the power for salvation to those who believe. Power (*dunamis*) in this setting conveys the gospel's inherent efficacy to offer someone the way to be rightly related to God.

Salvation (*soterion*) refers to God's deliverance to a sound or whole condition. The word can have a physical or spiritual import, but in this context, clearly spiritual. People of this age and in every age felt the need for deliverance. They felt the need for what Seneca described as “a hand let down to lift us up”. The Latin philosopher thought the people of his day were overwhelmingly conscious of “their weakness and their inefficiency in necessary things.” This salvation has come and is rescuing people from the state of sin. It is a present reality and a glorious future hope.

It is for everyone who believes, for those with a settled conviction that through the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, God is putting back together a broken people and a broken world. People's faith (*fides*) must be engaged for this dynamic to come to its desired result. The efficacy of this salvation depends on the willingness of a person to receive (believe) the message. Faith is an enduring devotion and loyalty which marks the true follower of the Lord Jesus. It encompasses the conviction that the gospel is true (2 Cor. 13:5) It calls for total acceptance and absolute trust—betting your life on the Lord Jesus.

**Illustrative quote**—Robert Louis Stevenson once remarked: “I believe in God and if I woke up in hell, I would still believe in Him.”

Faith begins with receptivity, goes on to mental assent, and progresses to total reliance. Paul's phrase “to the Jew first and then to the Gentile” simply references the New Testament pattern of offering the gospel first to the lost sheep of Israel in the Lord's ministry (see Jn. 1:11) and then in the apostolic era (see Acts 13:45-46; 28:25, 28).

One of the most explosive things about the gospel is that it broke down barriers between human beings, specifically then between Jew and Gentile. God's saving power is no respecter of ethnic divides. God's covenant with Abraham was intended as the way the Creator would rescue the world and people from every trace of evil, corruption, and death.

Paul was not ashamed to preach the gospel. He might have felt intimidated moving from a remote province to the capital city of the Empire. Christians in that day certainly were not among the elite of Roman society. Rome had philosophers and philosophies aplenty. Why pay attention to fable of a Jew who came back from the dead? To think that a little Jewish tentmaker would have the cheek to preach

such a message to the mucky mucks of the world was humorous.

He lists his reasons for not being ashamed—

- Gospel's origin (1:16a)—it is the gospel of the Lord Jesus. It is a message from and about the very Son of God.
- Gospel's power (1:16b)—Paul was taking to Rome the power to change lives. Rome may have had military power, but down in its bowels it was a weak society. It was increasingly a dissolute society and culture.
- Gospel's outcome (1:16c)—it is the power of God unto salvation. Indeed, salvation is the major subject of this letter.
- Gospel's reach (1:16d)—to everyone who believes. God does not ask people to behave to be saved, but to believe.

**1:17**—This is the key text for the entire book. The word translated righteousness (*dikaiosune*) is used in one way or another (righteous, just, justified) over sixty times in Romans. God reveals a righteousness that is by faith. This verse has two puzzling expressions:

- “[A] righteousness that is by faith from first to last” (literally “from faith to faith”). Does this mean from the faith of the preacher to that of the hearer, or from Old Testament faith to New Testament faith, or entirely of faith (as the NIV takes the phrase), or from God's faithfulness to human faith?
- “The righteous shall live by faith” could also be translated “The one who is righteous by virtue of faith shall live.” This is a quote from Habakkuk. 2:4 which also appears in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. Romans explains “the just,” Galatians elaborates on “shall live,” and Hebrews discourses about “by faith.”

The term righteousness or justification (*dikaiosune*) is used by Paul in a way that differs significantly from its typical use in English. In our use, if we justify ourselves, we produce reasons to prove that we were right. If someone else justifies us, they produce reasons why we act properly. However, in Greek, that word does not mean to prove or make a person something but to treat, account, or reckon a person as something. Justification is to be rightly related to God. It means that God treats sinners like us as if we were not sinners at all. He does not treat us as bad people and enemies, but as good people and friends. This right relationship is not because we meticulously performed the works of the law, but because, by utter faith, we cast ourselves on the amazing mercy of God.

**II. Need for Salvation: Plight of Humanity Lost in Sin (1:18-3:20)**—Hear ye! Hear ye! The court is now in session. This portion of the book puts all humanity in the dock. It concludes that the riotous Gentile world is guilty (1:18-32), that the moral pagan and the Jew are guilty (2:1-3:8), and everybody is guilty (3:9-20). This is the mother lode of a formal accusation.

Right standing with God received by faith is the theme of the first part of the letter. Paul explains that this is necessary because sin has gained a stranglehold on all people (1:18-3:20). God's righteous anger and formal accusation stands over the Gentiles lost in their sin and idolatry (1:18-32). The Jews have even less excuse. Although they have the law, they do not obey it. Its possession and the outward mark of God's covenant (circumcision) avails them nothing (2:1-3:8). Paul concludes that all people, Jew and Gentile alike, are helpless slaves to sin and cannot be made right by anything they do (3:9-20). Paul's method strikes the modern mind as decidedly negative. However, people are not likely to yearn for

deliverance until they sense their dire need.

**A. For the riotous pagan (1:18-32)**—There is a correlation between the revelation of God's salvation in the gospel and His judgment of sin in history. Paul starts with the riotous people who embody the terrible corruption and perversion of human life. As he discusses this, the apostle is telling us that the degrading depths sin is itself a present judgment of sin by God.

**Illustration**—This section is like driving through a neighborhood you do not want to be in. Roll up your windows, lock your doors, and do not stop.

Years ago, I was on a business trip to the city in which I was born—Detroit, Michigan. My presentation for the conference concluded in the morning, my bosses kindly let me have the afternoon off to see my birthplace. I wanted to visit the hospital in which I was born. The Renaissance building where the conference was held was posh. The area where I was born was not that far away—and what a difference! It was like a war zone! It could not have been like when I was born. My mother walked to her job in the neighborhood until two weeks before my birth. Wow! What a change!

The ark of human history is not one of a bestial lunkhead turning from worshiping many gods into a conscientious monotheist. That is the myth of progressive humanity onward and upward. This is different. People began knowing the true God, turned from the truth desiring to be like God, and rejected Him. The self-sovereign ones were deceived into thinking they could replace the true Sovereign One. That central deception led to distorted thinking, darkened hearts, and shameful behavior. That deception and its sad consequences continue in our time.

**1:18-23—Suppressing the truth leads to distorted thinking, darkened hearts, and futile idolatry**—God's righteous anger (1:18) is expressed against human wickedness that suppresses the truth about God's character and work (1:19-20), which they completely distort in the darkness of their thinking and in their pursuit of false gods (1:21-23).

Because God is God, He is characteristically holy. He cannot tolerate sin. The wrath of God is His annihilating reaction against sin. Martin Luther spoke of God's love as God's own work, but of God's wrath as His strange work. The Old Testament prophets frequently warned the people of God's righteous anger (His wrath). The message was clear—there is a moral order to this world. God made things in such a way that to violate His laws, to break the moral order of the world, was to put yourself at peril.

The central problem is human rebellion. Paul begins a section of the letter in discussing this. Humanity in general, not just in particular obvious examples, is rotten inside and this rot reveals itself in corruption, disintegration, and decay. The rot first reveals itself, not in obvious corrupt behavior but in distorted thinking and in darkened hearts. We grow an expanding capacity for self-deception, thinking ourselves virtuous and wise. We easily deceive ourselves, especially when our own interests and desires are concerned.

We can make two types of mistakes in thinking about God's patience and final judgment of evil. First, that there is no glimmer of good in the world. We should punt on service, secure ourselves as we can, and wait for the end. Second, that evil is not really all that serious, a reality that can be confined. Oh,

never mind the generations of wickedness on an ever-growing scale. We will progress beyond it. A secular heaven awaits a world which refuses to recognize anything beyond it. In our current situation, our society seems locked into the second view. However, the gospel is clear. The situation is dangerously diseased and progressively so. It needs the radical treatment of an energized gospel.

**1:18**—A word about the wrath of God. To the modern mind this is an unacceptable concept. Many people think of divine wrath as uncontrolled human anger expressed in a savage and vengeful way. However, God's wrath is not malevolent and capricious. He does not lash out indiscriminately and wildly. His anger is not temperamental, but impartially just. Its object is twofold—the godlessness of humanity, a lack of reverence and an impiety that arrays people against God (1:19-27), and human wickedness and injustice toward other people (1:28-32).

Later in Romans, Paul will speak of God's patience with this ugly scene. What this expression of God's wrath means is that God will not let the types of activity and behavior that signal a creeping death from distorted thinking and darkened hearts go on indefinitely. That type of activity defaces and damages the world and the human beings that occupy it. God is good and must put things to rights.

**1:19-20**—Natural revelation, what can be known of God through the created order, leaves people without excuse. It is plainly set before people and understood by them. It is a constant testimony from the creation of the world, but a limited one. We can discern God's power and some aspects of His nature, but not His love and grace. Stoic philosophers agreed with Paul's assertion here that the nature of God was evident in the created order. Cicero even asserted that no race of humanity was so “uncivilized” as to deny the existence of the gods.

**1:21-23**—Paul begins to unfold humanity's descent. People do not glorify God or express thanksgiving to Him. Their failure to worship God or give Him His due reveals their distorted thinking and darkened hearts. Instead of true worship, we grow attached to idols, to non-gods of our own making.

Paul may have the mythology and idolatry of his own age in the back of his mind here. This grew out of the insistent need of people to recognize a greater power than themselves in the universe coupled with their refusal to grant any supreme being the place of supremacy. The sophisticated West does not worship carved gods of wood and stone, but we do bow down before money, sex, and power. When worship fails, humanity eventually, and often quickly, descends into injustice, where human society gets progressively out of joint. Truth becomes a casualty and people eagerly accept ever-changing, pedaled nonsense.

Idolatry is the final stage of the progression of sin's evil impulse in the human heart. The description of pagan idolatry uses Old Testament texts relating to Israel's idolatry (see Deut. 4:16-20; Ps. 106:20; Jer. 2:11). Is this a literary coincidence or a set-up for the argument for Jewish readers in Romans 2?

As for Gentile accountability for their wayward thinking and behavior, Jewish tradition taught that God had given seven laws to Noah after the flood for which all humanity was responsible. Jewish pride amplified this tradition, asserting that, unlike Israel who had to keep 613 commandments in the law (by rabbinical count), the Gentiles disobeyed even the seven laws of Noah.

**1:24-28**—**God gives them over to depraved desires that degrade their bodies**—The refrain “God

gave them over” (see 1:24, 26, 28) explains how God's righteous anger with sin works. People damn themselves as they warp their own humanity. As He did in the Old Testament, God gives people over to their own hardness of heart. From idolatry to immorality is one short step. If people are their own god or make their own gods, then they can make up the rules and do whatever they please. Self-deification often leads to an enslaving self-indulgence.

God permitted them to revel in their sin and reap its sad consequence. His righteous anger was not immediately satisfied by fire and brimstone but by abandoning people to their sinful ways. The repetition of the phrase “God gave them over” in 1:24, 26, and 28 is telling. Humanity out of joint is the result of God allowing people to follow their lusts wherever they may lead. He is serious about the structure built into the world and serious about the responsibility of humankind to nurture this. False worship born of distorted thinking and darkened hearts leads us down the path of a creeping death and the decay that results.

**1:24-25**—Sinful desires (*epithumia*) is a key idea in this passage. It means a reaching out after pleasure which defies reason. It is a passionate desire for forbidden pleasure; a craving that makes people do nameless and shameless things. Paul speaks of God abandoning people to these unclean desires which lead to debasing acts. The most terrible thing about sin is its enslaving power. Sin gives rise to further sin and to a debilitating downward spiral.

**1:26-27**—The age Paul described was one that to its travelers seemed—

- Out of control. Virgil, the Roman poet, wrote: “Right and wrong are confounded; so many wars the world over, so many forms of wrong; no worthy honor left to the plow ...” Tacitus, the historian, wrote: “I am entering upon the history of a period, rich in disasters, gloomy with wars, rent with sedition, savage in its very hours of peace ...” Livy, the historian, wrote: “Rome could neither bear its ills nor the remedies that might have cured them.” To Seneca, the age seemed “stricken with the agitation of soul no longer the master of itself.”
- An age of luxury—In Juvenal's words “Money, the nurse of debauchery ... and enervating riches sapped the sinews of the age with foul luxury.” Crime became the antidote to boredom until, as Tacitus said: “the greater the infamy, the wilder the delight.”
- An age of immorality—Clement of Alexandria, a third century believer, spoke of the typical Roman society lady as “girt like Venus with a golden girdle of vice.” Juvenal reported that Agrippina, the wife of the Emperor Claudius, left the royal palace at night and went down to the brothel out of sheer lust. “They show a dauntless spirit in those things they basely desire.”

The text takes aim at sexual sin. Greek men of the day were often bisexual. Not only was homosexual behavior approved, but in some cases (see Plato's *Symposium*), it was deemed superior. Elements of the culture of the day even socialized boys in that sexual direction. The Jews recoiled at this practice, disdaining it as a distinctly Gentile vice. The Jewish folk and Roman Christians would say a hardy “Amen” to Paul's discussion here.

Throughout his argument in this section of the book, Paul assumes a structure. He sees human beings created in the image of God and given charge over the rest of creation. God commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply, to celebrate our co-creative role in sexuality, and enjoy the life sustaining capacity of God's good world. We are to be stewards of this world, bringing order.

This helps explain why Paul focuses on homosexuality as a first instance of corruption. He is not saying that this practice is uniquely off base and always exploitative. He is saying that the distortion in the Creator's life-giving intention in heterosexual love indicates the beginning of a character-twisting idolatry. Homosexuality is seen as a sign that the world God intended is out of joint. This is certainly not the last word on homosexuality. However, we need to realize in the polemic and rhetoric that surrounds this topic in our modern world, that the Scripture is presenting a profound theology of what it means to be genuinely human and warning of our capacity for self-deception.

**1:29-32—Vice list; Behavior resulting from depraved thinking and desires**—When people banish God from their lives, they begin to take on certain characteristics. This passage is one of the most terrible descriptions of the kind of people they become. They not only lose any sense of godliness, but of their essential humanity as well.

Paul employs a vice list as a crescendo to this formal accusation of the pagans. Paul elaborates on the wickedness that the depraved mind produces. He describes the havoc in human relations when people suppress or deny the knowledge of God. The classification of this list of offenses eludes us and that reality is a testimony to the irrationality of sin and to its disordering effects. Note Paul's extensive list of descriptive terms.

- Wickedness (*adikia*)—If *dikaiosune* describes one who does justice, giving God and people their due, *adikia* describes the person who robs people and God of their proper rights.
- Evil or villainy (*poneria*)—This is more than badness. It entails the desire to do harm. It is callous cruelty; the active, deliberate will to corrupt and inflict injury. One of Satan's common titles is that of the evil one (*ho poneros*).
- Greed or the lust to get (*pleonexia*)—The spirit that grasps at things it has no right to take. It is predatory greed, the desire that knows no law, no boundaries.
- Depravity or viciousness (*kakia*)—This is the general word for badness. It is the degeneracy out of which all sins grow and in which all sin flourishes.
- Envy (*phthonos*)—Good envy reveals to people their weakness and inadequacy and make them eager to copy a good example. Bad envy is grudging, resenting the good example and desiring to tear it down. It is one of the most warped and twisted of human emotions.
- Murder (*phonos*)—Jesus immeasurably widened the scope of this word to include the spirit of sustained anger and hatred.
- Strife (*eris*)—This is contention born of envy, ambition, and the desire for prestige, place, and prominence. It is a God given gift to be able to take pleasure in the successes of others as in your own.
- Deceit (*dolos*)—The quality of the twisted mind, unable to act in a straightforward way. It describes the crafty cunning of those who are forever plotting and scheming.
- Malice (*kakoetheia*)—This is literally “having an evil nature.” The spirit that puts the worst construction on everything. The 17<sup>th</sup> century theologian, Jeremy Taylor, described this as a baseness of nature that takes things by the wrong handle and expounds things in the worst sense. Pliny, a first century Roman thinker, described it as an interpretation that maligns.
- Gossips and slanderers (*psithuristes* and *katalalos*)—The secret whisperer who delights in destroying other people's reputations.
- Haters of God (*theostugeis*)—One who would eliminate the God who limits his license to do whatever he wants.

- Insolent (*hubristes*)—This term composes both those proudly defiant of God and those who are wantonly and sadistically cruel. It is the type of pride that settles into a sadism that delights in hurting others simply for the sake of hurting them.
- Arrogant (*huperephanos*)—One who exudes the air of contempt and delights in making others feel small. Scripture clearly indicates that God resists such people (Prov. 3:34; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pt. 5:5).
- Boastful or braggarts (*alazon*)—The pretentious snob. The spirit that pretends to have what it has not.
- Inventors of evil (*epheuretes kakon*)—Those who seek new, obscure, or subtle vices because they have grown bored and need a new thrill.
- Disobedient to parents (*goneusin apeitheis*)—When the bonds of family are loosened or destroyed, wholesale degeneracy follows.
- Senseless (*asunetos*)—One who will not learn from experience.
- Faithless (*asunthetos*)—Essential dishonesty. People whose words are worthless.
- Without natural affections (*astorgos*)—*Storge* was the Greek word for family love. *Astorgos* is the negation of that family love. This was an age when family love was dying.
- Ruthless or pitiless (*aneleemon*)—This describes the spirit where the quality of mercy is gone.

The first set of these descriptors of sin—wickedness, evil, greed and depravity—are a broad and generic description of sin. The rest of the list in 1:29b-31 constitutes a thorough indictment of humanity denying and raising its fist at God. Romans 1:32 is stark! Not only do people do things that are shameful but approve and eagerly affirm others who do likewise. They applaud people for their vileness and wickedness. Instead of repenting of their misdeeds, they promote wrongdoing in a defiant revolt against God and any standard of behavior.

The line between good and evil runs, not between “us” and “them,” but down the middle of each of us. Paul shows us what life looks like when God lets us have our own way. Human thinking and behavior begin to deconstruct altogether. God's structure is built into the fabric of the world. Evil is inherently destructive, self-deceptive, and self-affirming. The conclusion of Romans 1 is the chilling sight of future death creeping into the present and casting its dark shadow.

**B. For the moral pagan and the religious Jew (2:1-3:8)**—Human inadequacy considering divine standards of judgment continue to characterize the discussion. In this section, the situation of the ethical person (or at least a self-styled ethical person) and/or the religious Jew are the focus just as the riotous pagan was in the previous section.

There is disagreement as to the intended audience for this passage. Some think Paul is addressing moral pagans in 2:1-16 and Jewish people in 2:17-3:8. Others think that the entire section is directed towards the Jews. They assert that Paul's discussion of the law in 2:12-16 makes sense if he is addressing Jews, but not if he is addressing Gentiles. In 2:17, he directly addresses his reader as a Jew.

The Jews thought they occupied a privileged position with God. God was the judge of the Gentiles, but the special protector of the Jews. Paul points out that the Jews were sinners like the Gentiles, and they would not be judged on the basis of their racial heritage but by the kind of lives they live. He reminds them of four things:

- that they were trading on the mercy of God.

- that they were taking the mercy of God as an invitation to sin rather than as an incentive to repent.
- that there was no most favored nation clause in God's scheme of things.
- that God would settle with each of us according to our deeds.

**1. Impartiality of judgment (2:1-16)**—God is kind but impartial. His judgment is not arbitrary or capricious, but principled and without favoritism. All will be judged fairly. No breaks. No payoffs. No inequity. He judges based on reality, not by appearances. He judges on what is done, not on the basis of good intentions or a theoretical ought. His kindness does not lead Him to skew the standard. He is the standard for a moral universe and if there is no consequence for doing wrong, then doing wrong becomes all right. The ultimate consequence of wrong not judged is a lawless universe, a permanent hell on earth.

Paul is preaching here in a lively diatribe style. That was a style of teaching used in ancient schools characterized by rhetorical questions and imaginary interlocutors. The upshot is that God demanded consistency and judged impartially (2:6, 11); to doers of good there will be future rewards (2:7a, 10b); to the wicked, there will be punishment (2:8-9).

Human beings throughout time have reflected, in puzzled fashion, how people can know the right thing to do and yet fail to do it. Repeatedly, people have deceived themselves into thinking that education and willpower can lead them to rise above it all and live a life of virtue that all truly sensible people aspire to. Nonsense is the apostle's verdict on this line of thought. You who sit in judgment on the benighted souls described in Romans 1 are without excuse because you secretly do (or yearn to do) the same things you condemn. God will indeed put things to rights, but in a completely impartial way.

**2:1-4**—The Jew and the pagan moralist would both agree in Paul's condemnation of the riotous lifestyle condemned in Romans 1. Seneca described Rome in his day as “a cesspool of iniquity” and the writer Juvenal called it “the filthy sewer into which the dregs of the empire flood”. However, the ethical person often fails to realize his own plight. They are so taken by the faults of others as to fail to observe their own shortcomings. They tend to understand evil as something “they” (those other people) are, but not “us.” The “righteous” concern of the religious or morally conscious person simply makes them even more fit for God's impartial judgment.

Philosophers viewed sin as moral folly but were puzzled by its presence in their lives and in others. Their thinking and their doing could not come together. The Jews had their 613 commandments, extrapolated from the Mosaic law, and prided themselves on trying to keep it. However, even the legalistic Jews had to admit that everyone sinned.

**2:4**—In this verse, Paul uses three rich words to describe God—

- Kindness (*chrestotes*)—this describes someone who is always kind.
- Forbearance (*anochē*)—This is the word for a truce, a cessation of hostility. But it has a limit. It is supplying a window of opportunity that will close.
- Patience (*makrothumia*)—A characteristic Greek word that speaks of patience with people. One who has the power to avenge but deliberately does not use that power.

**2:5-11**—This passage has the flavor of the Day of the Lord passages in the Old Testament (Isa. 2:6ff;

13:6, 9, 13; Ezek. 30:2-3; Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14-2:2; Mal. 3:2; 4:5). This judgment is based on the works of the law. This text does not teach salvation by good works, but that God's judgment is an impartial one. He judges according to our deeds, impartially and in truth. This impartial standard is precisely why salvation by grace is necessary. No one, Jew or Gentile, passes this impartial judgment. No one lives up to the strict standards of the law.

**2:12-16**—Paul speaks of how God's impartial judgment works. He speaks of the Jewish law, the Torah. The Gentiles did not possess that. Surely, Paul's Jewish kin would argue, the possession of God's law matters. Not if you do not keep it is the apostle's reply.

Paul goes on to describe a judgment based on what we do. A limited or selective obedience to God's revealed will not cut it. Paul is removing the flimsy edifice of humanly contrived righteousness based on human effort. What will occur in judgment is God's assessment of human beings laid bare of all their secrets and pretense (2:16).

Those who sin will be judged, whether apart from law or under law. On its face, this is radically different than what the apostle will proclaim in the very next chapter where he will wax eloquent on justification by faith. The contrast between judgment according to works and justification by faith is not one between a system by which God would have liked to operate and an alternative one He had to move to. It is a contrast between a future judgment based on works and a present anticipation of that verdict based on faith in the covenant faithfulness of God and the new humanity created in Jesus Christ.

To the point of setting things to rights. The world is not in the hands of a God blind to its rebellion. It is not subject to a God who is capricious and akin to so many human judges. Justice will prevail. The law did not give the Jews or anyone else an out. It only magnified their responsibility and their failure.

**2:14-15**—What are we to make of Paul talking about the Gentiles of doing by nature things required by the law and being a law for themselves? Is he suggesting that the ethical Gentile does not have a sin nature like the rest of humankind? Or is he suggesting that the Gentiles were not given the law and could allege that they did not know any better? Neither.

Paul answers, establishing two significant principles:

- We are judged by what we could have known. We will be accountable to the highest standards we know.
- Even those who did not have the written law, did have a convention in their hearts. They have an instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. There is in the very nature of our humanity and inbred sense of “ought.” The Stoics described this sense of ought as *phusis* (nature) and urged their followers to live *kata phusin* (according to nature).

The upshot is that the Jews would be judged by the law and the Gentiles by a God-given conscience. Both would fail the test.

**2. Jewish advantages to no avail (2:17-3:8)**—Human inadequacy considering divine standards of judgment is Paul's ongoing theme. He is demonstrating that all humanity is lost, having begun with the riotous pagan (1:18-32), continuing with upbraiding ethical and religious people by underlining God's impartiality (2:1-16), and now confronts the religious Jew head-on (2:17-3:8). Paul begins by speaking

to the advantages of the Jew in possessing the Law (2:19-24) and in the distinctive mark of circumcision (2:25-29). In both cases, those advantages are offset by Jewish boastfulness and fruitlessness. In 3:1-8, the apostle introduces a new factor in the discussion, that of Jewish failure to respond to God by trust and obedience which occasioned God's judgment of them. Jewishness is not a matter of racial identity at all, but of conduct. To be a real Jew is not a matter of pedigree, but of character.

**2:17-24—Obedience to the law, not its possession is what matters**—God had chosen Israel and given them His law to make them a beacon of light to the rest of the world. You see that in the Abrahamic Covenant, right from the beginning in Genesis 12 and in its various reiterations to the patriarchs. Israel failed in this task, indeed imploded, and separated itself from this task, despising Gentiles and others outside their ranks. They were not a conduit of grace to others, but a self-contained community of self-righteous legalists who had lost sight of their calling. Jewish practice had ossified in external and sanctimonious regulations, not in inner devotion. On the outside, some may have been ceremonially clean. But on the inside? The Lord's indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23, illustrated this issue perfectly. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5 (2:24) for the idea that instead of glorifying God among the Gentiles, the Jews were dishonoring Him. The pagans interacted with the Jews in daily life and were not fooled by outward devotion to the law.

**2:17-20**—Paul begins by citing the advantages of the Jew. He acknowledges that the Law provides knowledge of God and that its teachings are more beneficial than relying solely on one's own judgment. However, this advantage had caused the Jews to see themselves as superior to Gentiles. Paul proceeds to expose Jewish pride and boasting as utterly ridiculous.

**2:21-24**—In this passage, Paul says that there were Jews whose conduct dishonored Yahweh's name among the Gentiles. He confronts the Jews with the disparity between what they taught as the will of God and their own manner of life. Paul brings the testimony of the Jewish prophets to bear (Isa 52:5 and Ezek. 36:22 in 2:21-23), not to accuse all Jews of being adulterers and thieves, but to effectively undercut any Jewish boast of being a light to the world. Israel's continuing sin and legalistic evasions only confirmed the prophets' charge. Israel was indeed God's people, and the law was indeed holy and true. But something had misfired. Israel had failed in its vocation.

The Gentiles of the day at times accused the Jews of atheism (*atheotes*). They were challenged by a religion without visual images of worship. The Jews were also accused of being having contempt of their neighbors (*misanthropia*) and of not being sociable (*amixia*) because of their separatism. Pagans would later make the same charges of the early Christians.

Jewish attitudes towards the Gentiles compounded these negative perceptions. The Jews of the day were a closed stock, having failed in their responsibility in the Abrahamic Covenant to be a blessing to the world. Jewish privileges at Roman law only made things worse—

- The Jews were allowed to transport the Temple tax to Jerusalem each year, something of an exception to the taxing power of the sovereign Roman state.
- They were, to some extent, allowed to have their courts and live according to their own religious law.
- Rome respected the Jewish Sabbath even though the Gentiles generally regarded the custom of Sabbath observance as evidence of pure laziness.

- They enjoyed *astrateia*, an exemption from Roman military service largely because their Sabbath observance rights would make performing military duties on the Sabbath an impossibility.

Combine this with Jewish rebelliousness that would erupt into war in 66, one does not have to wonder much about the whys and wherefores of Jewish unpopularity in the first century.

**2:25-29—Circumcision of the heart, not the external rite is what matters**—Circumcision was the mark of the covenant God made with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation (see Gen. 17). It was the badge of Jewish identity for males. Indeed, the Gentiles were often reviled by Jews as “uncircumcised dogs”. The tragedy was that the Jews depended on this physical mark rather than the spiritual reality it represented (see Deut. 10:16; Jer. 9:26; Ezek. 44:9). God judges in accordance to truth and is not impressed by outward formalities and appearances.

Paul's point is that the badge could be deceptive. If a Jew broke the law, then the badge was worthless. The truth was that a disobedient Jew turned his circumcision into uncircumcision. Jeremiah had said the same thing centuries before (see Jer. 9:26), charging faithless Israel as being uncircumcised in heart. This outside/inside reversal works in the other direction as well. If those uncircumcised follow the law, they should be considered circumcised. Paul may be thinking of Gentiles who have the law written on their hearts by the Spirit, not because of their special, effective moral effort. Physical circumcision is irrelevant. What matters is the circumcision of the heart. One is a true Jew, not because of ethnic background or a physical mark, but because of the state of one's heart.

**2:25-27**—The Law was the major advantage of the Jew and circumcision was a symbol of that advantage. As with the law, the Jews were guilty of placing unwarranted confidence in this outward rite. Circumcision was a symbol of law observance, but if the observance is a mere facade, what value has the symbol? Possessing the symbol without the substance of observance just makes you a lawbreaker like all the others you so piously despise.

**2:28-29**—Paul continues by demonstrating that a true Jew was one inwardly and true circumcision involved that of the heart as well as outwardly and in physical terms. These verses anticipate the apostle's argument in Romans 8 concerning the inner transformation of the believer by the Spirit. There are many Old Testament texts supporting Paul's appeal for the circumcision of the heart (see Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26). In 2:29, Paul engages in a word play with the name “Jew”. “Jew” comes from “Judah”, which means “praise”. The Jews praised themselves for their outward conformity to the law. The important thing was not the praise of people, but that of God. Their externalized practice did not garner that praise.

**3:1-8—Summation and refutation of objections**—Paul engages with an imagined Jewish debater to bring home his argument. Three queries are raised:

- What advantage then has the Jew (3:1-2)? If the law merely heightens the stakes, then the possession of the law is a disadvantage. On the contrary, the law and circumcision were of great value. The Jews were given God's oracles and a symbolic rite. Possession of the Word of God and knowledge of what He wants is a great blessing. The problem is not the law, but Jewish inability (and ours!) to keep it. The issue is that Israel has been unfaithful to the covenant, not that God has been. In proper Jewish circles, being called a sinner was a severe insult. Paul will

go on and conclude that everyone is a sinner—a shocking insult to the primrose set.

- So Jewish unbelief cancels God's faithfulness to His covenant (3:3-4)? Paul says absolutely not but actually confirms and establishes it. Their lack of faith did not nullify God's faithfulness but underlined it. If some Jews did not have faith, that did not undermine God's faithfulness to the covenant. Paul cites Psalm 51:4 (3:4) where David finally confesses his sin and acknowledges his offense and that God and His standard was right all along. God is true to His covenant promises because He is true to Himself as the arbiter of what is right and good.
- If our faithlessness confirms God's faithfulness, why are we condemned (3:5-8)? The objector asserts that if Jewish unfaithfulness points out God's faithfulness even more clearly, then why should He punish them for showing off His character? Paul dismisses this argument in that its logic would prevent God from judging the world. The effrontery continues unabated. If Jewish falsehood arrays God's truthfulness in sharp relief and promotes His glory, then why should not the sinner be exempt from condemnation. This argument would undermine God's sovereignty and reward lawlessness—let us do evil that good may result. Paul dismisses this as unworthy. This is a specious reply, a species of sophistic argument, playing intellectual games rather than seeking the truth.

The Jews are in a special position in relation to God. However, that special position was one of special responsibility as well as special privilege. The Jews were missing that point. However, not all Jews were under condemnation. Paul never forgets the faithful remnant and he was sure that God's seeming rejection was not final. It should have been the Jews evangelizing the Gentiles. Actually, the reverse was to happen.

One can also perceive two universal human tendencies—that the root of sin is disobedience, and that people display an amazing ingenuity in justifying themselves. We need humility to genuinely confess our sins.

**C. All fall short (3:9-20)**—These verses summarize Paul's argument that all humanity falls short of what God requires. Both Jew and Gentile are under condemnation. Everyone is in the dock. The entire human race is accountable to the Sovereign Lord and deemed guilty as charged. Paul cites Old Testament references (3:10-18) to highlight human sin and its pervasive impact on all aspects of life. When human reality is assessed against divine standards, it leaves no room for pride or boasting, only a reflective silence that acknowledges implicit culpability. The practical result of seriously considering the Law's requirements or the "ought" of one's conscience is to become conscious of sin (3:19-20). The best avenues of contemplating humanity apart from Christ only deepens one's sense of failure and of one's need for the gospel.

We are all guilty. No one can obey God's law and do what is right. It is true that "the doers of the law shall be justified" (2:13), but nobody can do what the law requires. God must save us by another means. Paul concludes this section with our excuses muted, our mouths stopped, guilty as charged in the dock. We must stand silent before Him as sinners for Him to work our salvation by His grace. If we excuse ourselves, defend ourselves, or commend ourselves, we cannot be saved by His grace.

**3:10-18**—Paul employs a common rabbinical practice called *charaz*, which means stringing pearls. He uses quotes from the Psalms (5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; and 140:3) and Isaiah (59:7-8) to summarize the terrible result of sin upon humanity—

- character mired in ignorance, indifference, crookedness, and uselessness.
- tongues that are destructive, deceitful, and malignant.
- conduct characterized by oppression, injury, and insatiable greed.

No one can claim exemption from this all-encompassing condemnation.

Paul employs a rabbinical practice called *gezerah shavah* which links Old Testament text by a key word in those texts. All the verses quoted mention body parts: throat, tongue, lips, and mouth (3:13-14, quoting, respectively, Ps. 5:9; 140:3; 10:7); feet (3:15-17, quoting Isa. 59:7-8); and eyes (3:18, quoting Ps. 36:1). The list affirms what theologians describe as total depravity. This does not mean human beings are as bad as they can be, but rather that their entire beings are adversely affected by sin.

**3:19-20**—The practical result of dealing seriously with the law is to become conscious of sin. Whenever human achievement is measured against what God requires, there is no place for boasting but only the silence of the guilty. The best revelation of God to humanity apart from Christ only deepens one's awareness of human failure.

**III. Justification: The Imputation of Righteousness (3:21-5:21)**—Paul moves from a description of justification (3:21-26) to its availability only through faith (3:27-31) to the Old Testament illustration of justification by faith in the cases of Abraham (4:1-5) and David (4:6-8). Then he turns to the promise to Abraham and points out that it came apart from circumcision (4:9-12) and apart from Law (4:13-17). He concludes by asserting that Abraham's faith is the standard for every believer (4:18-25).

This section (3:1-4:25) and the next one (5:1-21) are the biblical heartland for the doctrine of justification by faith. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner to be righteous in Christ based on Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. It is an act, not a process. It is something that God does, not us. It is a declaration of right standing and being before salvation becomes a process of conforming our lives to be more like Christ. Justification and sanctification are two aspects of our salvation. Justification is a legal declaration and is solely of God. God sees us as being in the right because we are in Christ. Sanctification is a process in which God by His Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ. Sanctification is a co-laboring process. We bring ourselves to the anvil of the Spirit for God, by His Spirit, to mold us into shape. That co-laboring, molding process is a lifelong one.

**A. Justification described (3:21-31)**—God's method of bringing people into a right relationship with Himself is apart from law. Law operates not to justify but to bring the consciousness of sin. This manner of being rightly related to God operated in the Old Testament long before the Savior appeared, a reality Paul will elaborate on in the next chapter.

Paul uses a term from the law courts—justification (*dikaioisune*). Though we are responsible for our actions, God, in great mercy, considers us as if we were innocent. There is sacrifice involved. Jesus Christ, by His life of obedience and His substitutionary death out of love, made one sacrifice to God which truly atoned for human sin. Paul speaks of deliverance from the slavery of sin. We were held in the power of sin and only Jesus could free us from it.

**3:21-24—Unveiling of God's covenant justice**—Paul has been building an argument of the covenant unfaithfulness of the Jewish people. The bearers of the solution to the world's problem turned out to be

part of the problem. God had called Abraham (Gen. 12) to undo the problem caused by Adam's sin (Gen. 3) and to get the original creation (Gen. 1-2) back on track. Faced with a world gone wrong, God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Israel) to get things right. However, the covenant people had gone rogue. So, there is a two-pronged problem here. God's justice required calling wrong what it is. If wrong is all right, then we live in a lawless universe, a hell on earth. However, in that judgment, how can God Himself be faithful to His covenant?

Jesus is the faithful Israelite who would offer God the faithful obedience Israel should have offered but failed to do. Foundational to this line of thinking is that Messiah Jesus represents His people, so that what is true of Him is true of them. The result is redemption, a word used for buying back a slave from the slave market, or an object from the pawn shop. This redemption provides what guilty people in the dock could hardly hope for—not just pardon, but a verdict of being “in the right”. But how can God do such a thing? How can He declare guilty people to be in the right, here and now, long before the final day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed?

**3:24**—The concept of justification is without doubt the leading doctrinal contribution of Romans. The Greek is from the law courts, meaning to “acquit.” However, the term has a more positive side as well, that of considering or declaring someone to be right with God. God not only acquits guilty sinners but declares them to be rightly related to Himself. The background to this declaration is important. God sees the believing sinner as being “in Christ.” Believers do not have a righteousness of their own, but one operative through faith in Christ.

The Old Testament picture pointing to this was the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Two goats were offered at the altar. One was slain and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The priest took the other goat, confessed the sins of the people over it, took it into the wilderness, and set it free to symbolize the carrying away of sin. Psalm 103:12 states: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

**3:25-26—Jesus' death reveals God's covenant justice**—Paul speaks of the “sacrifice of atonement” (*hilasterion*). The divine retribution for sin is addressed through the provision made by God in the sacrificial offering of His Son. This propitiation for sin is required by God's justice. He exercised forbearance in passing over sins previously committed in the ages before Christ's sacrificial death. This was not due to sentimentality but to His merciful recognition that justice would be done in due season.

Paul shifts to the language of temple sacrifice. God put forth Jesus, the way a priest would place the shewbread on the altar of the Temple (see Lev. 24:8). Jesus is where, and how, God of Israel meets with His people and forgives their sins. Forgiveness is affected through the blood of Jesus. His sacrificial death is at the very heart of God's saving plan.

The best way to understand all this is through the picture of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. God accomplishes redemption while being faithful to His age-old covenant plan. God's covenant justice is putting forth Jesus to take upon Himself the anger and wrath of God against sin of which Paul spoke in Romans 1. This justice also declares, in the present, that all those who believe the gospel are in the right. They will be proven right in the future. Thus, in the death of Jesus, God has shown Himself—

- to be in the right in dealing with sin properly and impartially.
- to be faithful to the age-old covenant.

- to have dealt with sin properly and not just fudged the issue.
- to be committed to saving those who call out in sincere but helpless faith.

**3:27-31—God of both Jew and Gentile**—This marks the end of the way of human achievement. People can never put themselves in a right relationship with God by their effort. All grounds for boasting and smug self-satisfaction are eliminated, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul says this strengthens the law, moving the motive for obedience from fear to love. This also opens onto his argument later of a new power to obey—the Holy Spirit within.

God gave Israel Torah, the holy, just, and good law. Israel was to keep Torah and those who did would be vindicated as God's people when God acted in history to judge the nations. A people marked out in advance, reckoning in the present who would be vindicated in the future, was understood by the Jews as restricted to the Jews. In addition, it was understood as having restrictions within Israel as well. The Pharisees, the Essenes, and other various Jewish groups thought their sects would be vindicated and only those in the sects who kept the law properly by the group's estimate would be included. This was the idea of justification by the works of the law and how that played out in Judaism. Paul's word for this mindset was “boasting” and he says that the gospel rules this out.

Paul is touting justification by faith. Individuals who affirm their belief in the gospel of Jesus are considered members of God's covenant family, having received forgiveness for their sins. They are the ones marked out in advance of the verdict of the last day as being God's people and thus “in the right.” They are the true people of Abraham, the people of Messiah Jesus. The badge of this reality is not a physical mark but faith in Christ Jesus. Both Jews and Gentiles must come this way and are on an equal footing.

In this God does not abolish the law but sets it to a new tune. The law could not be fulfilled by works. It requires faith in Jesus Christ.

**B. Abraham as Illustrating Justification by Faith (4:1-25)**—What's with Abraham? Why does Paul suddenly want to talk about Abraham? For three reasons—

- Abraham was the founder of the Jewish race and considered to be a pattern of what an individual should be.
- Abraham embodied the lesson Paul was seeking to prove—that what makes us right with God is not the performance of the works of the law (which we can never really do) but the simple trust which takes God at His word and believes what He says. He loves us even though we have done nothing to deserve that love.
- Abraham was the embodiment of what a faith that works looks like. It was not Abraham's meticulous performance of the law that put him in a relationship with God, but his simple trust in God. Abraham did not have the law. Only centuries later, did Moses receive it. The Jewish rabbis, infatuated with their theory of works justifying themselves, insisted that Abraham was chosen because he knew the law by anticipation even though biblical evidence of that was completely absent.

This chapter is a Jewish midrash or commentary on Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” If anyone was righteous by Jewish traditional lore, it was Abraham. Extrabiblical Jewish traditions had Abraham as a model Pharisee long before there were Pharisees. He

also was a model proselyte, by tradition bringing Gentiles to the true God. He destroyed idols, standing for God's truth. Some Jews believed that Abraham's merit protected and saved Israel in later generations.

**1. Basic case stated (4:1-8)**—The backbone of Paul's argument is Genesis 15:6. Abraham believed God and God credited him with righteousness. He was believing God for a natural heir. God promised him an incredible progeny and the old saint took God at His word.

Genesis 15 is the chapter in which God solemnly reiterates His covenant promise to Abraham, a promise of an extraordinary family. What follows is a ceremony, and a weird ceremony at that, that establishes this covenant. How was “being in the right” credited to Abraham? Not by the works of the law. The law had not been given and would not be for several centuries. Not by a physical mark. Abraham was circumcised in Genesis 17, well over a decade later. Abraham was credited with righteousness because he believed in God. He started as a pagan, without the law or the sign of the covenant, and came to God by faith, not by any work or rite.

The word “counted” or “credited” is a banking term, Romans 4 uses the term is used eleven times, variously translated as “credited” or “reckoned” (4:4, 9-10), “imputed” (4:6, 8, 11, 21-24), and “counted”.

**4:6-8**—This is a head-scratcher. Paul is quoting Psalm 32:1-2 as concerning the reckoning of righteousness apart from works. But the passage quoted speaks of offenses forgiven and of sins covered. David repents of his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. In Psalm 32:2, he says: “Blessed is the man whose sin ... is not counted against him.” The Greek word for “credit” (quoting Gen. 15:6 used in 4:3) and “count” (quoting Ps. 32:2 used in 4:8) is the same. Paul is utilizing the Jewish rabbinical practice of *gezerah shavah* or analogy, which links different texts containing the same key word or phrase. This was an interpretative practice that in situations where the same word occurs in two or more passages of Scripture, the sense in one may be used to explain the meaning in the other.

What is the upshot? In the case of Abraham, “being in the right” came by faith, not works. In the case of David, staying in the right (i.e. being forgiven for egregious offense) comes freely by God's grace. Under the law, David had no escape. The penalty for adultery and a degree of homicide was clear—the death of the perpetrator. David was completely dependent on God's mercy. Paul is extrapolating here. Sin in a believer's life does not cancel his or her justification.

**2. Promise apart from circumcision (4:9-12)**—Paul now addresses the Jewish sign of right relatedness, the mark of the covenant in circumcision. In doing so, he appeals to another Jewish interpretative principle, context. For the Jews, the blessedness that Paul is describing was confined to the circumcised. Paul dissents, pointing out that Abraham was declared righteous by faith fourteen years prior to being circumcised (Gen. 15:6; 16:15-16 to 17:1; 17:24-25). This fact challenged the weight allotted to circumcision in Jewish thinking. Here, Paul is arguing that believing uncircumcised Gentiles can claim Abraham as their father on the simple basis of their common faith. This sign was given after the covenant was established. Abraham's faith, not the physical sign of circumcision, was what God calculated in crediting Abraham as being in the right.

Therefore, circumcision is not essential to belonging to the covenant family. Abraham is the father of both those circumcised and uncircumcised. This both broadens and narrows the reach of the family. It opens covenant ties to Gentiles who believe in the gospel as well as Jews. It also narrows family. The Jews are not automatically included. The law, circumcision, the Temple rituals, and cultic apparatus were not the ticket to ride.

That argument here would have punched a good Jew in his religious gut. It is one thing to say that uncircumcised Gentiles could be saved if they kept the seven Noahian laws of rabbinical tradition. It was quite another to put Jew and Gentile on the same level as Paul was doing in this passage. The way to God is not through national or racial identity, not through any law or physical mark on someone's body, but by faith which takes God at His word and depends solely on His grace. Abraham was not the father of those who were circumcised, but the father of those who believed God. Real Jews were those who trusted God as Abraham did. Abraham, properly understood, is the father of the faithful.

**3. Promise apart from law (4:13-17)**—Paul moves on to say that Abraham's reckoning as being in the right was apart from any legal consideration. This is a key idea. The need to keep the law as a condition for receiving the grace of reconciliation would first, pit the God of grace against the impartial God of judgment, and second, it would doom everyone, since no one is able to fully keep the law. Being credited as right comes from faith and grace, not from legal or ritual practice. The covenant and its promises were not made on the basis of circumcision or on the basis of Torah. God's covenantal justice was always intended to put the whole of creation to rights because of faith.

God promised Abraham that he would become a great nation and that through him all families of the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). That promise came because of the faith he displayed in God. The promise was dependent on two things—God's grace and Abraham's faith. The Jewish attitude of acquiring merit by the works of the law destroyed the basis of the promise for if the promise depends on keeping the law, it can never be fulfilled. Indeed, the law moves us to desire the very thing it forbids. Stolen fruits are the sweetest. Whenever law is front and center, transgression is not far behind. With transgression comes God's righteous anger for His character is the standard for a moral universe.

**4:13**—Two Greek words for promise come to the fore. *Huposchesis* means a promise with conditions. *Epaggelia* is an unconditional promise. God's promise is of the second type. It is dependent on God's own generous heart, not on our merit. In addition, the Hebrew word for “land” also can mean “earth.” Abraham was promised the land. This expanded in Jewish thought as expressed here by Paul into the belief that Abraham and his descendants would inherit the entire world to come.

**4. Abraham's faith as the standard for every believer (4:18-25)**—Abraham's faith becomes the standard for all believers. Here, Paul goes again to the Old Testament to make his argument. Abraham believed God's promise of an heir of his own flesh even though He and Sarah were long past their child-bearing years. Abraham did indeed have a moment of hesitancy with respect to this promise (see Gen. 17:17), but that moment passed without any consequences for him. Indeed, his circumcision and that of his whole household shows his trust in the God of the promise (Gen. 17:23-27). In the end, the old patriarch believed that the Lord God could do the impossible.

Faith is at the heart of Abraham's family. Faith in God who promised to do impossible things and then accomplished them. In Abraham's faith and that of his successors, humans are restored and can

discover a truly human life. Unfaithful humans ignored the Creator (1:20, 25); Abraham believed Him (4:17). Unfaithful humans knew about God's power, but did not worship Him (1:20). Abraham recognized God's power and trusted Him to use it (4:21). Unfaithful humans did not give God glory (1:21); Abraham did (4:21). Unfaithful humans dishonored their own bodies in worshiping false gods (1:24); Abraham worshiped the God who gives life and was given procreative power even though he was long past the age for fathering children.

God reckons as forgiven, with immediate effect, the sins of those who believe in Jesus and are members of the covenant family (3:21-31). Now, akin to the faith of Abraham, God gives us, who believe in Jesus Christ, new life as we recognize that our lives are in God's hands and trust Him to carry this new creation through to its conclusion.

**4:23-25**—Both Abraham and Sarah were long past the child-bearing years. They did not fulfill the promise. God did something special in enabling this old couple, long past their reproductive years, to have a child. This text applies the lesson to us. Being right is based on what God has done in Christ and applied by believing in Him. We must believe in the God who acts for us and in so doing reckons us as being in the right. We believe in Christ who died for our sins, a forensic reality that is the basis of our justification and of our inauguration into the new humanity in Christ. We are raised to life in Christ, a living relationship with Christ in which we regain and will regain all that was lost in the Fall.

The last verse (4:25) has Isaiah 53 once more in the background. The prophetic promise has come true; Abraham's faith vindicated; the law fulfilled; human idolatry, sin, and death decisively dealt with. God sent His son as the Messiah, Israel's faithful representative, to do for Israel and for us what we could not do for ourselves. Believers in the gospel are assured that they are the people of the new covenant, the world-wide family promised to Abraham.

**C. Benefits of justification described (5:1-11)**—Can rebellious humanity really have a familiar friendship with God? Our thoughts, emotions, and actions have been warped by defiance and idolatry. Surely, establishing a familiar friendship with this perfect Being would be difficult and awkward to maintain. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Paul now draws out the significance of being rightly related to God both for the present earthly life and for the future judgment. Peace with God and reconciliation with Him is a secure hope for vindication in the day of judgment.

Through Jesus we have an introduction (*prosagoge*) into the grace which we stand. The word was used for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty. Jesus opens the door to the throne room of the sovereign God and what we find is grace and undeserved kindness, not condemnation, judgment, and vengeance. We have glorious hope! By grace, we have—

**5:1**—Peace with God. On the cross, mercy and truth met, righteousness and peace embraced (see Ps. 85:10). God has declared us as being in the right in Christ and the law cannot condemn us. Moderns think of peace in terms of personal tranquility. Here the idea centers on concord between God and the believer.

**5:2a**—Access to God in Christ. We have the right of approach to Majesty. When He died, The Temple veil was torn (Lk. 23:45) and the Temple dividing wall broke down (Eph. 2:14). In Christ, believing Jews and Gentiles have access to God (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 10:19-25).

**5:2b**—Glorious hope. Peace with God takes care of past hostility. Access to God takes care of the present. Hope of the glory of God takes us to our glorious inheritance.

**5:3-5**—As soon as Paul says these things, he realizes that, in this life, Christians are often up against it. Our sufferings, troubles, or tribulations (*thlipsis*) express the pressures of life—material want, difficult circumstances and people, sorrow, in your face persecution, unpopularity, and loneliness. The English word “tribulation” comes from the Latin *tribulum*. This was a heavy piece of timber with spikes in it used to thresh grain. It separated the grain from the chaff. Philosophers in Paul's day emphasized that hardships proved the quality of wise people. The Old Testament and Jewish tradition revealed that God tested and matured people by trials. As we go through tribulations, depending on God's grace, the trials purify us, getting rid of our fleshly chaff.

These troubles or sufferings produce a litany of virtues—fortitude, character, hope. In this discussion. Paul employs the rhetorical device called concatenation. We rejoice in the hope of glory, but also in the sufferings that accompany it. Elsewhere, Paul stresses that our sufferings are an extension of the sufferings experienced by Christ in His days in the flesh (Rom. 8:17; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24).

These sufferings produce an assortment of benefits. First, perseverance, fortitude, or steadfast endurance (*hupomone*). *Hupomone* is more than mere endurance. It is the spirit that overcomes the obstacles before it.

**Illustration:** Beethoven, when threatened with deafness, the most terrible of troubles for a musician, remarked: “I will take life by the throat.” That is *hupomone*.

This fortitude produces character (*dokime* = tested value). *Dokime* referred to metal purified by fire, removing all impurities. What emerges from the fires of adversity is genuine Christian hope. Hope speaks of character that endures and rises to meet the challenge before it. We do not like crises, but we can appreciate the opportunities crises present. Our hope is in the love of God which is not an illusion. The Spirit within is that love's confirmation. In this litany of terms, Paul underlines that we have access by faith into this grace of God. Faith tested is better than faith.

**5:6-11**—That Jesus died for us is the ultimate proof of God's love. The wonder of it is that Jesus died for us when we are sinners and in a state of hostility to God. Love can go no further than that. Jesus' death reconciles us with God. By His life in the power of the Spirit we are to grow in that relationship. Our status change needs to be accompanied by our change of state.

**5:5-8**—As we wait for our glorious hope, God pours His love out into our souls. Paul highlights God's love by contrasting the immense value of Christ's sacrifice with the unworthiness of its beneficiaries. He gave His dearest to rescue the neediest. Four times in three verses the phrase “die for” or “die on behalf of” (*hyper*) expresses the substitutionary character of Christ's death. Surrounded by God's love and generosity, we breathe the fresh air of our regeneration.

We are beloved of God. When we believe in the good news about Jesus, we are assured in the present that we belong to the covenant family. Our sins are forgiven, and we are already assured of the verdict of being in the right before God when we are in the future dock. In our culture of easy-going relativism, this appears either arrogant or irrelevant. Arrogant because their gauge is a law-side analysis that draws

a knowing sneer or irrelevant because a loving God (if He even exists) would never judge anyone. Forget clever answers to these objections. Wallow in the personal love of God which enables us to make such wonderful claims.

**5:9-10**—We have salvation from future wrath. If God saved us when we were enemies, how much more will He keep on saving us now that we are His children. If God would do this for us when we were in the throes of outright rebellion, will not that same God of grace save us completely.

**5:11**—We have reconciliation with God. Atonement means restoring a progressively familiar friendship. Apart from law, and purely by grace, we have a salvation that takes care of the past, the present, and the future. Christ died for us. Christ lives for and in us. Christ is coming again for us. Through His death, we are reconciled, and our salvation is fully realized by His life working within us both individually and collectively. The Father invites us to be true reflections of him, true image bearers of God.

**D. Applicability of justification: death in Adam/life in Christ (5:12-21)**—Paul compares and elaborates on creation in Adam and the new creation in Christ. This is the standard Jewish argument of *qal vahomer* (how much more). All who were in Adam by birth became sinners; all who are in Christ by the new birth become righteous. However, that new birth introduces a far richer vein than the original birth. We are destined to share in Christ's life, death, resurrection, exaltation, and reign. The inheritance we receive in Christ is far more than the liability we received through Adam.

Adam exercised dominion over the old creation, he sinned, and he lost his sovereign domain. Because of Adam's offense, all humankind is under condemnation and under the law of sin and death. Christ came as the sovereign of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). By His obedience in going to the cross, He made those who believe right. He not only undid the damage of Adam's sin but accomplished “much more” by making those who believe the very children of God, destined to be heirs with Him in glory. 1 Corinthians 15:22 succinctly summarizes Paul's argument here: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive”. Note the repeated phrases in this passage. “One” appears eleven times. “reign” or its kin five times as is the phrase “much more.”

But is it fair for God to condemn all for one man's offense? First, let's get off the cloud and talk turkey. Had God tested any of us, the result would have been the same. We all sin in the likeness of Adam's offense. We all set ourselves up as our own little god, going our own way. We all sing a version of “But I Did It My Way.” But Paul pressed beyond this. Humanity is depicted as being in solidarity with Adam, and when Adam committed a sin, humanity is considered to have sinned as well because it was represented by him. The principle of solidarity is illustrated in Hebrews 7:9-10, where Levi is described as paying a tithe through Abraham to Melchizedek. The crucial point is the idea of being a representative of humankind. By condemning all through the sinful offense of one, God was able to save all who believe through the faithful sacrifice of one.

**5:15-17**—Paul's thought is this: by the sin of Adam, all human beings became sinners and were alienated from God; by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, many are restored to a right relationship with God. He restates this idea in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. Paul sees Adam as the head of old humanity. He was one with all humanity and because of this solidarity, his sin was the sin of all. This has caused much discussion and a number of suggestions of what the apostle means:

It has been interpreted by some that Adam's sin serves as a representation of the sin inherent in all human beings.

- Some have taken this to mean that Adam was the representative of humanity and humanity shares in the deed of its representative. Others push back at this, asserting that a representative must be chosen by the people he represents and that was not the case with Adam.
- Others say humanity inherits the proclivity to sin from Adam. In Adam, humanity is *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin).
- Others assert that what Paul is saying is that all humanity sinned in Adam and that death is the direct consequence of this sin.

Note another aspect of Paul's thought. Death is the direct consequence of sin—Adam sinned when he disobeyed a direct command of God, and he died. The law did not come until centuries later in the time of Moses. Can there be sin without the breaking of law? Paul has already made that argument with the Gentiles earlier in Romans, when he noted that people have an internal law of the ought, their conscience. However, he is not making that argument here but noting that death reigned among people who lived between Adam and Moses. Sin counted against them because of humanity's solidarity with Adam.

Critics assert that the argument has a serious flaw. Assuming the literal truth of Adam and Eve, in the Fall, humanity had no choice whatever. However, our union with Christ is something we accept or reject. It is voluntary, not mandatory. People have wrestled with Paul's argument here throughout the ages. However, the central idea is that of the representative. Adam, the federal head of old humanity acted in a way that affected all. Christ, the federal head of the new humanity acted in a way that affected all the new humanity. By what Christ is, what He did, and what He gives, He enabled people to escape a hopeless situation dominated by sin. Indeed, humanity was ruined by sin and rescued by Christ.

The point of solidarity is important because believers have a solidarity with Jesus Christ in His deliverance. If one laments inheriting a sinful nature from Adam and being accountable for it, they are reminded of the “much more” of our solidarity with Christ. What is true of Messiah Jesus, in its full scope of death, resurrection, exaltation, and reign, is true of His brethren. The resemblance between Adam and Christ is in this solidarity. Each communicated to those whom he represented that which belonged to him (sin with respect to Adam, being in the right with respect to Christ).

**5:18-19**—In this text, Paul gives the comparison of humanity in Adam and humanity in Christ. In Adam, humanity's status is grim. It appears as a death mask of a once noble character, who through a life of folly and dissolution, shows unmistakable signs of decay. In Adam, we are not good people who sometimes do terrible things. We are flawed people whose flaws repeatedly reveal themselves in specific sins.

Christ's one act of righteousness brought justification for all who are in Him. In Christ, humanity exhibits life and promise. This new humanity is let loose in the world through the upright life and death of the Lord Jesus. Adam's disobedience involved a grasping after equality with God. In stunning contrast, God's own unique Son, did not grasp for anything, but humbled Himself to the point of accepting death on the cross.

Does this sweeping language imply that all of humanity will be justified? Does it suggest that no one will be lost? No. Paul is not contradicting himself, for he has already presented people as perishing because of sin (see 2:12). His entire presentation of salvation emphasized that justification is granted only based on faith. The upshot is clear. Only those found in Christ can be deemed right.

**5:20-21**—These verses are really an extension of his thought in Romans 3:20, that through the law we become conscious of sin. Paul is saying that only when sin is seen in its maximum and true expression can we genuinely appreciate the extent of divine grace. The law is indeed a revelation of God's will and serves to restrain evil in the world, but it is not the beginning of the new humanity. When Torah arrived in Israel, far from marking the start of the new humanity, it intensified the problem of the old humanity. The law draws attention to sin and what sin is, but by itself it is powerless to do anything about it. God has found a new way to deal with this inability of the law, which Paul will elaborate on in 8:1-11 and 10:5-9.

Another contrast comes in 5:21. “Sin reigned in death” pictures an abstract power taking hold of the world. Its tyrannical rule destroys the world bit by bit. This contrasts with the reign of grace, energetic and full of new possibilities. God's faithful covenant justice accomplishes this. A new form of human existence has emerged due to the faithfulness of the living God to His covenant, which aims to restore order to the world. The death of Jesus put into action God's redemptive love (5:8) and was an act of faithful obedience through which, as always envisioned by the covenant, sin and death were defeated and grace and life unveiled in their wake.

**IV. Sanctification: Imparting Righteousness (6:1-8:39)—How we are set apart to God**—Paul has been discussing why we need salvation, what God has done to bring it about, and how we can get on board with God's program and purpose. He has spoken of sin, condemnation, and of Christ's work, faith, and justification (making us right). But we are still living in a fallen world and have an old master to contend with who desires to deceive us and enslave us all over again. What divine resources help us to contend with sin as we live our lives in Christ?

That is the subject of the next three chapters. This involves regeneration, the point where justification takes place. That is God's declaration that the believer has the status of being right in Christ. However, God is after our actual state or condition and not just our status. That reforming process is described as sanctification and begins with the reality of that word's meaning – our being set apart in Christ and His Spirit. This positional sanctification is basic to any progress in the Christian life. This process of sanctification reaches its consummation when we leave our sinful natures behind and we are fully conformed to the divine standard seen in the life of God's unique Son (8:29-30). We believe that that occurs at death (see Heb. 12:23) or at the return of Christ for those alive at that time (1 Jn. 3:2).

But what of the objection to God's free grace in justification? Why live up if the verdict is already in? Paul's answer is that in becoming a Christian one moves from one type of humanity (in Adam) to another type (in Christ). In becoming a Christian, you die and rise again in Messiah Jesus. Since the Messiah represents His people, all that is true of Messiah is true of His people. This is depicted in the rite of baptism. Thus, there is a change in our status which requires our recognition of that and for us to take actual steps in bringing our lives into line with the personal stand on the Resurrection ground on which we stand.

In Romans 6 through 8, Paul raises and answers three basic objections to justification by faith:

- If God's grace abounds when we sin, then let us continue sinning so we can experience more grace (6:1-14).
- If we are no longer under the law, then we are free to live any way we want (6:15-7:6).
- If your contentions are correct, then God's law is sinful (7:7-25).

These objections miss the point, going to the extremes of either legalism or license. In answering them, Paul explains how we can live lives of victory (Rom. 6), liberty (Rom. 7), and experience security (Rom. 8). He explains our relationship to the flesh, the law, and the Holy Spirit.

**A. Believer's union with Christ in death and resurrection life (6:1-23)**—Romans 6 is a bracing chapter. It gives us the framework for thinking about why Christian behavior matters, and how to put it into practice. The Lord's redeeming work is not only substitutionary, but also representative. Christians are identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. In this context, we are freed from any assertion that sin can dominate us. God has a plan for dealing with the power of sin as well as its guilt and they both entail our solidarity with the Lord Jesus. This chapter in a nutshell:

- Know the truth of your new identity in Christ.
- Consider/reckon/count it to be true in your daily life.
- Yield/present/offer yourself to God.

The question Paul is pressing goes to the heart of the spiritual battle. Why be enslaved to the rotten leeks and garlic of your Egypts of which you were ashamed? The influence of sin has ended, and the presence of the Spirit cascades within. Mortify the flesh in the energy of the Spirit by knowing that you have died to sin, reckoning that in the particulars of your life, and presenting yourself and yielding to the Spirit's control.

**1. Know—what we need to know to live right (6:1-10)**—The repetition of the word “know” (6:3, 6, 9) underlines that we need to process something to live as we should. The truth Paul is teaching is the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. We are identified with Adam in sin and condemnation, and now with Christ in righteousness and justification.

There are two types of humanity—those in Adam and those in Messiah Jesus. Once you have died with Christ, sin no longer has a claim on you. When we are in the Lord Jesus, what is true of Him is true of us. In addition, the future has come forward into the present in the person and achievement of Jesus, so that His followers already taste the reality of that future verdict in the dock while living in the present. We must know this. The talk and thought must be processed for the walk to truly begin.

Note how his argument develops:

|                                     |                                    |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Justification (3:21-5:21)           | Sanctification (6:1-8:39)          |
| —Substitution—He died for me        | —Identification—I died with Him    |
| —He died for my sin                 | —He died unto sin                  |
| —He paid sin's penalty              | —He broke sin's power              |
| —Righteousness imputed to my credit | —Righteousness imparted to my life |

We are in Christ. He is our representative head. What happened to Him, happened to us. This living union with Christ introduces a whole new dynamic to our lives.

**6:2-5**—Paul refers to the early church's practice of baptism by immersion as a symbolic representation of dying, being buried under water, and then rising again to new life. Early Christian baptism was closely tied to professions of faith. This new life is based on our identification, our union with Christ. We are no longer the old humanity in Adam, we are the new humanity in Christ.

**6:6-10**—We should not serve sin. Sin is a terrible master and finds a willing servant in our human flesh. The body is not sinful per se, but our sin nature allows sin a beachhead in our being (see Rom. 7:18). Knowing that we have died with Christ means that the body need not obey its old master Sin. Paul is describing a fact which we need to act on. Sin and death have no dominion over Christ. We are in Christ and therefore sin and death have no dominion over us. Christ died for sin and unto sin. He not only paid the penalty for it but also broke its power. But how do we make this fact a part of our life experience?

Jewish teachers believed that what they called the “evil impulse” would trouble even the most pious person until the time of Messiah. For Paul, the Messiah has arrived, breaking sin's power. The finished work of Christ means that the believer has already died to sin and now needs to acknowledge this.

**2. Consider/count/reckon—moving out on what we know (6:11)**—“Reckon” translates a word used over forty times in the New Testament. Almost half of those occurrences appear in Romans. It first appears in Romans 4. It can be translated “count”, “credited”, “reckon”, or “impute”. We are to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ. What God says in His Word about what happened at our conversion is now the experience we act on.

Reckoning doesn't create our union with Christ but makes it operative in our lives. This reckoning is in the present tense, an ongoing activity. Christians are dead and alive at the same time—dead to sin and self, but alive to God in the power of the Spirit. This is not an attempt to convince yourself of something unrealistic in terms of actual experience. There must be faith and willing cooperation. Believers must refuse to be cowed by sin and refuse obedience to its enticements. We are to present or offer ourselves to God and our capacities as instruments of righteousness.

“Reckon” was a bookkeeping term, used in calculating accounts, in working out profit and loss figures. In this reckoning we remember who we really are, so that we can act accordingly. Do not listen to those voices that tell you are still in Adam and should behave just like you used to. Resisting temptation is not a matter of pretending you would not find it easier to give in. It is a matter of thinking straight and acting on what you know to be true.

**3. Present/yield/offer (6:12-14)**—We are to serve a new master. The word translated present or yield or offer is used five times in this text (in 6:13, 16, and 19). It means to place at one's disposal, to present, to offer as a sacrifice. We are to yield ourselves to God by His Spirit. This is an act of the will based on the knowledge of what Christ has done for us and the deep desire that the freedom He won for us will be our actual measure.

**4. An exchange of masters (6:15-23)**—Paul is countering a common argument against salvation by grace. If God yearns to forgive us and His grace is sufficient to cover every stain and spot of sin, then why worry about sin? Why not just do what we want? Paul's argument in reply is to say that we have exchanged masters. The old tyrant of sin that led us to increasing bondage to our shame is

replaced by Christ, our new master. We were slaves to sin. Sin had us in exclusive bondage. Now God has exclusive possession of you. The old humanity tended to be lawless; it could not obey the law. Indeed, the law egged the old nature on to increasing lawlessness. Our exclusive possession by God leads to sanctification (*hagiasmos*), the road to holiness. It is a lifelong process.

We yield or offer ourselves to God by His Spirit out of gratitude for God's gracious kindness (6:14-15) and because we want our freedom (6:16-20). Whatever you yield to becomes your master. If we yield our members to sin, the old tyrant is back. To yield to sin only leads us deeper into sin's pigpen. It becomes increasingly difficult to do what we know is right. The story of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-24) illustrates this. First, he was a slave of wrong desires, then of wrong deeds, and finally a literal slave taking care of pigs.

Paul is arguing that with new freedoms, one gets new frameworks. The purpose of the new life, and the reason standards of behavior are necessary, is because God is putting the world to rights and wants His newborn children to be part of that work. Christians are to be people transformed from within and willing to conform to the teaching to which they committed. The early Christians developed certain basic traditions about the gospel itself (1 Cor. 15:3-8), about the Eucharist (1 Cor. 11:23-26), about behavior (1 Thess. 4:1). These rules set out frameworks of belief and behavior, a family code of conduct. They were to be willing bondservants of Jesus Christ and comport themselves in a way that honored His name.

**Illustration**—Luther when tempted crying out “I have been baptized!” This was his way of saying that he had a new master.

The objection that we are merely exchanging one bondage for another does not hold up. Sin's bondage is rigorous, relentless, and destructive. Its ways carry the reality and odor of death. Our new bondage leads to life and peace. Besides, we have no alternative. We either learn to live by the Spirit or return to the mire.

**6:20-23**—These rules and guidelines for Christian living are not there to squash us whether it is good for us. The rules are there because they are the rules of the road. It matters which road you take. To choose to live in sinful ways, you are choosing behavior that is destructive to those doing it and others around it. It already has the smell of death upon it. When people behave in patterns set out in the gospel and early Christian teaching, there are signs of life already at work. Christians were summoned to live in the present considering their future destination.

**B. Believer and the law (7:1-25)**—Paul's thought progresses. How do we deal with the flesh is the subject of Romans 6. That chapter explained that the believer's crucifixion with Christ has brought freedom from enslavement to sin. Now, he considers the Christian and the law. The law had served to promote sin. Paul's argument turns to show that Christ's death effected release of believers from the law. Emancipation from law permits a new attachment, namely to the risen Lord in the power of His Spirit.

The main subject of Romans 7 is not the Christian life per se, but the law. Paul seeks to describe the purpose of the law, its role in accomplishing its intended function, and its fulfillment through the actions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He also wants to explain that the law itself could not give the life it

promised but was bound to work against that very life. The gospel has made a transition from the covenant family defined by the law to the covenant family defined by the Messiah and the Spirit.

Two extremes raise their heads. License asserts that being saved by grace allows individuals to live as they please. Legalism posits that while salvation may be achieved through grace, individuals are expected to obey the law. Paul answers the first group in Romans 6 and the second group in Romans 7. Learning to know, reckon, and yield, we begin to have victory over the habits of our flesh. Then we see deeper into our own hearts and discover how sinful we are. God's law takes on new power and we begin to wonder if we can ever do good. We begin to see the sin problem within. Trying to please God legalistically, often leads us to pretending or abandoning the pursuit of righteousness. In addition, a legalistic emphasis often makes people judgmental and extremely hard on other people.

**1. Deliverance from law (7:1-6)**—This passage continues the discussion of Romans 6:15—“Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” The basis of Paul's argument here is the legal principle that death cancels all contracts. In 6:15-18, Paul used the illustration of master and servant. Here he uses the illustration of marriage.

When a spouse dies, the surviving partner may remarry. Like a widow or widower freed from marriage obligations, believers are freed from the law's demands that cannot be fulfilled. In our new allegiance, to Christ rather than to sin, our obedience is not to an externally imposed written code but to an inner allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

**7:4-6**—When we trusted Christ, we died to the law, arose from the dead, and are now free to live a new kind of life. While we died to the law, we are not lawless but living by a new principle within, God's Spirit which Paul will elaborate on in Romans 8. Paul then arrives at his conclusion: the law cannot exercise authority over a dead person. We are freed from the law to serve Christ. How is this different from before? The law did not provide the ability to obey it. The Spirit enables us to live for Christ.

Paul is saying that the law is part of what is amiss. It is part of the Adamic dilemma. It does not lift us out of the sin mess, it simply informs us that we are in the mess. Living in the old Adamic solidarity, and being under the law, means living the old life under the letter of law. Living in solidarity with Messiah and His Spirit involves abandoning the old life and being revitalized by the Spirit.

**2. Law and sin: what is the gig? (7:7-25)**—The law is not sinful simply because it provides an awareness of sin. Paul sharpens this point by the specific example of the tenth commandment “Do not covet.” He appeals to his own experience (7:7-13) and then broadens that out to a more general picture of the soul struggle of those who try to serve God by obeying the law but find themselves checkmated of the operation of sin within (7:14-25). Sin, in this passage is not a reference to specific acts of sin, but to the sin principle, activated in a person's life by the law's prohibition.

**7:7-13**—Paul is contending that the law is holy, just, and good. It very effectively identifies sin but in so doing does not supply the power to overcome it. Indeed, it frequently becomes the occasion of temptation in accomplishing its function. It is as if sin uses the law, lying in wait and taking advantage of the law.

Paul deals with the paradox of the law and the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The law is holy and good

and yet it fosters sin in that it defines it and actually encourages it. Forbidden things hold a fascination for people. Sin's delusion works in three ways:

- It deludes us regarding the satisfaction to be found in sin.
- It deceives us regarding the justifications made for it.
- It deludes us regarding the probability of escaping the consequences of it.

Thomas Carlyle spoke of the infinite damnability of sin. It takes the loveliest of things and corrupts them with its polluting touch. It takes love and turns it to lust. It turns the beauty of friendship and uses it as seduction to wrong things. It takes honorable desires and turns them into hateful obsessions.

Paul was raised and lived as a Pharisee. However, there was a time when he was blissfully indifferent to the intensely and inwardly searching demands that law makes on an individual. External compliance was unaccompanied by searching queries of the inner self. He speaks of sin as personified, as acting as a person would act. It uses and twists the law to its own ends. Sin within caused him to do or want to do that very thing the law forbade. The law appeared to enable sin, leading to failure.

**7:14-25—Human situation**—Paul bares his soul and the souls of us all. We know what is right and want to do what is right, but somehow, we just don't do it consistently. Seneca described our human “helplessness in necessary things.” The Roman poet Ovid once said: “I see better things, and I approve them, but I follow the worse.”

The Jewish rabbis taught that there was a good impulse and an evil impulse in all of us. They also said that no one ever needs succumb to the evil impulse. The law was an antiseptic to the evil impulse. Paul disagreed. The law egged on the evil impulse. There is something in us that responds to the seduction of sin.

This passage highlights several human inadequacies:

- Human knowledge—We may know how we ought to behave, but that is far from being able to behave appropriately.
- Human resolution—To resolve to do a thing is far from doing it. There is in human nature an essential weakness of will.
- Diagnosis—We may know what is wrong, but that does not give us the strength to do what is right.

**7:14-20**—This is a classic passage on our struggle with sin. People from time in memorial have noted the irony of knowing the right thing to do, but not only not doing the right thing but very thing they know is wrong. Paul describes the law as spiritual, but he is unspiritual, fleshly and in rebellion against God and indeed against anything that would hold him to a standard. He then describes himself as sold as a slave to sin. This slavery extends to the totality of his being. He does not understand himself and his moral inability. He wants to do what is right but does not do it. The power of sin drives him to do what is wrong or long to do it. The invader he fears has secured more than a foothold, but roams freely, making itself at home and thrusting its waywardness ever more deeply into his desires and longings. The person who wants to do good for the right reasons finds himself or herself checkmated from within.

Paul is describing indwelling sin in this passage (7:14, 18, 20). Deliverance is not in will power or rules

or pretense. The dilemma Paul presents in this passage suggests that an individual's mind, will, and body may be governed either by the flesh or by the Spirit. Why surrender to the old tyrant? The struggle within shows the new believer that he cannot do the good he or she wants to do but has the inclinations (even aroused inclinations) to do the evil he or she detests. Romans 6 spoke of how to stop doing terrible things—know, reckon, yield). Romans 7 speaks of how we will ever do anything good again.

**7:21-25**—Paul describes his inner conflict. In his inner being, the law is welcome and brings delight. But in his members and his way of living, he finds the sin principle that even uses the law and Paul's best intentions to its dastardly ends. There is an inner state of war. The closer you try to walk according to the law, the more the law accuses you of being a sinner.

When God gave Torah. His intention was not simply to teach the world a standard of morality. It was to further His purpose for Israel to be an instrument to rescue the world from sin and death. To accomplish this, God not only gave Torah but also His Son and His Spirit to do at last what Torah could not do in and of itself.

Questions about this passage abound. Is this Paul's personal experience or is the passage a vehicle to present the struggle with sin as a universal experience? Is the “I” in this text truly autobiographical or does it function as a hook for the broader and more universal human dilemma? The more strenuously debated issue is whether the state described in the passage is that of an unsaved person or a believer. Arguments that describe the situation of an unsaved person usually proceed along the following lines:

- It was the prevailing view of the early church.
- Expressions like “sold as a slave to sin” and “unspiritual” seem a more fitting description of someone outside of Christ than one in Christ.
- “Now” in 8:1 seems to be a transition from an unsaved to a saved condition.
- The absence of the Holy Spirit and Christ from the description of the struggle seems to indicate the unsaved are in view.

Arguments that believers are in view in this passage are as follows:

- Augustine and Reformers were of this opinion.
- The change from the past tense in 7:7-13 to the present tense in 7:14-25 seems to suggest a movement from a pre-Christian experience to one post conversion.
- The movement of the book is toward sanctification, unique issues only for believers.
- The power of self-diagnosis into the inner bowels of our waywardness is beyond the capacity of an unbeliever.
- The person described is desiring holiness in a way that is difficult to picture in one unsaved.

**7:23-25**—The philosophers of the day often spoke of this struggle knowing the right thing and not being able to do it in military terms as Paul does in 7:23. “Wretched man that I am” in 7:24 was a cry of despair, mourning, or self-reproach. Some philosophers commented that this was their state, a mind morally attuned but imprisoned in a wayward body. Paul aptly describes the dual allegiance—trying to keep the law while enslaved by sinful passions.

**C. Life in the Spirit (8:1-39)**—This is high and holy ground. It begins with instruction, moves to consolation, and culminates in celebration. It gathers the various strands of thought in the preceding chapters. Like Romans 5, it presents the blessings of justification grounded in the removal of

condemnation. Like Romans 6, it stresses freedom from the bondage of sin and from that of death itself. Like Romans 7, it deals with the problem of the flesh, finding the remedy in the liberating and productive ministry of the Spirit.

There is no condemnation because we share the righteousness of Christ, and the law cannot condemn us (8:1-4). There is no obligation we cannot meet because we have the Spirit of God who enables us to overcome the flesh and live for God (8:5-17). There is no frustration and despair even amid suffering and pain because we share in the very glory of the Lord Jesus Himself and that hope is a glorious one (8:18-30). There is no separation and abandonment to fear because of the deep love of God in Christ Jesus (8:31-39).

Two words keep recurring in this chapter—flesh (*sarx*) and spirit (*pneuma*). Paul seems to use *sarx* in three separate ways:

- Of our physicality. He speaks of circumcision “in the flesh” in Romans 2:28.
- He speaks of things being “according to the flesh” (*kara sarka*). When he uses this phrase, he is looking at things from the human point of view.
- He has his own way of using “flesh”, meaning human nature in all its weakness. When he speaks of being “in the flesh” (*en sarki*) (7:5), of walking according to the flesh (8:4, 5), of being in the flesh (8:8), of the mind of the flesh (8:6, 8), of not being in the flesh (8:9), he is speaking of our fallen nature.

Spirit (*pneuma*) usually speaks of a power that is not our own but is divine. This chapter contains approximately twenty occurrences of its use. Believers, who were in Adam and not able not to sin, are now in Christ and able not to sin because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul is not saying we will not sin, but that a new power and a new obligation enables us to live lives pleasing to God.

**1. Liberation from the law of sin and death (8:1-11)**—Paul contrasts life in two spheres of existence—in Adamic flesh and in Christ and the power of the Spirit. Flesh (sinful nature in the NIV) connotes both physical weakness and mortality as well as moral weakness. A life ruled by the flesh is a life dependent on finite human effort and resources, a self-focused life as opposed to one directed by God's Spirit. Romans 7:14-25 describes the struggle of trying to fulfill divine morality by human effort. This text tells us that people either live that struggle by the flesh or by the Spirit. The flesh is mortal and inadequate to stand against sin. The problem with the flesh is not that people are physical but that they live life their own way instead of by God's power and grace.

**8:1-4**—Romans 3:20 reveals the “therefore” of condemnation in Adam. Romans 8:1 reveals the “therefore” of no condemnation in Christ. The intention of the law (to give life) is ultimately fulfilled by the Spirit. God gives resurrection life to all those who belong to Messiah Jesus. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus because—

- The Spirit has set you free from law that occasioned sin; and
- God acted in His Son and His Spirit to condemn sin and provide life; and
- There are two types of humanity and those in Christ Jesus are the Spirit-type; and
- The two types of humanity are heading, respectively, for death and life.

Sin was executed in the person of Messiah. The weight of the world's sin weighed on Israel. The weight of Israel's sin weighed on Messiah and Messiah died a criminal's death as God condemned sin.

**8:3-4**—The Mosaic law makes demands and condemns when those demands are not met. The problem is not the law itself but the inability of the recipients of that law to keep it. Christ's mission comes into view. He came in the “likeness of sinful man”, which carefully articulates what theologians call the hypostatic union (the union of humanity and divinity in a single person, Jesus). He came in the likeness of sinful man but was not Himself sinful. In addition, that likeness was truly human, not a subtle docetic idea that denies the true humanity of the Lord Jesus. Jesus dealt with sin effectively and representatively, making it possible for His followers to live the kind of life envisioned in this text. God condemned sin in the same sort of human nature that, in everyone else, is dominated by sin.

Paul does not present believers as robots, but people accountable for their redeemed lives. We are to live as people of this new humanity. At the same time, he pictures the requirements of the law as fulfilled (passively) in believers, not actively by them. We do not independently possess the power to live as we should. The power to live as we should resides in the Spirit.

**8:5-11**—Paul gives us an extended statement contrasting life according to the sinful nature and life according to the Spirit. Paul describes two kinds of life diametrically opposed to one another. He exposes the flesh in its stark reality as totally alien to God and His purposes. Life dominated by the sinful nature focuses on self and its own desires. It is all about self, be it controlled by passion and lust, or pride, or ambition. Life dominated by the Spirit of God is all about Christ. He is the person's mind, his controlling principle and affection, and his focus for living. This Christ-centered life is not a perfect one. However, it is a life of steady progress to God. Paul's thought is that every Christian is indissolubly one with Christ. We are in Christ and share with Him complete identity from cross to throne. We are crucified, raised, exalted, and enthroned with Him.

He contrasts the carnal mind with the spiritual mind—

- **Flesh vs Spirit (8:5)**—Those outside Christ live according to the flesh, those in Christ according to the Spirit. This is not claiming that those outside Christ never do anything “good” and that those in Christ do not do anything “bad”. Paul speaks of the bent of the old nature and the bent of the new nature. Flesh refers to people or things who share the corruptibility and mortality of the world and often are in rebellion along with the world. Spirit refers to God's Spirit remaking and reclaiming us.
- **Death vs life (8:6)**—Outside of Christ, people are alive physically and dead spiritually.
- **War with God vs peace with God (8:6-7)**—There is an enmity toward God and His requirements among the unsaved. Saving faith removes that enmity.
- **Pleasing self vs. pleasing God (8:8)**— “I did it my way” is not a song of victory in the end, but a lament of enslavement. The root of sin is self-sovereignty— “I will” rather than “Thy will.”

The evidence of conversion is the presence of the Spirit within (8:9). He witnesses to us that we are children of God (8:16), that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20), and that we are sealed with a new owner (Eph. 1:13-14). Such a life beckons us to an abundant life. In our “proper” moments, our “better” moments, we yearn for it.

How can God declare in the present that those who believe the gospel are in the right, anticipating the verdict of the final judgment? The Spirit works in the hearts of believers, generating faith with the preaching of the gospel and then generates the kind of life that lives in covenant faithfulness.

**2. Additional ministries of the Spirit—groaning (8:12-27)**—Paul speaks of three groanings as we live our lives in Christ in this order.

- 8:18-22—Creation groans—Creation is good (Gen. 1:31), but now it groans, subjected to frustration and to a decay it cannot of itself escape. It awaits its liberation from these things which happens to correspond to the unveiling of our full inheritance as God's children and heirs.
- 8:23-25—Believers groan—With our new creation in Christ, we get a foretaste of glory. We get a foretaste of the blessings of heaven in the life of the Spirit. We begin to understand and eagerly await our full inheritance that our redemption promises. Meanwhile, we wait hopefully. When we experience pain and suffering, when we are frustrated by our circumstances, when we are confused by the trials that seem to press in on us from every side, we realize that these things are indeed temporary and prepare us (even unknowingly) for the weight of glory that awaits us as children of God.
- 8:25-27—Spirit groans—God is indeed concerned for the trials of His people. The Spirit groans with us and feels the burden of our weaknesses and suffering. He prays for us in this groaning so that we might be led into God's will.

**a. Children of God led by the Spirit (8:12-17)**—We are called to a life of saying “No” to all kinds of things that the world and our flesh say we want. A Christian discovers a new identity by adoption into God's covenant family. When the Spirit dwells within us, one of the first signs is we recognize God as father. The Spirit speaks to our spirits, and we must learn to listen to His voice, to nurture this faculty of listening. This passage concludes with lifting our eyes to our destiny—we will share the destiny of glory of the Lord Himself. We will be heirs with Him in glory. We need to live in a particular way, a way which anticipates this “glory,” this rule over all creation in which we will eventually share with the Messiah. In the present, that living will mean some degree of suffering as indeed He underwent.

**8:12-13**—The ministry described here is mortification, putting the sin nature to death. If this seems like 6:11-14 all over again, it is because it is, with the reminder that no one can hope to deal with the sinful nature effectively by determination alone. “Obligation” is the keynote here. We are debtors to the Spirit and must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are obligated to live and serve God in the arena of the Spirit. The passage clearly implies that believers still wrestle with the sinful nature within and underlines that sanctification (growth in the grace of God) is not a luxury but a necessity. The solicitations of the flesh are constant and must be continually put to death.

**8:14-17**—What is set forth in these verses is the Spirit's attestation that we are indeed children of God and adopted into the heavenly family. It assures us of our relationship based not on our progress or lack thereof in the Christian life but by redirecting our vision to the Father who established the relationship. In crucifying the flesh, we need the assurance that we are claimed by God and equipped with His resources for the fight. In that fight, the Spirit's role is persuasion, not coercion.

Adoption at Roman law had two steps—*mancipatio*, conducted by a symbolic sale and *vindicatio*, where the adopting parent went to a Roman magistrate and presented the legal case for the transfer of family ties. The adopted people lost all rights in their old families and gained all legitimate rights in their new ones. They became heirs in their new parents' estate and co-heirs with naturally born children. The adoptive emperors of the second century—Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, and Marcus Aurelius illustrate this point. Paul is saying that old life has no more rights over us. God has purchased those rights. The past, with our debts and sins, is wiped clean. We begin a new life in Christ and become joint heirs to all His riches.

**b. Creation's renewal patiently awaited (8:18-25)**—God's covenant faithfulness was always about His commitment to put the world to rights. Humanity was originally placed in charge of creation but rebelled and in numerous ways worshiped the creation itself rather than God. Creation fell into disrepair. God allowed this to continue while Israel failed in its task until a faithful Israelite, Messiah Jesus, shouldered for all the penalty for sin and in His train brings those who believe back to take their place under God over all creation. Creation will benefit wonderfully when God's children are glorified. Creation is in labor longing for God's new world to be born. We are groaning and waiting, eager but patient.

**8:18-22**—Paul lingers with this idea of future glory in relation to present suffering. This vision of a renewed earth was dear to the Jews and should be dear to us. Paul was realistic in seeing the extent of human sin and the sorry state of the world. But he also saw God's redeeming power. Life is not to be a state of despair, waiting for an inevitable end of a world encompassed by sin, death, and decay. Our new life is one of eager anticipation of a liberation, a renewal, and a recreation brought about by the glory and power of God. The Christian keynote is hope—we do not only see the consequences of human sin, but we see the power of God's mercy and grace.

This is akin to his reflection in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. Weighed in the scales of lasting values, the hardships endured in this life are light compared to the splendor of life to come. He expands this concept beyond the believer's individual destiny to all of creation. Creation eagerly awaits our glorification to be freed from the frustration and decay caused by human sin.

Cosmic pessimism was rampant in the first century. Greek tradition saw the world declining from a past golden age. Jewish tradition suggested that Adam's sin had brought extensive harm and the domination of evil powers to all creation. Many believed that decay and a melancholy destiny was our fate. Paul's point that God had subjected creation to this temporal state is bearable only in the light of future hope made sure by God's faithfulness.

**8:23-25**—Creation's groaning for our full revelation as the children of God is accompanied by our own groaning for that glorious destiny. We who have the first fruits of the Spirit also groan inwardly for the redemption of our bodies.

This expression of the “first fruits” looks back to the Old Testament where the Israelites were expected to bring the first ripened grain to the Lord as an offering (see Ex. 23:19; Neh. 10:35), recognizing that the harvest was His. Implicit in this ritual was the divine assurance that the general harvest would providentially follow. Applied to the discussion at hand, the gift of the Spirit to believers at the inception of the new life in Christ to understood as God's pledge of the completion of the process of salvation. This is described as “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Believers who are already adopted and sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption (see Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30) will receive a final adoption, when we will be fully conformed to the likeness of God's Son (8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2). In between these two events stretches the course of our sanctification. Herein lies our blessed hope for which we are to patiently wait.

**c. Spirit's intercession for us (8:26-27)**—Paul now arrives at intercession, the final ministry of the Spirit mentioned in this passage. The Spirit intercedes for us in our weakness. We often do not know our real needs nor the needs of others. In addition, we are often in the dark concerning God's will regarding these and many other things. The Spirit searches us and intercedes for us in accordance with the divine will. That is such a comforting thought when our situations and the general world condition leave us speechless and without direction.

God, by His Spirit, is the searcher of hearts. No doubt as He searches the dark corridors of our hearts, He comes across all sorts of things we would rather remain hidden. However, the one thing He yearns to find in us is the sound of the spirit's groaning. The Spirit calls out to us with a groaning beyond words, a prayer beyond prayer, diving down deep into the cold and dark depths of our humanity. We discover that the transcendent creator is continually in communion with the Spirit who dwells in the hearts of His people. God hears and answers prayer which we only know as groaning, the tossing and turning of unquiet hearts standing before our Maker with the puzzles and pain of the world that weighs heavily on us. We are caught up in the loving, groaning, redeeming dialogue between the Father and the Spirit. This is often what worshiping the true God looks like while the world remains out of joint. Prayer, as described in 8:26-27, is taking responsibility for the larger world, in advance of the new creation, and entering into and sharing the sufferings of Messiah. We are identified as God's people not by external signs, but by our inner prayers, loves, and longings. We follow in the Son's resurrection, exaltation, and reign, chosen of God in a mystery Paul states but does not attempt to explain.

**3. Security and permanence of life in the Spirit (8:28-39)**—This passage spells out God's provision for His own. It reaches back into the past to include His eternal purpose and its realization in the love and sacrifice of Christ. It moves to the present to proclaim God's power to preserve His own. It sweeps ahead to defy any power to separate us from the abiding love of God in Christ.

The entire section from Romans 5 onwards has been an argument about assurance. Romans weighs in on the meaning of justification: that God has declared all those who believe in the gospel to be in the right. The God who has called us in the gospel has declared that we are members of His family, and He will not let us go. The passage declares that on the final day God will reaffirm the verdict of being in the right based on faith.

Paul uses five arguments to make his case.

- 8:31—God is for us—The Father is for us, giving us His very Son (8:32). The Son is for us, sacrificing His very life (8:34). The Spirit is for us, groaning and praying for us here and now (8:26). God is working all things for our good (8:28). In His person and providence, God is for us. We need to enter each day with this “for us” upbeat message.
- 8:32—Christ died for us when we were rebellious and defiant. How much more will He be for us now that we are His?
- 8:33—God has made us right—We are declared to be in Christ and we have the life of Christ imparted to us in the power of the Spirit.
- 8:34—Christ intercedes for us. Both the Spirit (8:26-27) and the Lord Jesus plead our cause. The Lord Jesus is our ever-faithful high priest at the right hand of glory itself, being our advocate. Romans hinted at this 5:9-10. He always lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25).
- 8:35-39—Christ loves us—Christ will never fail us. But what if we fail Him? This section tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Note that God does not shelter us from the difficulties of life because we need them for our spiritual growth (5:3-5). In 8:28, He assures us that the difficulties of life are working for us and not against us. God permits trials to come for our good and His glory. Furthermore, He provides power to conquer adversity (8:37). Our security is an established fact of being in Christ. The bottom line of Romans 8—No condemnation! No failed obligation! No need for frustration and discouragement! No separation or abandonment!

**8:28-30**—Romans 8:28 states that God works for the good of believers who love Him and are called according to His purpose. He says that God is intermingling all things for good to His faithful ones. Quite a claim—do we believe that? God is at work in time and eternity and working things according to His purpose. Romans 8:28 is both a comforting text and confounding one.

This line of thought agrees with Romans 5:3-5 as well as with the mention of suffering and opposition in the earlier parts of Romans 8. His intention is expressed in elevated terms in 8:29-30—those whom He foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Sanctification is not mentioned, perhaps because sanctification is the one area where human cooperation is essential. God never appeals to us to be called, justified, or glorified, but there are numerous appeals to cooperate with Him in the realization of a set apart life.

**8:29-30**—This text is the basis of the Reformed *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and other attempts to theologically explain God's eternal purpose for us. The theological talk arises in the midst of our Christian walk. In our experience, we begin to realize that we really have little to do with this redemptive trek we are on. It all comes from God. God marked us out for salvation, called us, gave us a purpose, plan, and task, nurtured us through the bumps and bruises of our experiences, and will bring us home in time.

**8:31-39**—This is one of the most lyrical passages in all the Scripture. Paul is saying that if God is so loyal to His own that He sacrificed His very own Son for their eternal welfare, how can we not trust a loyalty like that. Here is a vision to take away all loneliness and fear. You can think of every terrifying thing that this or any other world could produce. None of them can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lord of every terror and Master of everything and every world. What then shall we be afraid?

**8:31-36**—These verses expound the wonderful position of the believer. The key sentence is right up front: “If God is for us, who can be against us” (8:31). God has acted in His Son and by His Spirit. That activity cost Him dearly. With the cross before us as the mighty demonstration of God's grace in giving His dearest to rescue the neediest, it follows that that grace will not withhold anything from us.

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions:

- Who can be against us if God is for us (8:31)? God poured out the life of His dearest Son to deliver, how will He not make good on this promised inheritance (8:32)?
- Who will bring any charge against us (8:33)? No one can successfully press any charges.
- Who condemns us (8:34)? Christ will never renounce the efficacy of His own work for His people. There can never be any condemnation (8:1).
- Who can separate from Christ's love (8:35)? Severance from the love of God in Christ is no more thinkable than the Father ceasing to love the Son He allowed to endure the cross.

What glorious assurance! Paul applies the wonderful advocacy of God in 8:31 to the heavenly court in the day of judgment. The emphatic negative answers to these questions resonate with confident hope in the power and faithfulness of Almighty God.

**8:37-39**—This is the crescendo of the believer's assurance. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Created beings dare not. Time and space cannot. And nothing in creation would separate us for creation itself groans for our full realization as the children of God (8:22)

Given the context of cosmic opposition here, we should take “principalities,” “powers,” “angels,” and “demons” as forces opposing us. “Angels” in this context seems strange, but probable refers to spiritual

forces ruling the nations and bring opposition to God's people. For Paul, it is not these powers, or fate, or the heavens above or Hades below, that determine the lives of believers. The governor of all is the faithful love of God in Christ Jesus.

## **V. Jewish Rejection of Messiah: Righteousness Vindicated (9:1-11:36)—Is God Faithful to His Covenant? Is He Trustworthy?**

Romans 9-11 is not an excursus about an issue Paul cannot let go of, how could the Jews reject their Messiah, but about the way God is fulfilling His ancient promises in and through Jesus. Jesus is Messiah from the Jewish people (“according to the flesh”) but also Lord of all. He does belong to the Jew but also to the entire world as rightful Lord.

In Romans 5-8, the Jew-Gentile tension drops out of sight. It is renewed in Romans 9-11. Paul argued in Romans 8 that a believer is secure in Jesus Christ. God's election would stand. But what about the Jew? They were chosen and set aside for the in-grafting of the Gentiles. Did God fail to keep His covenant promises to the Jews? The very character of God is in issue in this inquiry. If God was not faithful to the Jews, will He be faithful to the church?

These chapters feature a liberal use of Old Testament quotations, partly to emphasize the sovereignty of God and His covenant faithfulness and partly to substantiate Israel's failure. In chapter 9, Paul emphasizes Israel's past election, reminding us that Almighty God is free and sovereign in what He does. In chapter 10, he focuses on Israel's current rejection, demonstrating that the Jews had not lacked the opportunity to hear the gospel. God did not set His people aside arbitrarily. In chapter 11, Paul zeroes in on Israel's restoration, saying that Israel's rejection was not complete, for there was a believing remnant. In addition, Israel's rejection is not final, for a mass conversion of Israel will occur. In the end, God is found faithful to His covenant promises despite the unfaithfulness of Israel.

Paul accepts as fundamental that the Jews have a unique place in God's purposes. Nevertheless, they rejected and crucified God's own Son. Let us summarize Paul's argument through these chapters:

- The Jews are the chosen people.
- To be a member of Israel is more than mere ethnic descent. There has always been election within the nation and always a remnant that was faithful.
- Election is fair; God is completely free to do what He wants.
- God did harden Jewish hearts, but only to open salvation's door to the Gentiles.
- Israel's mistake was to depend on law-keeping rather than relying on a trusting heart in God.
- Gentiles must not grow arrogant. They must remember that they are wild olives grafted into the true olive stock.
- Gentile salvation will move the Jews to beneficial envy, and they will be brought to Christ by the Gentiles.
- In the end, all in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike, will be saved.

**A. Paul's sorrow over Israel's condition (9:1-5)**—There's poignant sorrow as Paul begins to explain the Jewish rejection of Christ. He is going to say some hard things about his own kin and will be saying things that would be exceedingly difficult for them to hear and bear. This is not the stuff of anger, but anguish. Paul's deep desire for his people is their salvation.

**9:4-5**—Paul acknowledges Jewish privileges:

- In a special sense, they were children of God (Deut. 14:1; 32:6).
- They saw/had the shekinah (the pillar of cloud over the tabernacle and later the temple), the divine splendor when God visited His people.
- They had the covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New).
- They had the law.
- They had temple worship—special avenue of approach of the soul to God.
- They had promises (various aspects of Messianic salvation closely connected with the covenants).
- They had the patriarchs.
- From them came the very Son of God (the human ancestry of Jesus Christ).

The tragedy was, for all their advantages, they missed their visitation.

**B. God's choice of Israel based on election not pedigree (9:6-13)**—God's purposes were not frustrated by Jewish rejection. Paul unveils the principle of sovereign selection at work in Israel from the beginning. Not all individuals of Israeli descent are considered true Jews according to God's design. Paul wrote of the difference between Abraham's natural seed and his spiritual children in 2:25-29. The Old Testament also had taught this (see Num. 14:22-23; Deut. 1:34-35; Ps. 78:21-22; 95:8-11; 106:26-27).

God not only chose one family from the entire human race but continued that practice within the chosen family itself. He worked His purpose through some people (who were themselves part of the problem) and not others until the time was ripe for His own Son to emerge and take destiny on His shoulders. Furthermore, God chose to carry forth His plan without regard for the moral character of the people involved (Sarah's conniving; Jacob's scheming). Abraham had two sons. Isaac, the younger, forged the chosen line over Ishmael. Isaac had two sons. Jacob, the younger, was chosen over Esau. Paul is saying there is more to Jewishness than physical descent. In the latter case, it was clear that God's choice occurred before Esau and Jacob were born (9:11-12). Election was not based on Jewish pedigree or on human performance.

God did not mess up, we did. We are like a drunk, who stumbling into a ditch and hurting himself, blames the road engineer for his injuries while excusing, even denying, his own intoxication.

**9:10-13**—In 9:7-9, Paul shows that Isaac was chosen over Ishmael. However, Ishmael was not a Jew. It was only natural for God to select the son of Sarah rather than the son of Hagar, a bondwoman. So, Paul cites the case of Jacob and Esau. Natural generation from Isaac, of the seed of Abraham, did not assure Esau of the same place in God's plan as Jacob. In addition, God deliberately disturbed the primogenitor rules of the culture in selecting Jacob (quoting Gen. 25:23).

**9:13**—The quote from Malachi 1:2-3 in 9:13 is not of the temperamental variety. Hatred for Esau is simply a way of saying that Esau was not the object of God's elective purpose.

**C. God's sovereign right to act (9:14-29)**—This segment on God's sovereign choice ends with the Old Testament passages about the potter and the clay (see Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:1-6). God struggled with rebellious Israel (the prophets give eloquent testimony to this struggle), like a potter

working with clay that simply will not go into the right shape. This chapter expands on 3:1-9. God intended Israel to be a light to the world and Israel had utterly failed in that mission. God is saying, in effect, throughout Romans 9-11, that Israel was in the molding and re-molding phase of pottery creation. It is not until the pottery is fired and glazed that you must smash the pottery to remake it. The divine purpose will be accomplished through a faithful remnant of Israel and the Gentiles who embrace the gospel. The sovereign God has the right to remold His people and to pass the torch from Israel in general to a remnant of Israel and the Gentiles responding to the gospel.

Note the progression of Paul's argument:

- The principle of God's supernatural election (9:14-18).
- Who are we to argue with the Sovereign creator (9:19-21).
- God has His purposes that are beyond us (9:22-24).
- God's working in human history in this fashion was prophesied (9:25-29).

**1. Mercy on whom He will (9:14-18)**—Paul answers the charge of arbitrariness with the stark reply that God can do whatever He chooses (which does not contradict His own nature). He will have mercy on those He chooses to have mercy. Two instances establish this:

- Aftermath of the Golden Calf incident (Ex. 33).
- Hardening of Pharaoh in the Exodus account (Ex. 7-14).

Paul's underlying point here is that the “justice argument” against God does not work. That is because none of us have any claim on God whatsoever. The creation has no claim on the Creator. We deserve nothing and can claim nothing. In God's dealings with the world and us, the essential thing is His will and His mercy.

**9:18**—The hardening of Pharaoh in Exodus 7-14 has occasioned discussion. At times Scripture informs us that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 19, 32) and at other times that God hardened it (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27). Pharaoh resisted opportunity after opportunity to repent and God gave him over to this hardening process. The same sunlight that melts ice hardens clay soil.

**2. Potter and the clay: objection met (9:19-21)**—If God acts unilaterally according to His own will and purpose, does this not remove all basis for judgment since no one can resist His will? Is there a reason to assign blame? Paul calls out this pretense as if any creature had sufficient standing to judge the Almighty. The illustration of the potter and the clay (9:21) shows how preposterous it is for the creature to call out the Creator to whom he or she owe their very lives and their function in life.

**Objection**—Candidly, to moderns this seems like a bad analogy. A human being is a person created in God's very image; a lump of clay is a thing, without mind or feeling. To tell a bewildered and sorrowful person to suck it up because God can do whatever He wants and he has no right to complain, makes God look like a tyrant and not the loving father that He is.

Remember that Paul is in anguish when he writes this. The only explanation he could see for the Jewish rejection was that God had blinded His people for His own purposes. What follows are “what if” sayings that explain Gentile inclusion in the church. He then cites Old Testament texts to prove this rejection of the Jews and acceptance of the Gentiles was foretold by the prophets (Hos. 1:10, 2:23; Isa. 10:22-23, 37:32).

**3. God's purpose and justice (9:22-24)**—In 9:22, the crucial question is the interpretation of “prepared for destruction”. Is Paul teaching “double predestination,” that God chooses some people to experience His mercy and others to experience His wrath? “Prepared” or “fitted” for destruction is in the middle voice in the Greek, highlighting reflexive action. God prepares people for glory, but people prepare themselves for judgment. God gives them over to their choices.

God is patient with these “objects of His wrath” suggesting a readiness to receive such people upon repentance (see 2:3-4; 2 Pt. 3:9). Preparation for destruction is the work of human beings, hardening in their hearts and allowing themselves to deteriorate despite knowledge of God and their own consciences. In speaking of “objects of His wrath”, Paul may be thinking of the obstinate Jews so adamant in their opposition to the gospel. He contrasts them with “objects of mercy”, in whom God shows the riches of His glory (9:23).

**4. God calls a remnant (9:24-29)**—Paul quotes Old Testament texts (Isa. 1:9, 10:22-23; Hos. 1:10; 2:23 8:14) to establish this principle of the remnant. Most Jews remained outside the community of the renewed people and only a remnant remained inside. Indeed, this is what God had said would happen all along. Jewish infidelity was not a problem of God's covenant faithfulness but of Israel's problem of hearing and heeding. Israel enters a strange role, that of being a castaway to get out of the way of the light showing forth among the nations.

**D. Israel's failure due to reliance on works rather than faith (9:30-10:21)**—The theme of this chapter is Israel's present rejection. Paul moves from divine sovereignty in Romans 9 to human responsibility in Romans 10. There are reasons for Israel's rejection:

- They yearned for political salvation from Rome but felt no need for spiritual salvation from their own sin (10:1).
- They were zealous for God, but not according to knowledge (10:2)—They even sought to improve on God's law with their own traditions, making those customs equal to the law. They were maestros not only of the “plain statements of Scripture” but also of their ever growing “necessary implications.”
- They were proud and self-righteous (10:3)—They were ignorant of God's glorious righteousness intent on establishing their own. They were stubbornly resistant to the truth of their own brokenness.
- They misunderstood their own law (10:4-13)—Everything about their religious tradition pointed to the coming Messiah—the sacrifices, the priesthood, the temple services, the sacred festivals, and the covenants. Christ is the “end of the law” for those who believe in the sense that His death and resurrection terminated any sense of Law righteousness. The power of the Spirit fulfills the Law's righteousness in faithful believers (8:4). Any Jewish protest that they had obeyed the law was one of contrived external compliance. The emphasis always was on heart adherence, the inner spiritual condition, not one of jumping through ritualistic hoops.
- The remedy for this conundrum energizes the outreach of the people of God (10:14-21).

**1. Jewish stumbling (9:30-33)**—Paul contrasts two ways of approaching God. The Jewish way regarded a right relationship with God as something earned by strict obedience to the law. This was a losing battle. Imperfect human beings can never justify themselves before a perfect God. While the Jews sought to put God in their debt, the Gentiles were content to be in God's debt. The Jews sought to come by works, the Gentiles by the way of trust. A stanza from the hymn *Rock of Ages* expresses this

eloquently:

Not the labor of my hands,  
Can fulfill the law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone:  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Paul cites Old Testament stone testimonies, a combination quote from Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16. In Isaiah 8:14, the prophet says that God would become to Israel like a stone or rock one stumbles over. Isaiah 28:16 proclaims that God would lay in Zion a trusted cornerstone, a sure foundation. Trusting in this cornerstone ensures you will never be dismayed. The Lord Jesus is a stumbling point for some who reject Him and the sure foundation for those who trust Him. Jesus came into the world for our salvation. By our attitude toward Him, we either gain salvation or merit condemnation.

Jewish unbelief does not represent a thwarting of God's plan, but what God planned all along. What Paul wants to tell us is threefold—

- God has been faithful to His covenant.
- Membership in God's covenant family is marked out by faith alone.
- The Jews were doing their best to use the law as a badge of covenant membership. But the law was never meant to work that way.

**2. Misguided zeal (10:1-4)**—Paul's deep desire is for his people. Paradoxically, it is Israel's zeal for God that constitutes the great barrier. This zeal lacked knowledge in that they tried to establish their own righteousness rather than accepting it by faith. The proof that Israel was out of line with respect to God's will was their reaction to the Lord Jesus.

The Jews approached God based on meticulous obedience to the law and even human amplification of the law. Take Sabbath observance for instance. There were regulations for how far someone could walk on the Sabbath; how heavy a burden someone could carry on the Sabbath; requirements that no food could be cooked on the Sabbath. One could not heal on the Sabbath, only take measures to keep patients from getting worse.

The Jews' zeal for the law was evident in their strict dietary regulations. In the Fourth Book of Maccabees, Eleazar the priest refuses Antiochus Epiphanes' command to eat pork. He was beaten to a pulp, scourged, and his sides were cut numerous times. The soldiers pitied him and brought him meat, which was not pork, and begged him to eat it and they would tell the king that he ate pork. He refused and in the end was executed. The Maccabean author writes: “Even in the tortures of death, he resisted for the sake of the law.” (4 Maccabees, chapters 5-6).

The Jews saw this zeal for the law as earning credit with God. Christ is the end of this type of legalism. Because of the Lord Jesus, we are no longer faced with satisfying God's justice but can simply accept His love. We no longer must win God's favor; we simply need to accept the grace and mercy He freely offers. Paul cites Old Testament passages from Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:12-13 in this discussion. Leviticus 18:5 says that if the people meticulously obey the law, they will find life. While that is true, no one has ever done any such thing. If anyone obeys the law, they must do so in some

other garb than human flesh (*sarx*). The Deuteronomy text says that God's law is not inaccessible and impossible. Paul interprets this passage in the light of the New Testament revelation. The law is only accessible and possible in the power of the Spirit.

**10:4**—What does Paul mean by “Christ is the end of the law.” The Greek word in question is *telos*, meaning “end.” Is Paul saying that the law is abolished? But how do you square that statement with what the apostle said in 3:31, that faith does not nullify the law, but upholds it? *Telos* can also be used in the sense of “the end of the matter” or “to the end that.” In that sense, what the apostle is saying here is that Christ is the end of the matter in the sense that law, properly understood, brings people by faith to Christ by showing them both what God requires and that they cannot do what is required in their own efforts.

**3. Fulfillment of the covenant (10:5-13)**—Paul begins this portion with quotes from Deuteronomy 30:12-14. What he does is a midrash (a commentary) on these verses and applies them to Christ. “Who will ascend” in Deuteronomy 30:12 refers to who will ascend Mt. Sinai to bring the law again. “Who will descend” in 30:13 refers to descending into the Red Sea again to cross over. God had redeemed His people at the Exodus. Paul applies the great saving event in the Old Testament and points it to cross of Christ.

Deuteronomy 28-30 is a charge to Israel before they entered the Promised Land. If Israel keeps God's commands, there would be blessing (Deut. 28), if not, cursing (Deut. 29). Deuteronomy 30 is God's further promises that if Israel after disobedience turns back to Him, He will rescue them. True Israel longed for this promise, this covenant renewal, this circumcision of the heart.

This promise, this covenant renewal had come true in Jesus. God had unveiled His salvation, a single way for all people (10:11-13). He brought it near to them and to all people in a new way, not by way of legalistic bondage. Now all who openly acknowledge the Lord Jesus by faith wear the badge that truly matters, not that of physical circumcision, but of circumcision of the heart, which declares that they are those whom God will save. Paul articulated a doctrine of salvation grounded in the Old Testament, demonstrated God's intended variations on it, and illustrated how it has been fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. However, if the Jews want this new promise of deliverance in the Messiah to be theirs, they must share Him, and the covenant family redefined in Him, with a much larger company.

**10:9-13**—A glorious reception text, an invitation to all who would confess the Lord Jesus. He quotes Isaiah 28:16 to show that salvation is solely by faith and then Joel 2:32 that salvation is open to everyone. Paul is contrasting law righteousness with faith righteousness:

| <b>• Law</b>             | <b>Faith</b>                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Open only to the Jews  | Open to everyone                |
| • Based on works         | Based on faith                  |
| • Self-righteous         | Rightly related to God          |
| • Sees itself as obeying | Calls on the Lord to deliver    |
| • Proudly self-contained | Dependent on and glorifying God |

**10:9-10**—This text is the basis of an early Christian creed. First, Christians were to proclaim Jesus as Lord (*kurios*). They were to give Him a supreme place in their lives and pledge implicit obedience and reverent worship. They were to have the sense of the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Second, they

must believe that Jesus rose from the dead. They were learning about a historical figure, to be sure. But more than that—they were living with a real presence. Jesus was not only a martyr for us, but also the victor for us. Third, they were to believe in their hearts and proclaim with their lips and lives. Christianity is belief plus confession; it necessarily involves witness before others.

**4. Call to all; failure of Israel (10:14-21)**—God is calling us back to God's original plans and His stated intentions. Gentiles joining God's assembly and some Israelites staying out was always part of the plan. God made certain promises of salvation to Israel, promises to work through Israel for the benefit of the rest of the world. Israel mistook the promises as being their possession. Now, God was acting through Messiah to fulfill His original intention, even though Israel clung to its misinterpretation. What will happen to Israel? Will Israel be jealous? Will the Gentiles inherit the promises, while Israel, the promise-bearers, miss them? Paul drives that point home from a text in Isaiah 65. The gospel has burst upon the Gentiles unawares. They just stumbled on it, while the original recipients of the promises were taking a pass.

In addition, this portion of the text obliterates excuses. Paul says that the way to God is not the works of legalism but of faith and trust. But what if the Jews never heard that? What follows is objections with Scripture texts in reply:

- You cannot call on and believe in God unless you hear about Him. Hearing the good news necessitates its proclamation, as supported by the quote from Isaiah 52:7, which references the beautiful feet of the messenger who brings the gospel. Israel had received the herald's message.
- But Israel did not obey the good news. Indeed, in their refusal, they were being true to form, which is followed by an Old Testament quote to that effect (Isa. 53:1).
- But did they ever really get the chance to hear? Scripture clearly proclaims that they had—indeed, that the message had gone out to all the world (see Ps. 19:4).
- But what if they did not understand? Well, if Israel did not understand, the Gentiles certainly did. Why was that? This so-called ignorance was willful. Israel certainly did understand, and quotes from Deuteronomy and Isaiah back that up.
- Indeed, all through history God has been pleading with Israel and Israel has been disobedient and wayward, quoting Isaiah 65:2.

This matter of pleading ignorance is so often a con game:

- Many times, our asserted ignorance is the result of the neglect of knowledge. Neglecting obvious information can be blamed on a person.
- In addition, our ignorance can be willful. We shut our minds to what we do not want to see. We shut our ears to what we do not want to hear.
- Many times, our asserted ignorance is a lie. God has provided conscience and guidance. Often when we plead ignorance, we are not being honest. We must admit that in our heart of hearts, we did indeed know the truth.

Paul emphatically proclaimed divine sovereignty in Romans 9. Just as emphatically, he proclaimed human responsibility in Romans 10. He sets these two things side-by-side. Everything is of God; Human beings have a choice. He makes no attempt to resolve this dilemma. Therein lies the paradox of our human situation: God is in control, and we are responsible for our choices.

**10:14-17—Discussion on Israel's rejection**—The text discusses how Israel's blessings and privileges

were meant to be shared rather than hoarded. Christians are reminded that our charge is the same. Paul is emphasizing the believer's role in God's plan to reach the lost. Salvation is received by faith and that faith depends on knowledge, on hearing the gospel message. That hearing is dependent on someone preaching and the preaching event is dependent on someone answering the Lord's call. Note that idea of being “sent.” We are never self-authorizing and self-originating messengers.

The only way unbelieving Jews can be saved is to call on the Lord. To call on Him, they must believe. To believe, they must hear the Word. To hear, a herald must be sent, and the Lord does the sending. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 and Nahum 1:15 in 10:15. The Nahum reference related to the destruction of the Assyrian Empire and Nineveh their capital. Isaiah used this quote for a future event—the return of Messiah and the establishment of the glorious kingdom. Paul uses this quote with a present application—the messengers of the Gospel taking the Good News to Israel in the apostle's day.

We must never minimize the missionary outreach of the church. We go because—

- Command to go from above (Mk. 16:15).
- Cry from below (Lk. 16:27).
- Call from without (Acts 16:9).
- Constraint from within (2 Cor. 5:14).

**10:18-21**—Three results all supported by Old Testament quotes:

- Israel is guilty (10:18)—The supporting quote is from Psalm 19:4, emphasizing God's revelation in the created world. Israel had the benefit of the book of nature and the written word of God. They heard but did not heed.
- Message goes to the Gentiles (10:19-20)—Moses predicted this in Deuteronomy 32:21. Israel's rejection resulted in a grace extended to the Gentiles and to making Israel envious.
- God still yearns over His people—Paul quotes Isaiah 65:2. Israel as a nation was set aside, but individual Jews were still being saved.

**E. God not finished with Israel (11:1-36)**—Chapter 9 emphasized the sovereignty of God in choosing a people for Himself in a special sense. Chapter 10 dealt with Israel's failure to respond to God by faith, ending in a verdict that they were a disobedient and obstinate people. In Chapter 11, Paul deals with whether Israel's sin and stubbornness will defeat the purpose of God or will God find a way to deal effectively with the situation to safeguard His purpose.

*Aside*—Rome recognized the Jewish religion but regarded the Jews as a pain in the neck, “secta nefaria”, a nefarious sect. Romans 11 reflects that God's attitude is decidedly different. The chapter is devoted to proving that God is not finished with Israel and also to warn the in-grafted Gentiles against the attitudes of the people of Empire that regarded the Jews with suspicion and disdain.

**1. Remnant of grace (11:1-6)**—This section is about the remnant. Paul is emphatic that God has not abandoned His people. In verses 9:27-29, the concept of the remnant in the Old Testament is summarized through quotations from Isaiah. Has God's purpose failed? Not everyone who is a descendant of Israel belongs to Israel (9:6). Spiritual descent, not physical descent is what matters. Paul's own conversion was sufficient evidence to refute the charge that God had rejected Israel.

Paul introduces the vignette about Elijah in the time of Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 18 and 19. After

his dramatic clash with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Elijah runs from the wrath of Jezebel and despairs of life itself. God intervenes and informs Elijah that there are 7,000 Israelites who have not bent the knee to Baal. In the same way, God is raising up a remnant chosen by grace.

**2. Stumbling with a purpose (11:7-12)**—The failure of most of Israel to seek divine righteousness by grace and their being hardened is in line with Old Testament history. “Hardening” is a strong word, suggesting an ongoing bluntness and insensibility of intelligence. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Psalms to make his case. The first quote weaves together Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10 providing illustrations of Israel's hardening from two periods. In Deuteronomy, the people had witnessed the wonders of the Exodus and God's miracles in the wilderness, but did not respond with loving trust in the Lord. In Isaiah, the background is the continued testimony of the prophets to whom the people shut their ears. The quote from Psalm 69:22-23 relates to a time when David is suffering reproach and torment from his enemies. Those enemies are viewed as enemies of the Lord, people who used their feasting as occasions for blasphemy. This imprecatory psalm prays for their eyes to be darkened.

The text speaks of the hardening of the large majority of Israel. This hardening is neither total nor final but happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentile inclusion is accomplished. God still has a future for His people, Israel.

**3. Gentiles as ingrafted branches: Temporary rejection of Israel (11:13-24)**—The Jewish stumble in not recognizing their Messiah was part of God's plan to bring salvation to the nations and to make the Jews jealous in a way to draw them to their true heritage. Biblical history records many examples of God establishing the younger child, while the older is jealous and resentful. Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), Isaac and Ishmael (Gen. 21), Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27), and the wayward younger son and bitter elder son in Luke 15 play this tune in various settings. In this passage, Israel is in the position of the elder child and the Gentiles the younger. God used Israel's stumbling to bring the Gentiles into God's family. He meant to leave the unbelieving Jews in a position of jealousy.

Two illustrations frame a warning to the Gentiles least they get any idea of being superior now. First comes from the sacrificial system. The mention of “dough” alludes to the first fruits of the dough offering in Numbers 15:20-21, which sanctified the entirety of the harvest. Those Jews who at present had come to faith were like the first fruits and that, in principle, meant that the whole of the Jewish people have been presented to God.

The second idea comes from horticulture. Israel is the cultivated tree, and the Gentiles are the wild one. The Gentiles coming to salvation are branches grafted into the cultivated tree. If the branches of the cultivated tree have been broken off and cast away, the Gentiles were to beware of the type of “boasting” that Israel had fallen into. If the original branches could be removed, what would that portend for the grafted branches? Furthermore, if God, in cutting off the branches of the cultivated tree had made room for the Gentiles, how much easier for Him to restore the natural branches to their place in the cultivated tree.

The illustration is a curious one. It does not follow the pattern of grafting ordinarily practiced in the Mediterranean world of the time. In fact, it reverses it. Normally a cultivated branch was grafted into the stem of the wild tree. Furthermore, cultivated branches, when broken off the cultivated tree, would

not be grafted into the cultivated tree again. Paul acknowledges that his illustration is “contrary to nature” (11:24), but rests the illustration not on nature, but on God being able to do this contrary thing to fulfill His gracious purpose.

Four things bare emphasis in this passage:

- Those Jews who have not believed the gospel really are cut off from the tree.
- The people of God are really a single family.
- God can and will bring more Jews into the renewed family
- The Gentile believers are warned not to suppose that they have replaced the Jews as God's favorites. The Gentile believers could easily pick up the anti-Semitic attitudes of society at large.

**4. Israel's future salvation (11:25-32)**—The Gentiles must not think they have displaced the Jews in God's favor and set up a new system of inverted privilege. Jewish and Gentile believers alike are in a full and complete sense, fellow members of the body of Christ. How is God going to save His whole people, Jew and Gentile alike? How is “all Israel” to be saved (11:26)? All Israel widens the scope of Paul's thought to all the family of Abraham (those of faith), including believing Jews and Gentiles. He made the point earlier in 9:6 that not all who are of Israel are in fact Israel. This is a matter of faith, not fleshly descent.

Fleshly Israel's hardening was to allow a time for non-Jews to join the family on equal terms (11:11-12, 15). God's plan included this hardening. If ethnic Israel had embraced the gospel from the start, it would have been easy for them to continue in their entitled attitudes and assume that they had always been entitled to salvation. However, salvation is by grace, not by works or by pedigree. God decided to act through a people who themselves were part of the problem as well as the bearers of the solution. Paul quotes the Old Testament to support his argument. Taken together, Isaiah 27:9, 59:20 and Jeremiah 31:33-34 do not speak of special privilege coming to Israel aside from the Gentiles, but of God working for the benefit of the Gentiles through the fulfillment of His covenant with Israel.

Here is Paul's sequence of thoughts. First, the Gentiles were grossly disobedient. Then the Jewish people turned away from the gospel of grace and created space for the Gentiles to come into the family. With the Gentiles receiving mercy, the Jewish people, or so Paul believes, will become “jealous” (11:14) and so turn away from their unbelief (11:23) and find mercy. For the mercy gained to be available to all as a gift of grace rather than as a privilege or a right, it was necessary for all people, Jew and Gentile alike, to be shut up in the prison of disobedience. Only then could grace be grace, and, with all human pride being humbled and merit discounted, mercy rather than reward be available to all.

**11:25**—The term “mystery” refers to an activity of God in salvation history, once hidden, but now made known by revelation. The mystery of which Paul speaks is the hardening of the Jewish people to the gospel to facilitate Gentile inclusion in the church.

**11:26-29**—What does “all Israel will be saved” mean? This is a debated item. Some commentators insist that the phrase must refer to national Israel as a whole, in contrast to the remnant of Israel that responded to the gospel in Paul's day and in others. Others insist that Paul has moved on from the idea of “Israel” as an ethnic reality and is now referring to “Israel” as a spiritual reality. In that understanding, “all Israel” signals a significant revival in the future among the Jewish people, without

national connotations. Once again, Paul underscores this with Old Testament quotations, this time a conflated reference to Isaiah 59 and Jeremiah 31.

In our day, most American believers subscribe to one of two systems of thought in this regard:

- Israel and the church are separate entities, and God has saving purposes for both. In this system, “all Israel” is literal, meaning all national, ethnic Israel will be saved.
- Christians have become the new Israel or the “Israel of God” (usually citing a text like Galatians 6:16). This view holds that God does not have a separate purpose for ethnic Israel, but that true Jews will “find their way home” and come to salvation.

**5. Theology concludes with doxology (11:33-36)**—At this point of the argument the only thing left to do is take a deep breath, shake our heads in wonder, and praise almighty God. Paul praises God's wisdom (again employing Old Testament quotes, this time from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11, referring to God's sovereignty over all creation) in designing history such that salvation would be available to all people. God is the source and director of all human history, and all things—even the evil choices of fallen people—will be in the end glorify Him and the rightness of His wisdom. Paul was not seeing a Jewish influx in his own day, but was confident that someday it would come. And that day would be a day of great rejoicing.

God's salvation plan confronted head-on universal human idolatry, sin, disobedience, and the corruption in which all creation has been subjected. God's new creation is not complete. However, its foundations are secure, the work is well in hand, and its completion is not in doubt. It is time to step back and take everything in, in sheer awe and breath-taking wonder at the scope and scale of it all. To almighty God be all glory!

**11:30-32**—Paul reminds his Gentile readers that their former disobedience did not nullify God's gracious purpose in including in His salvation plan. So too the Jew. True, they have been disobedient and failed to respond to their Messiah at His first coming. By God's rich mercy there will be a Jewish reception of their Messiah in time. Indeed, by His mercy, disobedience does not have the last word.

**VI. Spiritual Service: Practice of Righteousness (12:1-15:13)—What do right relationships look like in shoe leather?**—Paul has concluded his theological exposition concerning how sinful humanity can be put into a right relationship with God. However, there is a “so what” query to answer. What difference does that make in our relationships with other people, in what God now expects of us, and how we should apply our new spiritual resources to the situations we encounter? Paul provides guidance to the Romans and us on Christian behavior towards fellow believers, the broader society, civil authorities, and in the challenging life circumstances we may face.

**A. Dedicated lifestyle (12:1-2)**—Another “therefore” in the text—follow the trail (see also 3:20; 5:1, 11; 8:1; 12:1). The “therefore” of condemnation (3:20) precedes the “therefore” of justification (5:1, 11) which leads to the “therefore” of assurance (8:1) which brings us to the “therefore” of dedication (12:1). This dedication involves our bodies (12:1), minds (12:2a), and wills (12:2b).

Paul begins with a call to dedicated living. Romans 12:1 calls for decisive commitment, to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Romans 12:2 deals with the continued maintenance of that commitment. Paul speaks of the body from a Hebrew mindset, not a Greek one. Greeks tended to see the body as an

entity distinct from one's inner self. In this text, the believer is viewed as a unity, body and soul. The body is a vehicle that implements the desires and choices of the redeemed spirit. Body is not the prison of the spirit. It is the temple of the Spirit, the locale of His operation and instrument through which He works. It is not inherently evil as later Christian asceticism tended to view it. He is telling us to take our bodies, all our daily tasks, the ordinary work at the shop, whatever that might be, and offer it all as an act of worship to God.

“Offer” and “sacrifice” are cultic terms. “Holy” is a reminder to Christians for the necessity of renouncing the sins of the old life and committing oneself to obedience to God's will by the power of the Spirit. The term “spiritual service” or “spiritual act of worship” integrates the word for “service,” which references the priestly offerings in the temple, with a term for “spiritual,” which can be interpreted as “rational.” This ties into the thought of 12:2 where Paul speaks of thinking right and not just going along with the age. The sacrifice Paul has in mind is a total life of service to God. Throughout this discussion, Paul equates the Christian's living sacrifice with our proper spiritual worship. Our service is to be intelligent and deliberate devotion to God.

The threat to a continued maintenance of our devotion comes from “this world.” We are not to be of this world but are called to live in it to show forth the praises of the good grace of our Lord. We are to avoid being conformed to this world. It is essential for our minds to undergo transformation (12:2a). This is the same word translated “transfigure” in Matthew 17:2. The word comes into our English language as “metamorphosis.” It describes a change from within by the power of the Holy Spirit. A renewed mind goes beyond obeying mere guidelines. It is to understand why human life is to be lived in a certain way rather than in other ways. In addition, mind renewal is linked to offering your body to God. That transformed mind, that Spirit-formed mind, is accomplished in conformity to the inspired Word of God. Finally, we need to yield our wills to God (12:2b). Again, this is the Spirit's activity. Our participation in that activity is via disciplined prayer and devotion. This dedication leads to discernment in lifestyle which leads to delight in God's will.

**B. Practice in the body of Christ: Varied ministries (12:3-8)**—All believers are to live set apart and dedicated lives. But what that will involve for everyone in terms of service in the church will be different. Thinking soberly about yourself precedes the brief discussion of gifting in the body and the function of the gifts. Each member of the church has a gift, a special function, for the edification of the whole. The traditional distinction between clergy and laity present in most religions is reconsidered. This is not a criticism of ordination or proper submission to leadership in the body. It is reflective of the principle of the priesthood of every believer.

Behind this portrait of service in the body of Christ are important takeaways:

- Know yourself—what we can and can't do.
- Accept yourself and use the gifts God has given.
- Get over yourself. Whatever gifts (*charismata*) we have come from God. We don't acquire them or attain them because of our merit or our status.
- Contribute to the common good. Using our gifts for the common welfare of the body of Christ is our duty, not our prerogative.

**12:3**—He begins his discussion of these gifts for service with an exhortation to humble self-assessment. We are to think of ourselves with “sober judgment” (*sophronein* = sound mind, sensible,

keeping one's head). What gauge are we to use in this self-assessment process? One in keeping with the measure of faith God has given. We have the tendency to falsely evaluate ourselves, either overinflated or overly self-deprecating. Both are wrong. The gifts distributed are meant for the building up of the body. They must be acknowledged and exercised by faith and according to the will of the giver of the gifts. In other words, get over yourself and focus on God's gifting and desired activity.

**12:4-5**—Paul compares the divine gifting of believers with the human body (see 1 Cor. 12:12-31 for a longer elaboration of this idea). He sets forth three truths in this regard—the unity of the body, the diversity of its members with their corresponding diversity of function, and the mutuality of those members and their need for each other. The body is to be united and all accepted and valued. The diversity of gifts should contribute to that unity and to the necessary edification of the body.

**12:6-8**—Paul speaks of the gifts of the Spirit, functions enabled by the Holy Spirit. They are not marks of status, toys to play with, or subjects to fight about. All are necessary if the body is to function properly. Paul is not giving an exhaustive list here. He emphasizes the need to exercise the gifts listed in the right way.

- “Prophesying” primarily involves the communication of revealed truth and convicts and builds up the people of the Lord (see also 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Prophecy rarely deals with foretelling the future. It usually deals with forthtelling the Word of God. Prophets should announce the message with the authority of those who know it. Thomas Carlyle's father once remarked: “What this parish needs is a man [person] who knows Christ other than at second hand.”
- “Serving” (*diakonia*) seems primarily to focus on ministering to the material needs of fellow believers. This is showing the love of Christ in acts of service to others.
- “Teaching” certainly involves doctrinal instruction but particularly as it applies to Christian living. The message of Christ needs to be explained as well as proclaimed. At this time in the Church's history, early Christian teaching was dependent on the Old Testament. The number of Old Testament references in Romans is no coincidence or accident.
- “Encouraging” (*paraklesis*) is variously rendered “encouragement”, “exhortation”, or “comfort”. Here, exhortation is the dominant idea. However, effective exhortation should have encouragement as a dominant note.
- “Contributing to the needs of others” has private benevolence or generosity in view with a singleness of heart and free of mixed motives. Grandstanding about one's generosity is not on the radar screen here.
- “Leadership” requires dedication and a selfless attitude. The church needs leaders who show the way with eagerness and enthusiasm. It is an avenue of service, not an arena for status.
- “Showing mercy” has fundamentally to do with ministering to the sick and needy. A gracious kindness to the situation's others find themselves is in view.

**C. Principles of Christian conduct (12:9-21)**—Just as he does in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, so to here in Romans 12, Paul follows a discussion of spiritual gifting with the requirements of living lives of Christian love. Love is the circulatory system of the spiritual body, enabling all to interact and function in a healthy, harmonious way. It must be honest and humble, zealous and generous, joyously hopeful, faithfully prayerful, and sturdy in times of hardship. We need to be there for one another, particularly for those in need. A humble attitude and a readiness to share are the marks of Christians who truly minister to the body of Christ.

Ancient moralists used a style of exhortation described as parenesis. This was a style of exhortation which strung together various moral sayings that often had little connection between them. However, Paul here strings these exhortations with a general theme of loving one another. In our Western culture, referring to “love” often has sentimental, even sensual, overtones. That is not Paul's backdrop here. Love here means doing good to others, getting along with others, deferring to others, being willing to sacrifice for others, and being for others.

The modern charge we have used at the end of worship service has the flavor of this type of exhortation:

Go out in the world in peace; have courage;  
hold on to what is good; do not return evil for evil;  
strengthen the faint-hearted; support the poor; help the suffering;  
honor all people. Go forth to love and serve the Lord,  
rejoicing in[, and relying on,] the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul waxes eloquent about the need for love in the body. In the first instance, this is more about what we do than how we feel. We act our way to heart-felt emotion sooner than we feel our way there. A host of body-building activities are listed:

- Honoring others by treating their concerns and their personal welfare as weighty matters.
- Serving zealously. There is no room for lethargy in Christian living.
- Being joyfully hopeful—if we are thinking right, the best is yet to come.
- Being patient with any affliction. We are to meet adversity with confident courage, with a fortitude of soul. Suffering may color all of life, but we can choose the color. We choose to meet adversity in the Lord.
- Faithful in prayer.
- Giving to those in need.
- Hospitality as regular practice. This speaks primary to the duty of the open door. Christianity is the religion of the open hand, the open heart, and the open door.

**12:17-21**—The previous passage dealt with the inner life of the church. This passage is about how Christians ought to behave in the wider public world. Another bullet list is in order:

- On meeting persecution/opposition with prayer/forgiveness/blessing.
- Empathy for others' situations.
- Live in harmony with others.
- Do not be a snob.
- Do what is right.
- Be peaceable. Be at peace with others as far as that depends on you. There are times when being at peace with someone is not possible. Christianity is not an easy-going tolerance of anything and everything.
- Do not be revengeful.

The last bullet receives emphasis in the text. We are not to return evil with evil, but with good. We are not to avenge ourselves. Christians must live on a higher plane. In a culture and a world that justifies revenge and taking one's vengeance in so many ways, this teaching reverses cultural norms and puts an end to the cycle of human retaliation. Vengeance is the Lord's and must remain there. Romans 12:20

reminds us of Christ's words about our enemies in Matthew 5:44-48. Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22, urging us to return good for evil and leave the delivery of “just desserts” to the Lord.

**D. Submission to civil authority (13:1-7)**—This is the most notable passage on Christian civic responsibility in the New Testament. Similar passages in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 echo the message of submission to civil authorities. It reflects Jesus' own words in Matthew 22:21: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.” It is also an extension of the earlier exhortation to dedicated Christian service in its various ramifications in 12:1-2. Our civic responsibility is one of those areas.

Loyalty to the state was standard advice among ancient writers. The Jewish community was expelled from Rome about a decade before this letter was written. Paul warns the Roman Christians against identifying with any revolutionary movement advocating rebellion against Rome. The Jewish people were a hotbed of such advocates and would rise in general rebellion within a decade which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the nation. Jews and Christians needed to publicly demonstrate their good citizenship against the popular slander that they were subversive.

However, this emphasis does not mean that Christians should avoid denouncing injustice. One can do the right thing and find rulers doing the wrong thing. Paul himself found himself in those type of situations in Acts: in Philippi in Acts 16 and before the Jewish authorities in Acts 23 as instances of this. He had no hesitation in informing the authorities of their proper course of action and in insisting that they follow it. The submission he instructs is not a blind one. He counsels Christians to be good citizens as far as they can be.

In our day, this counsel of submission bares reiteration. No good comes to a gospel witness by followers of Christ acting in a way that makes it easy for others to regard them as crazy dissidents who will not cooperate with the most basic social mechanisms. We, who believe in the true Lord of the world, should not pick unnecessary quarrels with lesser lords. Christians are indeed a revolutionary community, but not in the worldly sense of a violent and lawless one.

**13:1-2**—Paul's instruction is to submit to those in authority. This counsel stresses God's sovereignty over earthly rulers. Paul asserts that God establishes civil authorities. Governments are necessary to prevent unchecked evil.

Submission means to place yourself under someone else. Note that in both places (13:1, 5) where Paul gives this instruction, he omits the stronger word “obey”. There are times when believers may find it impossible to comply with every demand of the government. The reason for the command is the overarching sovereignty of God. There is no authority which God has not established. Therefore, rebellion against established authorities can be a species of rebellion against God.

These sweeping statements give us pause. The emperor at the time of the writing was the infamous Nero. However, early in his reign, in the time Paul was writing, he was a youth under the benevolent influence of his advisors, Seneca and Burrus. He would later fall under the influence of the reprobate Tigellinus, and then subsequently go in his own rogue direction (a terrible one indeed). Within a decade the entire Empire would be rising against him, with four aspirants to the imperial purple marching on Rome itself.

**13:3-4**—Paul gives the reason for submission that seems to assume that government always supports

what is right and punishes what is wrong. These verses are perplexing because they seem to take no account of the possibility that the government may be tyrannical and may reward evil and suppress good. Within a few years, Nero blamed the Christians for the widespread fires that swept through Rome and launched a horrible local persecution. Through the next three centuries, believers were subject to periodic local and even Empire-wide persecutions.

Commentators have wrestled with these verses through the years. Two principal approaches have been adopted:

- Paul is presenting the norm or the ideal for government. This approach would allow opposition to government where basic human rights and liberties were being denied and where the state ceased to fulfill its God-appointed functions. When justice collapses, the Christian community should be the voice of the state's conscience and one that reminds the state of its responsibilities.
- Others have referenced the principle of Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and who have been called according to His purpose.” God will bring good out of apparent evil. Critics have accused those taking this approach of being unduly passive and complicit with evil.

**13:5**—Paul advances two reasons for his instruction. First is the threat of punishment if believers do not submit to the government. Governments are established by God (see Acts 17:24-28) and empowered to punish wrongdoing. To resist it while performing its proper role is to resist God. On more than one occasion, Paul himself appealed to Roman law and Roman authorities to protect his own life and to extend his work.

The second reason is conscience, which he gives without further explanation. But thinking about this leads us to realize that we owe to the state our protection and safety and a wide range of services which we could not duplicate ourselves. Christians' relationship with civil authority is more than a merely temporary situation. Just as individual Christians are part of the body of Christ, they are also part of a nation or political unit. Everyone has a duty to the state, even if such a one as Nero is on the throne. Therefore, for the sake of conscience, we are to give what is due—taxes, revenues, respect, honor. We may not agree with everything that is done with the money we pay in taxes, but we dare not violate our conscience by refusing to pay taxes or do our duty. Christians are to obey the law to maintain a good conscience (see 1 Tim. 5, 19; 3:9; 4:2; Acts 24:16). Of course, there are times when government goes against conscience and God's law and then we are to obey God rather than people (see Acts 5:29). This denotes an awareness among those of faith that the ultimate foundation for all life is God. Christians, by virtue of divine revelation, may have a clearer understanding of the proper exercise of civil authority that the civil official.

**13:6-7**—Pocketbook time. The apostle doubles down on the necessity of submission with this instruction on that always popular topic of taxation. The obligation of paying taxes is assumed (13:6) and then enjoined (13:7). This is imperative. Taxes refer to the government's direct revenue-raising devices. “Revenues” may refer to indirect taxes. Also note the admonition to “respect” and “honor”. Doubtless, earnest believers through the centuries have swallowed hard in hearing and heeding this instruction. Once again this understands civil authority in the backdrop of God's sovereignty.

**E. Obligation of love in light of the end (13:8-14)**—We live in the present world as citizens of the future one (13:11-14). He instructs us to pursue the law of love (13:8-10), which is the fulfillment of God's law. The commands of the second part of the decalogue are summarized by “love your

neighbor as yourself.” Love is the debt that must be paid every day. The specific commands in this section help us to realize what the greater commandment to love means. We are to do good to others and continually so.

He is not telling us to keep the commandments to earn God's favor, but to respond to God's mercy and love towards others (12:1) by living a life that reflects God's own character. By the power of the Spirit, and in view of our future destiny (13:11-12), we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (13:14) and not walk in the way of the flesh (13:13).

We get into trouble with our contemporary culture when we speak of the law of love as fulfilling God's intentions. Today, love is frequently used as an excuse to pursue personal desires. Paul is speaking of a selfless and self-giving love that denies one's own desire to do the best thing for one's neighbor. Christian love is to imitate the self-giving love of the Lord Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

**13:11-14**—Living in the consciousness of the near return of the Lord Jesus wakes us up, if you will, to our moral responsibilities (13:11). We are to clean it up, laying aside the manners and deeds of the old nature and putting on the new (13:12-14), and grow up into the full stature of the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit.

This era between the Lord's first and second coming is one that calls for vigilance. We need to refuse to conform to an age that is satisfied with earthly things. He summons us to self-discipline rather than profligate love. The thought here resembles that of I Thessalonians 5:1-11. We are to live by the light of the dawning day not in the deeds of the darkness that is disappearing. We are to live as if the final day has come and we are alive in the actual presence of the Lord Jesus. He concludes by personalizing the figure of putting on a garment, only that garment is the Lord Jesus Himself. There is no room for a spirit of complacency as though a sanctified lifestyle automatically follows faith. The redeemed must be attuned to the Savior. Union with Christ demands a constant reckoning of yourself as dead to sin and alive to God and His holy will by the power of the Spirit.

Paul thought here encompasses the shortness of time. Time's winged chariot carried for him the expectation of the second coming of the Lord Jesus. He speaks of living well considering the nearness of that coming. He lists six sins typical of Christless living:

- Orgies or revelry (*komos*)—noisy, riotous, undignified behavior that is a nuisance to others.
- Drunkenness (*methe*)—
- Immorality (*koite*)—The word means “bed”. In this context, it was the desire for the forbidden bed.
- Shamelessness or debachery (*aselgeia*)—Those who have no shame. They dare to do publicly and openly what is unbecoming for anyone to do at all.
- Dissension or contention (*eris*)—Uncontrolled and unholy competition derived from a desire for place, power, and prestige. Self is in the foreground of everything.
- Envy (*zelos*)—This can be good or bad. Good envy attempts to emulate what is praiseworthy. Bad envy begrudges others their quality and derides it and tears it down.

**F. Questions of conscience upon which Christians differ (14:1-15:13)**—Churches mentioned in the New Testament usually had divisions with which to contend. The Corinthians had numerous issues, the Galatians were instructed not “to keep on biting and devouring each other” (Gal. 5:15), the

Ephesians and Colossians were reminded of the importance of unity (Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 2:1-2), and Paul had to plead with two Philippian women to get along (Phil. 4:2). In Rome, the Jew-Gentile divide played out in part in controversies concerning diet and sacred days. This was a practical cultural divide that tested Christian unity. Jewish Christians did not expect Gentile unbelievers to observe their dietary restrictions or follow their sacred calendar, but did expect that of Gentile proselytes. On the other hand, Gentiles often ridiculed Jewish dietary practices and sacred days, particularly the Sabbath practice.

We really do not know to what extent Paul possessed definite information about the internal affairs of the Roman church. This problem of judging others by what one had the liberty to eat or what days were deemed sacred, and the like must have been a general problem in any church made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul speaks of the “strong” as those uninhibited by dietary or observance customs and the “weak” as those who were. The weak were the Jewish element in the church who had long observed dietary restrictions and the observance of the Sabbath and special days in the sacred calendar. The dangers were twofold: that the strong by their conduct would cause the weak to stumble and that the weak would adversely judge the strong. Paul's concern is to promote unity in the body of Christ.

**1. Refrain from judging one another (14:1-12)**—Paul is addressing specific cultural issues that tended to divide people in his day. He is trying to break down the walls Christians so easily put up between people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Are Christians judging each other over things that are matters of indifference?

Jewish food laws, the Sabbath observance, as well as the sacred calendar of prescribed feasts contributed to Jewish separatism. To honor these practices, Jews often formed their own moderately self-sufficient communities through the Greco-Roman world. The Jews were accused of having contempt of their neighbors (*misanthropia*) and of not being sociable (*amixia*) because of their separatism. This separatism could also affect the unity of Christian churches. Remember, these are house churches about which we are talking. In that setting, it would have been exceedingly difficult to sidestep these issues.

It is important to understand that Paul is speaking here of questionable things. He is not saying that believers are not to hold each other accountable when another believer clearly goes off the rails. Consider the apostle's outrage when the Corinthians failed to confront sexual immorality in their midst (1 Cor. 5:1-5). The lawless mind can expand “disputable matters” to include things the God and Scripture clearly prohibit. That is not what Paul is doing in this passage. He is calling for mutual respect among forgiven sinners. We belong to the renewed people of God and in our present common life may not have definitive answers to all the questions we face. Humility dictates that we leave judgment to God in disputable matters and develop attitudes that enhance our common lives together.

**14:1-4**—Dietary concerns begin this section. The omnivorous person is apt to “look down” on the fastidious brother or sister. The weaker person in faith condemns the other's liberty. Paul insists that all meat is good and can in principle be eaten, but if a fellow believer's conscience is hurt by such action, you should refrain in the exercise of your liberty. The injunction for the “strong” is to accept the “weak” warmly. The admonition to the “weak” is to stop judging others. Both will stand before the Lord.

**Quote:** Oliver Cromwell to the rock-ribbed Scottish Calvinists of his day: “I beseech you, brethren, by the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken.”

**14:5-8**—Sacred days joins dietary concerns as part of the debate. Paul has been concerned for others who obsess with observing special days (see Gal. 4:10-11; Col. 2:16-17). But he pleads for a sympathetic understanding between the strong and the weak. What is common between us should unite us and differing practice should not divide us. The recurring phrase throughout this section is “to the Lord.” The important thing is for each person to conduct themselves in the consciousness of the Lord's presence.

As to what sacred days were in issue, we can only speculate. It may have been Sabbath observance or special days for feasting and fasting. It may have involved aspects of the Jewish sacred calendar. The mindset Paul underlines is for the believer to be fully convinced of the rightness of his or her observance. Amid these differences, Christians are to live not to themselves, but to the Lord.

**14:9-12**—Both the strong and the weak will answer to God. They were to avoid judging each other but be concerned with their own accountability before the Lord. We too will stand before the judgment seat.

**14:10-11**—Judgment seats (*bema*) were common in the Greco-Roman world. Officials like Pilate in the gospels or Gallio in Acts 18:12 made their judgments from such a site. God judging all people from His throne was a common image in Jewish portrayals of the end times. Paul's quote of Isaiah 45:23 (14:11), applying the text to the final judgment, would be quite natural since the text speaks of delivering Israel in the end and calling all nations to account.

What about our day? What kind of questions do Christians today find themselves on opposite ends of opinion?

**Illustration:** Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Joseph Parker, two prominent preachers in their day, disagreed with their respective prejudices. Parker went to the theater (which Spurgeon thought harmful) and Spurgeon smoked cigars (which Parker thought harmful). Both activities were debatable in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and illustrate the need for Christians to major on the majors in disputable matters.

**2. Avoid offending one another (14:13-23)**—Don't pass judgment on each other but instead use your judgment to avoid tripping each other up. Recognize that issues and things can become unclean, not because they are so inherently, but because of how people regard them. We need to recognize that there are occasions when we restrict our liberty to avoid harming the consciences of others. And equally in this exercise of perspective is to refuse to have the faith straight jacketed by relentlessly asserted opinions of small-minded brethren. It will take a good deal of thought and prayer to apply this lesson to today's issues in the church.

**14:13-18**—Paul's counsel is to respect the other person's conscience. The Stoics taught that there were a great many things that were *adiaphora*, matters of indifference. In themselves, they were neither good nor bad. There are certain things that the strong in faith see no harm in doing. But to those of a narrower viewpoint, those same things offend their consciences. It is our Christian duty to think of things, not only as they affect us, but those around us as well. We must be guided by the principle of love, doing good to/for the other. Our freedom must never be an excuse for riding roughshod over the feelings and opinions of others.

The principle behind not judging and not being a stumbling block for another believer is that of brotherly love. If we genuinely desire the good of another, we will seek to build up each in faith. Food is not unclean in and of itself, and days are not inherently special and therefore must not be treated in a sacrosanct manner. But if our liberty in these manners causes another to stumble, then where are our

priorities?

**14:14-16**—Jews classified foods as clean or unclean based on Leviticus 11. Paul concurs with the "strong" that these classifications are no longer literally relevant. It is precisely because food does not matter that one should be willing to forego eating them for the sake of what does matter—preserving the unity of the body.

**14:19-23**—Paul encourages the believers what leads to mutual respect and edification. Areas of honest disagreement must not undermine mutual concern and fellowship. What is OK for one person, may be the ruin of another (e.g. taking a casual drink in the presence of an alcoholic). For the strong, let your liberty be a matter between God and yourself. Your conscious limitation for the benefit of the other is your Christian duty. We exercise our liberty with three relevant concerns:

- Righteously—We need to give God and others their due. Christian living needs to be sympathetic and considerate of others.
- Peaceably—Not only to avoid turmoil, but what makes for the collective good.
- Joyfully—This frequently means making others happy. Christian joy is not individualistic, but interdependent.

In the end, we are to exercise our liberty with an eye to peace and to the edification of others. For the weak, heed your conscience, do not defy it, but do not judge either. That is not your prerogative. This counsel is not advocating the tyranny of the weaker brother.

**3. All charged to follow the example of Christ (15:1-13)**—This section divides into two components: 15:1-6 appeals to both the strong and weak to be grounded by the example of the Lord Jesus, who did not live to please Himself but gladly accepted whatever self-denial His mission required; and 15:7-13, where Christ accepted both Jew and Gentile in accordance with the purpose of God.

Paul is returning to his basic principle, that of accepting one another. Unity and Christian conduct supportive of it, modeled by Messiah Jesus, and encouraged by Scripture is front and center in this passage. A person's discernment reveals his or her spiritual maturity. Are they willing to give up rights for the benefit of the other, and to do this as a blessing rather than as a burden? Likewise, will others get off the judgment wagon and grow up in the faith, learning to major in the majors, rather than in preferred traditions. We must trust the Word of God and the Spirit's direction in prayerful discernment as we negotiate these gray areas.

Note principles of Christian conduct in community that run through this section. Christians should be—

- Considerate, but a consideration that never devolves into an easy-going and indulgent lack of concern (15:1-2).
- Marked by the study and internalization of Scripture that draws encouragement from the Word as opened unto our souls by the Spirit (15:4).
- Marked by fortitude (*hupomone*)—The kind of patient endurance which makes us adequate to cope with what life brings to us. This is the fortitude of soul that learns the secret of drawing on God's resources to rise above the conundrum of our circumstances (15:5).
- Hopeful (15:13). We are realists, but not pessimists. A glorious future awaits, and a present strength is available to us to meet the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. It is easy in the

light of experience to despair of ourselves, of our situation, of our world. But God is sufficient and will make us equal to the hour.

- At a cabinet meeting in the dark days of 1940, Winston Churchill realistically described the situation Britain was facing. It was grim and Churchill did not minimize it. As he concluded, he paused, looked slowly around the room into the concerned, even despairing faces of his cabinet, and remarked: "Gentlemen, I find this situation rather inspiring." It was the same spirit that motivated his later statement: "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, [people] will still say, 'This was their finest hour. '"
- So too with us. There is in Christian hope, something the shadow cannot quench. That something is that God is alive and that means the situation is never hopeless.
- Joyful—Joy is not dependent on things outside of us; its source is our consciousness of the presence of the Lord Jesus and the certainty that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Him.
- Peaceable—Stoic philosophers sought *ataraxia*, the untroubled life. They wanted a pervasive serenity of soul. We live in a distracted age, an age that pulls us apart and in different directions. We live in an age full of worry about external things. Peace is only something one finds in Christ, when we are sure enough of God's love and care that we can accept with equanimity even those things which wound the heart and baffle the mind.
- Power sourced—This is our need. Usually, it is not that we do not know the right thing, the fine thing to do. It is that we lack the inner resources to pull it off. The trouble is to cope and conquer things, to convert the "secret splendors of our intentions" into actual action. Accessing the power of the Spirit enables our fine intentions and gives them wings.
- In the end, Christian fellowship takes its example, inspiration, and dynamic from the Lord Jesus, who served others instead of pleasing himself (15:3, 7ff). Christ who unites us is far greater than whatever issues divide us. Do we believe that? Do we yearn to preserve that:  
     How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!  
     It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.  
     It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.  
     For the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore. (Ps. 133)

**15:1-2**—The strong are the key to resolving the issue Paul has been discussing. If they are interested only in maintaining their liberty, then the gulf between the strong and the weak will continue and grow. Theirs was the initiative to bear the burden of the scruples of the weak, not out of resignation or condensation, but out of love. Indeed, the refusal to live in a self-pleasing way should characterize every believer.

**15:3-4**—Paul quotes the Old Testament (Psalm 69:9 in 15:3) repeatedly throughout Romans. It is the earlier part of the story we ourselves are living in, explaining the roots from which we have grown. The Old Testament tells how God's covenant people were chosen to bring salvation to the fallen creation. Psalm 69 sets out the principle: even Messiah was not able to "please Himself" but instead had to take on Himself the insults which people heaped on Israel's God. The renouncing of personal rights, which framed the path Jesus had to tread to complete His messianic work, is also the path Christians must walk as we live our lives in this present order.

**15:5-6**—Endurance and encouragement, mediated through the Scriptures, are God's gift. So too is the spirit of unity. While this unity promotes the witness of the church to the world, Paul's main emphasis here is its effect on the worship of God's people.

**15:9-13**—Beginning in 15:9, Paul quotes verse after verse (Deuteronomy 32:43 in 15:7, Psalm 117:1 in 15:8, Isaiah 11:10 in 15:9) to show that God always intended to bring the people of the world into an equal fellowship with His chosen people, Israel. He has never abandoned His covenant promises. His people had. They relegated to themselves the grace and blessing that was meant to flow through them to a desperately needy world.

Note the progression in the promises Paul cites with Old Testament texts:

- God had chosen the Jews to carry the Good News to the Gentiles. In the Old Testament Israel copies the idolatrous ways of the Gentiles. However, in the New Testament, believing Jews had obeyed (15:9; quoting Ps. 18:49).
- The Gentiles rejoiced with the Jews (15:10; quoting Deut. 32:43).
- Jews and Gentiles joined in praise of God (15:11; quoting Ps. 117:1).
- Christ shall reign over Jew and Gentile alike (15:12; quoting Isa. 11:10).

## **VII. Conclusion (15:14-16:27)—**

**A. Past labor, present endeavor, future plans (15:14-33)**—The remainder of chapter 15 relates to Paul's personal ministry matters in which he hopes the Romans will take an interest and support.

**1. Ministry among the Gentiles (15:14-22)**—Paul briefly outlines his missionary activity. This is his “street cred.” He received this ministry by grace (15:14-16), it was done for the glory of God and accomplished by God's power (15:17-19) and was according to God's plan (15:20-22). He had fully proclaimed the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (a Roman province northwest of Macedonia along the Adriatic coast, the west part of the Yugoslav/Serbo-Croatian region), a distance of 1,400 miles. A tremendous achievement in of itself given the slowness of travel and the dangers lurking on land and sea.

The term he uses for his service is a version of *leitourgos*, a term used especially of service and worship of the gods. Paul laid everything he had and everything he was on the altar of service to the Lord Jesus. He saw himself as an instrument in the hands of Christ. It was Christ that accomplished this proclamation through him in all the major cities in the area described. It was done through the Spirit's power and validated by signs and miracles.

The apostle describes the drive that kept him ceaselessly at his task. He had the godly ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. His ambition was to be a pioneer, one who carried the good news of the gospel to people who had never heard it. He desired to blaze an uncharted trail for the gospel no matter how great the cost to himself. He cites Isaiah 52:15 to buttress his desire not to build on another person's work.

**15:14-16**—He has acknowledged the strong faith of the Romans and now adds goodness, knowledge, and competence to instruct in the mix. He has confidence in the Roman church and obviously believes them to be well taught. His boldness on certain points was due to his role as a minister to the Gentiles.

**2. Delivery of love offering and future plans (15:23-29)**—Paul's immediate plan was to go to Jerusalem with the love offering of the Gentile churches. The gift was meant as a demonstration of love and desire for unity by the Gentiles toward the mother church in Jerusalem. There was also something of an obligation involved. If the Gentiles were to share in the spiritual blessings along with the Jews, they should share their material blessings with the needy Jews in Palestine. Paul felt it was a payment of debt and duty. He would remember the poor (the people in Judah were encountering dire circumstances). There was no better way of demonstrating the unity of the church and putting one's faith into action.

As always, Paul is a man on the move—to Jerusalem before heading to Rome and aspiring to evangelize Spain. He wanted to take the gospel to new areas where hallowed footsteps had not yet trod. Spain at that time was experiencing a blaze of glory. Many of the great figures of the Empire were Spaniards: the poet Lucan, Martial, the master of the epigram, and Quintilian, the great orator and teacher of oratory. In addition, Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, and the de facto prime minister of the Empire during the early years of the reign of Nero, was from Spain. In the next century, emperors Trajan and Hadrian, were to come from Spain as well.

There is no evidence that Paul ever got to Spain. The gospel did get to Spain soon, albeit not by Paul. That the apostle wrote this gem of a letter as preparation for a journey that never happened is an important lesson for all of us. God allows us to dream dreams of what He wants us to do, not necessarily so we can fulfill them, but so we can take the first steps to fulfilling them. The first step in preparing Rome as a base of operations for a Spanish missionary journey, was to write a theological treatise for ages. Never underestimate what God will do with new initiatives even when they go nowhere.

**15:25ff**—A-a-ah money! Money matters, but few of us like talking about it. I cannot imagine Paul did. He had a settled principle of working with his own hands to support himself so as not to burden his fledgling flocks and so that no church could claim to have “bought” him. This collection was emphatically not for himself but for the Christians in Judea. Three things to reflect on in this matter:

- One of the reasons the Judean church was in need was because of their extreme generosity in the early days of the gospel witness. They pooled their finances, selling their property and putting the money into common possession. Famine and hostility from unconverted Jews had complicated things tremendously and the believers lacked resources to fall back on.
- It was the Judaizers from Judea that dogged Paul in his missionary journeys. Yet these people, a source of opposition to the apostle's work among the Gentiles, would be among those benefiting from the Gentile largesse that Paul was carrying to Jerusalem. Carrying large sums on roads and boats and at wayside inns was a dangerous endeavor.
- The collection does, in practical terms, what justification by faith does in theological terms. The Jews were to welcome Gentiles and share spiritual blessings. The Gentiles in return could share their material blessings to the Jews in the hour of need.

**3. Open-eyed to danger: Prayer requests (15:30-33)**—The apostle invokes prayer. Going to Jerusalem involved considerable risk for Paul. First, he was carrying a sizable gift on the road. He had faced deadly danger in Jerusalem and asked urgently for prayers to counter others' evil plans. He desired deliverance from the unbelieving Jews in Judea and an attitude of reception among the Jewish believers. Would the Jewish beneficiaries of this collection find it easy to accept resources from Gentile

sources? Would it offend their pride or stir their legalistic reasoning? How could they verify the money wasn't tainted? How did the Gentiles acquire it? Was it raised by idolatrous practices?

That Paul's journey to Jerusalem was perilous is amply attested to in the events recorded in Acts 21-22. He was arrested and spent four years in prison, two in Caesarea and two in Rome. It takes great courage to know that danger awaits and still venture forth.

Any subsequent journey to Rome after that planned visit would also entail danger. The apostle asks for prayer for traveling mercies. There were no direct flights from Jerusalem to Barcelona! Seriously, East-bound vessels would make their way to Rome and then the traveler would have to find a ship to Spain or travel overland by road through southern Gaul and across the Pyrenees. It was a trip of over a thousand miles by sea and took months. The trip overland from Rome to Cordova in southern Spain alone was 1,700 miles. And I complain about my discomfort on an overnight flight and the jet lag afterwards!

**B. Personal greetings, warning, and doxology (16:1-27)**—Paul greets at least twenty-six people by name in this chapter as well as two unnamed believers. He also greets several house churches. He closes with greetings to the Romans from nine of his associates in Corinth. Paul certainly did not live an isolated life. He multiplied himself through friends and associates.

**1. Commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2)**—Phoebe, the person entrusted with delivering the letter to the Romans, is commended. She is called a servant or deaconess (*diakonon*) of the church of Cenchrea. This verse and 1 Timothy 3:11 are often cited to support the idea that the office of deaconess was established soon in the early church. Cenchrea, located seven miles from Corinth, served as a seaport for the city of Corinth.

Letters were frequently delivered personally, with the individuals delivering them recommended to the recipients. Paul emphasizes Phoebe's qualifications since Jewish and Greco-Roman circles lacked regard for a woman's religious understanding and wisdom. Phoebe would need to minister to the Romans, explaining orally anything in Paul's writing that the listeners did not understand.

Phoebe is referred to as a “benefactor” of many, including Paul (16:2). That term means that Phoebe belonged to that class of people, vital for the health of ancient societies and particularly prominent in Roman cities in the first and second centuries of our era, who put their private means at public disposal. Being called a “benefactor” was a great honor. Benefactors were leading citizens of substance and civil generosity. The emperor himself claimed to be the Roman state's benefactor. It is significant that this woman of stature carries this theological treasure to Christians residing in the capital city of antiquity's greatest empire.

**2. Greetings to individual Roman believers (16:3-16)**—Although Paul had never been to Rome, he greets over twenty-six individuals by name in this chapter, more than in any of his other letters to the churches he had founded. Note too, he names two people (Aristobulus and Narcissus) who seem to be heads of significant houses in Rome. In addition, note the sizable number of women mentioned in this list. The chapter seems to suggest that there were at least five significant house churches at the time: churches that met with Priscilla and Aquila, in the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus, people with Asyncritus (16:14) and those with Philologus (16:15). Some are called Paul's kindred,

likely meaning fellow Jews now united in Christ, rather than blood relatives.

Paul is taking advantage of all the ties he has with this congregation, whom he hopes will be the primary supporting church for his planned western evangelism campaign. This differs with the epistles to church he had established. In those congregations where he knew virtually everyone, making so many personal greetings would expose him to the charge of favoritism or the embarrassment of omission.

Two more observations about this section. Half of these names appear in inscriptions or documents from the emperor's palace at Rome, referring to imperial household slaves. These were indeed common names but nonetheless suggestive, especially considering Paul's comment in Philippians 4:22, where he speaks of the saints in Caesar's household. One could argue that this signaled an inauspicious beginning for such an influential church. However, many slaves in this period were well-educated people of considerable ability. Nearly half of Rome's early population were estimated to be slaves. Second, women are prominent in this list, occupying various stations in life and performing valuable service for the Lord.

**16:3-5a**—Priscilla and Aquila are a fascinating couple. The account starts in Acts 18:2, where they were expelled from Rome and moved to Corinth. They were tentmakers like Paul and the apostle stayed with them while in Corinth. When the apostle moved on to Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila went with him. Paul describes them as having risked their lives for him. In Acts 18:24-26, when Paul was ministering in the regions around Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside and explained the way of God more clearly to the budding preacher.

In most of the references to this couple in the New Testament, Priscilla is named before her husband. Usually, the husband was named first. Some suggest that Priscilla was of a noble family, the ancient Roman Acilian family. There is in Rome, a Church of Saint Prisca on the Aventine. There is also a cemetery of Priscilla, the burial ground for the Acilian family. In that burial ground, lies Acilius Glabrio, consul of Rome in 91 AD and likely a martyr to the faith. If so, he was one of the first great Romans to suffer for his faith. Was Priscilla a member of this noble family, who fell in love with Aquila, a humble Jewish tentmaker, and these two, a Roman aristocrat and a Jewish artisan, were joined forever in love and Christian service? Putting aside speculation, many in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were deeply grateful to Priscilla and Aquila for their open home serving as a house church.

**16:7**—Andronicus and Junias (Junia, feminine in the original) are an interesting pair. This husband-wife team are described as apostles. The terms *apostolos* was used for an official office occupied by the Twelve and Paul or could be used more generally as “a sent one.” They had been in prison along with Paul and were described as his relatives (kindred Jewish Christians?).

**16:8**—Ampliatius is a common slave name. There is in the cemetery of Domatilla in Rome, one of the earliest of the Christian catacombs, an elaborate tomb with the single name Ampliatius carved in it in bold lettering. Romans who were citizens had three names—a nomen, praenomen, and cognomen. A single name usually indicated a burial place of a slave. But this slave was one of standing in the body of Christ given the elaborate tomb. What a fascinating thought that in early church one could be a slave and hold positions of responsibility; that early believers were not so beholden to social rank and standing in established society. This is pure speculation again, but a fascinating possibility.

**16:10**—The household of Aristobulus offers interesting possibilities. The term “household” described a person's immediate family and relatives but also included servants and slaves. Aristobulus was the name of Herod the Great's grandson who never inherited any of Herod's territories but became a close friend of the Emperor Claudius (41-54). Could this reference describe a household of believing slaves and servants of Herod's grandson?

**16:11**—The household of Narcissus presents an intriguing story. Narcissus was a common name. The most famous Narcissus was a freedman who served as a secretary to the Emperor Claudius and exercised a notorious influence over him. He made a fortune from the bribes of people petitioning the emperor. After Claudius's death and Nero's ascension to the throne, Narcissus was compelled to commit suicide.

These two household discussions suggest that several slaves at the imperial court were Christians. Could Christianity have reached the highest circles of the empire so very soon and in the most unlikely way?

**16:12**—Tryphaena and Tryphosa, twin sisters, are described as “working hard” (*kopian*) in the Lord. The verb means to toil to the point of exhaustion. The sisters' names mean “dainty” and “delicate.” It is as if Paul was saying that the sisters' names belied their fortitude, working like troopers for the sake of Christ.

**16:13**—Rufus and his mother. In Mark 15:21, Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry the cross of Christ on the road to Calvary. He is the father of sons named Rufus and Alexander. Simon certainly could not have been happy to have his Passover celebration hijacked into the performance of such a gruesome task. But did he come to celebrate Passover and leave a follower of Christ? Did he return home and introduce his sons to the living Lord? When men from Cyrene went to Antioch and witnessed to Greek Gentiles (Acts 11:20) was Simon or his sons among their number? Fast forward to Acts 19:33, where a Jewish man named Alexander, attempted to make a defense of Paul before the Ephesian mob. Was this Simon's son?

**16:15**—Nereus makes this list in passing. In 95 AD, Flavius Clemens, a former consul of Rome, was executed by the Emperor Domitian for being a Christian. His wife, Domatilla, the granddaughter of Emperor Vespasian, and the niece of Domitian, was banished to a lonely Mediterranean isle for the same offense. The couple's chamberlain was a man named Nereus. Is the man named in this verse that man and did he have anything to do with the conversions of Flavius Clemens and Domatilla? This is mere speculation because Nereus was a common name, and slaves populated the households of great Roman families.

But there is follow-on. Flavius Clemens was the son of Flavius Sabinus, who was Nero's city prefect when Nero so sadistically executed Christians after blaming them for the great fire in Rome in 64. It was terrible! Believers were rolled in pitch and set ablaze to form living torches for Nero's gardens. Could it be that the young Flavius Clemens, thirty years before he died a martyr's death, witnessed this barbaric cruelty and brave way the Christians met it? Could that have made an enduring impression? Could he have wondered what made people able to die like that? Did he discover the answer and follow in their path?

**3. Warning against dissension and spiritual obstacles (16:17-20)**—Paul warns them against false teachers. Were they the Judaizers who so plagued Paul's ministry? Along with false teaching is the ever-present collateral danger of imagining false teaching and stirring things up. The church could be caught in a crossfire of contention. There is a battle raging for the redemption and renewal of the world.

Paul's advice is to identify the false teachers and avoid them. However, it is not always easy to do this. These people are smooth talkers who flatter and deceive others. The word used is *chrestologos*, the kind of person who, behind a pious facade, is a bad influence. This is a person who speaks well and acts ill and can snare others in their wayward desires.

Paul commends the Romans for their obedience and being innocent (*akeraios* = untainted) of evil. It is so important in the church of Christ that we do not allow bad situations to develop and fester but have the courage to deal with them forthrightly.

**4. Greetings from Paul's companions (16:21-24)**—Paul's companions send their greetings to the Romans. Timothy was Paul's loyal lieutenant. Lucius of Cyrene was one of the teachers in Antioch who first sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Acts 13:1). Jason may have been the person who extended hospitality at Thessalonica and suffered for it at the hands of a mob (Acts 17:5-9). Sosipater may have been Sopater of Berea who took the Berean church's share of the collection to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater are described as “relatives” (16:21, akin to the same description in 16:7, 11). The list continues with Tertius, the only amanuensis Paul mentions by name, Gaius, his host in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), as well as Erastus (a prominent city official of Corinth), and Quartus.

**5. Doxology (16:25-27)**—The letter concludes with a wonderful doxology. This is the longest benediction Paul ever wrote and reflects his special ministry to the Gentiles. The reference to the “mystery” has to do with God's program of uniting believing Jews and Gentiles. God is indeed able to establish the Romans then and us today by the gospel and proclamation of the Lord Jesus, rooted in past revelation and now fully revealed, that the nations might believe and obey Him, to the glory of God.

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