

# Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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## PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

### Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, 4 who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; 7 to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul identifies himself as the writer in verse 1, but doesn't mention the addressees until verse 7. In between he talks about who he is and what is his message and ministry.

Paul says three things about himself in verse 1. He is a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

In identifying himself as a "bond-servant" he is not claiming anything great for himself. He is not a prince or a king or even a "king's kid." He is just a servant; a bond-servant, a slave. A slave has no choices. He doesn't do his own thing. He is the property of his master. He has no rights. His purpose in life is to carry out the commands of his master. In Paul's case his master was Christ Jesus. He was not a slave of anyone but Christ. He was not subject to the Jewish hierarchy of his day, though he had been in the past. He was not a slave of the Roman rulers, though he subjected himself to the authority of Rome for the sake of the gospel. He was a slave of Christ. The authority of Christ and His purposes were paramount in the life of Paul.

This is the important thing. Your master makes all the difference in your life. Christ must be acknowledged as our Master and Lord. We must see ourselves as His bond-servants. He is the One we serve. His question is pertinent at this point, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). If He is our Master, we must obey Him. Also, if He is our Master, we are in good condition. We will be blessed if we are faithful. He is a gracious and forgiving Master. He will take good care of us. As we seek first His kingdom and righteousness, He will take care of our needs.

Secondly, Paul says that he has been "called as an apostle." Jesus had called Paul for a specific purpose, just as he had called the other apostles. When He calls a man, He calls him first to Himself. Matthew 4:18 - 20 says, "And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him." He calls us to follow Him. This is the first task of one called by Jesus, to remain in fellowship with Jesus. We are called to attach ourselves to Him.

An "apostle" is a "sent one." He is an ambassador or representative of the one who sends him, an envoy. Paul was called by Jesus to be sent out by Jesus. Once we are following Jesus we may be sent out by Him. Once we have been called we may be used by Him. We will not serve Him unless we are called by Him.

The third thing Paul says about himself is that he is "set apart for the gospel of God." "Set apart" here is *aphorizō*, to mark off by boundaries from, i.e. set apart. Paul was separated from other things for the gospel of God. The purpose for which Paul was sent by Christ was to communicate the gospel of God. As you read the epistles of Paul it becomes obvious that the gospel was at the center of his life. Communicating the good news from God about Christ was his purpose. It was the most important thing in

his life. Nowhere does Paul identify himself as a tentmaker, though making tents was his vocation. He is always an apostle of Christ, sent to preach the gospel.

The gospel is God's good news. It comes from God and belongs to God. It is not a message that men have devised. It is the message that we are sent to communicate to the world by any means at our disposal. It is the gospel message that Paul turns his attention to in the next verses.

The message is the gospel of God. It is the *euaggellion*, the good message, the good news. The message Paul proclaimed was good news for all people, the best news, in fact. God has done something about our sin! He has sent His son to liberate us from sin and death and the devil and to restore us to Himself. In Christ He gives us the free gift of eternal life. Don't forget that our message is the good news that everyone needs to hear!

Paul says that the good news was promised beforehand by God. Before Christ came, the gospel message was promised by God. God promised that His Son would come. He announced it before it happened. The prophets were the instruments through whom the promise came. Note that they are called "His prophets." A true prophet is one who is sent by God and belongs to God. The prophets were the apostles of the Old Testament. They were sent by God to speak His words to His people. Through them He promised the coming of His Son.

We read of the gospel promise "in the holy Scriptures." The promise of the good news is contained in the Scriptures. Jesus could go to the Old Testament Scriptures and show His disciples all the things that were written there about Himself. He could show them that the Scriptures taught that it was necessary that He be rejected and suffer and be crucified:

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27)

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44-47)

As Christ opens our minds to understand the Scriptures, we see that it was a necessity that He go to the cross. We see that it was promised beforehand that He would die and then rise again the third day. God announced these things ahead of time through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.

The good news that God promised beforehand concerns His Son. The gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The good message from God is a message about His Son, about who He is and what He has done. If our preaching is not about Jesus Christ, then we are not preaching the gospel. The gospel is not the gospel apart from Jesus. If we want to proclaim God's good news, we must talk about Jesus the Son of God and what He has done for us.

Paul points to the dual nature of Christ as both the Son of David and the Son of God in verses 3 and 4. Jesus was fully man and was fully God. According to the flesh, Jesus was born of a descendant of David. The gospel genealogies show that both Mary

and Joseph were descended from David. This was another fulfillment of the prophetic promise regarding the Messiah. He was to be the son of David. Humanly speaking, Jesus was born as all other men are born (though born to a virgin).

According to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. Jesus was fully divine. This passage does not mean that Jesus was not the Son of God until the resurrection. Scripture indicates that Jesus was the Son of God in His preincarnate state (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6). Jesus existed as the Son of God before He came to earth. The resurrection was a powerful declaration that Jesus is the Son of God. His resurrection is the strongest evidence and proof that Jesus is who He said He is, the Son of the Father. The flesh says He is a man; the Spirit, through the resurrection, says He is the Son of God.

The individual thus described is fully named at the end of verse 4. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. His name is Jesus, His title is "Christ," the anointed one, the Messiah, His position is Lord. He is the King and ruler. We must acknowledge His position and authority.

Through this resurrected Christ Paul received grace and apostleship for a specific purpose: "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." The grace of Christ and His sending power and authority rested on Paul so that he might carry out the task of making disciples among the Gentiles. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations. He was sent by Christ as an envoy to the Gentiles. Grace and apostleship was given him for the sake of others, not just for his own blessing. God's grace and power is given us not just so that we can enjoy them, but so that we might be sent by Him to minister to others. There is no ministering to others unless God first ministers to us. We are blessed to be a blessing.

What Paul sought to do among all the Gentiles was to "bring about the obedience of faith." That is, the obedience that comes from faith. Without faith, there is no obedience. We will not obey apart from faith. Faith produces obedience. Abraham is a perfect example. As you look at his life, it becomes obvious that he obeyed the Lord because he believed, because of his faith. When God tested him and commanded that he offer up Isaac as a burnt offering, he obeyed because of what he believed (Hebrews 11:17-19). Faith produces obedience. If we trust in the Lord, then we will obey the Lord.

Our task, our mission, is to seek to bring everyone (note that Paul says "**all** the Gentiles") to trust in the Lord to such a degree that they will obey Him. Saving faith is obedient faith (James 2:14f). We want to bring people to true saving faith, faith that will produce obedience. In the "Great Commission" Jesus told us to make disciples and to teach them to obey all that He had commanded us (Matt. 28:18-20). We mustn't stop with mere faith. We must also teach obedience.

The believers to whom Paul wrote in Rome were among the Gentiles who had been called by Jesus Christ. There is no true believer in Christ who hasn't been called by Christ. We believe because we are called. He takes the initiative in our lives. We do not find Him, He finds us. He uses others who have received His grace and have been sent by Him to call us to Himself. If we are among those who believe and obey, we must not congratulate ourselves. Christ has done it all.

Finally, in verse 7, Paul mentions the addressees. He is writing to "all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints." They are beloved and they are called. They are the objects of God's love. They have been called because God loved them. John says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Romans 8:30 tells us that God calls those He predestines, then justifies them, then glorifies them. If you have been called by Jesus Christ, it is because of God's love. Because of God's love you have been predestined, called and justified; and you will be glorified. God's love comes to us packaged in Jesus Christ His Son.

They have been called *by* Jesus Christ, and called *as* saints. This is what they are called. They are "holy ones," those who are "set apart" from the world. Sainthood is not for super-special Christians. We are all saints if we know Christ. We are all called as holy ones. We are to be holy because our Father and our Lord are holy. We are called by Jesus to be like Jesus.

In his blessing in verse 7b, Paul wishes them grace and peace from the Father and the Lord. This is a standard blessing from Paul. He uses this formula here and in 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Eph. 1:2, Phil. 1:2, Col. 1:2, 1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:2 and Philemon 1:3. He wants God's favor to rest on them and His peace as well. These are necessary to accomplishing God's purposes.

### Romans 1:8-15

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. 9 For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, 10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

In this introduction, Paul starts with thanksgiving. Paul gives thanks *to* God *through* Jesus Christ *for* the believers in Rome. The object of Paul's thanks was his God. The God he thanked was his God. He was his God because God had called and chosen him. God had established the relationship. God is not ours unless we are His. He doesn't belong to us unless He has bought us for Himself.

The conduit of Paul's thanks was Jesus Christ. He gave thanks through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the "pipeline" through which God's blessings flow to us and our thanks and petitions flow to Him. We don't relate to God unless we do it through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6) We receive from God through Jesus Christ, and we give to God through Jesus Christ.

The subject of his thanks to God was all the believers in Rome. He gave thanks for them. Why? "Because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world." He was grateful to God for their faith, and that their faith had become known all around the known world. God was responsible for their faith, and was to be thanked for it.

Paul explains further his prayers in verse 8 and 9. God can testify about his prayers for the Christians in Rome. God is his witness. God knows about his prayers for them. This God he thanks for them is the God he serves in the preaching of the gospel. God knows that he prays for them "unceasingly." The word means "not ceasing, not leaving off." Paul kept asking God for the same thing regarding the Romans. The request he always made was that he might "succeed in coming to you." His request was specific. He had long wanted to go to Rome (verse 13) but had not been able to this point. He submitted this request to the will of God. He saw that the fulfillment of this request depended on the will of God. Success depends upon the will of God. Our plans will not succeed apart from the will of God. By the will of God we succeed. Knowing this, Paul kept asking for this and didn't give up.

Paul further explains the reasons he wants to come see them in verses 11 and 12. He says that he wants to give to them and also expects to receive from them. He wants to help "establish" them by imparting "some spiritual gift" to them. The gift he would impart would be a gift derived from the Spirit. It would not be a gift of the flesh but of the Spirit. This gift would give them a greater foundation of faith in Christ. It would help root them more solidly in Him. He is coming to minister. He is coming to give to

them. He's not thinking primarily of the fun and entertainment he will experience in Rome. He's thinking of what benefit he can be to them.

However, Paul wants to correct what might be a misapprehension. He expects that they will minister to him as well. He is not so arrogant as to think that others have nothing to give to him, that he must do all the giving, all the ministering. He expects that he will be encouraged by them as well as encouraging them. His faith will encourage them, and their faith will encourage him. This is what should happen when we gather together. We should impart spiritual gifts to one another. We should help establish one another in Christ. We should be mutually encouraged by one another's faith. We must not think that we are so advanced that no-one can minister to us. We can always learn from others, no matter how mature we may be.

Note here that faith is an encouraging thing, a strengthening thing. As we share what the Lord has done in us, we are strengthened and encouraged in our faith. As we hear what the Lord is doing in and through others, our faith is strengthened and grows, and we are better established in Him.

The Christians in Rome perhaps were aware that Paul had in the past said that he wanted to go to Rome, but he had never shown up. Perhaps they were skeptical that he ever would come. So here, Paul says that he doesn't want them to be unaware of the fact that he often in the past had planned or purposed to go to Rome (See Acts 19:21). He wanted them to know that many times in the past he had made plans to come see them, but he had always been prevented from doing so. Rome had been on his mind and heart and spirit for a long time, but other things always came up that kept him from executing this plan. Sometimes we may have to wait a long time before we see our plans come to fruition. That does not mean that we must always give up on our plans. Often it means that a plan or purpose has to go on the "back burner" for a while until God decides that it is time to fulfill it. When your plans are thwarted or frustrated, look for what it is that God has for you instead. The Lord had other work for Paul before going to Rome. Paul and the Romans had to wait for God's timing and so must we.

In addition to imparting "some spiritual gift" to the Roman believers and being mutually encouraged with them, Paul wants to "obtain some fruit among you." That is, he wants to preach the gospel there and make some disciples there. He wants to see the fruit of saved people. He comes not just to minister to the believers, but also to preach to the lost. He intends that through his ministry there people will come to faith in Christ. He has obtained fruit among the rest of the Gentiles, and now he wants to pick some fruit in Rome.

In verse 14 Paul explains that he is "under obligation" to all men. He owes a debt to everyone, both Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish. Paul gives assent to the Greek view of things. As the Jews saw the world in terms of Jew and Gentile, the Greeks saw the world in terms of Greek and barbarian. If you weren't a Greek, you were a barbarian. Whoever they were, Paul owed it to them to preach the gospel to them. Preaching the gospel to everyone was obligatory for Paul, and for us today as well. Whether we feel like it or not, we owe it to others to share the gospel of Christ with them. "Thus," Paul says, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." The fruit he sought was obtained through the preaching of the gospel. Paul discharged his obligation to all through preaching the gospel. As we get the word out, we pay our debt to others. We owe it to them to tell them of Jesus.

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

This gospel that Paul is eager to preach in Rome is a gospel of which he is not ashamed. He is not ashamed to proclaim to people the good news about Jesus Christ. Why isn't he ashamed? Because the gospel is the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." The gospel message is powerful. It contains the ability of God to save people from their sins. In believing this message the power of God is put to work in our lives. God uses this message to save us. Everyone who believes the gospel is saved and in that salvation experiences God's power. So Paul is not ashamed of the message he preached because it is a powerful message. It is a message that, once believed, saves us.

If we are not to be ashamed of the gospel, we must be convinced of its power. We must believe that it has the ability to save men and women from sin and death. This is why we must be eager to preach it. If people are to be saved and receive eternal life, they must believe the gospel. If they are to believe it, they must first hear it. This is why we must proclaim it. The gospel is God's tool for our salvation.

This saving message is the power of God for salvation "to the Jew first." The Jews were the first to receive the message. They are first in priority because they are God's chosen people. It was through them, in a sense, that the message came. But the message is not just for the Jews. It is not exclusive to a certain race or nationality. It is also the power of God for salvation to the Greeks. The gospel is a universal message for all people. It is not a "Western" religion. The gospel is for everyone everywhere.

Not only is the gospel the power of God for salvation, but the gospel also reveals the righteousness of God. The gospel discloses the righteousness that God has and the righteousness He imparts to us. God is righteous. He is always "right" and correct, never wrong. He does what is right and judges righteously. The gospel message shows us God's righteousness in dealing with our sin. In Christ's death we see that the righteous God must judge sin. He judged our sin in His Son.

The gospel discloses God's means of imparting righteousness to us. It shows us that we are declared righteous on the basis of Christ's death. It shows us how we may obtain a righteous standing before God in and through Jesus Christ.

This righteousness is revealed "from faith to faith." Robertson quotes Lightfoot in saying "faith [is] the starting point and faith the goal." (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, page 327.) One of Paul's major points in this epistle is that we must be justified (declared righteous) on the basis of faith in Christ. We receive the righteousness that God reveals in the gospel when we put our faith in the gospel. We then live a righteous life by faith.

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, "But the righteous man shall live by faith," as the cornerstone of this doctrine. We are saved by faith. We become "righteous people" in God's sight by faith. We live because we have believed the message of the gospel.

### Romans 1:18-32

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Paul is going to talk some more later about the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, but first he is going to indict everyone and show us that all of us are guilty and subject to the wrath of God apart from Christ.

God's wrath has been revealed. It is revealed from heaven. It is revealed against all of man's ungodliness and unrighteousness. God has not kept His wrath a secret. He has revealed it. He has disclosed it. Man cannot claim to be ignorant of the just wrath of God against our sin. God has made it known that He will "by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7). God's wrath will be exercised against our ungodliness and unrighteousness.

Not only are people ungodly and unrighteous, but they have also suppressed the truth. They have "held down" the truth in unrighteousness. People have deliberately denied and ignored and tried to suppress the truth about God.

God's wrath is revealed because to all God has made His existence and nature evident. The knowledge of God is within the grasp of all. God has made it evident that He is there. He has not been silent. He has disclosed Himself.

How has God made that which is known about Himself evident? He has done it "through what has been made" (v. 20). Ever since creation God's "invisible attributes" have been seen, and seen clearly. Through what He has made we may clearly see what is invisible. We both see and understand or perceive some things about God through His creation. As we may perceive something of the nature of a man through his art or his work, so we see some things about God through what He has made.

Paul mentions two aspects of attributes of God that are seen and understood through what has been made: His "eternal power" and His "divine nature". We see logically that God is the "uncaused Causer," the uncreated Creator of all that is. We see that He must be powerful to have created the universe and everything in it. We see that it must have taken a divine being to have made all that we see and experience. The fact that God exists, that He is powerful and that He is distinct from His creation is clearly evident from what He has made. If we see a building, we know that there was an architect who designed it and a contractor who built it. We know that there were many workers who put everything together. We know that they are not to be equated with the building itself. We know that the building is not to be congratulated for its own construction or existence. Even so the creation speaks of the Creator, of His power, creativity and divinity. As a result, people have no excuse for rejecting Him or denying Him. They cannot defend their idolatry. They have no justification for turning their backs on Him. No man can say that God never made Himself known.

Paul further explains in verse 21. Men knew God. They could see and perceive that He was there. But even though they knew Him, they didn't honor Him nor did they give thanks to Him. They did not esteem Him. They did not give Him the honor and glory that was due Him. They did not acknowledge Him as God. They were not thankful for all His goodness to them. It would be like us refusing to acknowledge that the President is the President. People have refused to acknowledge that God is God, even though they know He is. Unbelief is a matter of intellectual dishonesty. As we have seen, it is a deliberate suppression of the truth. The atheist is a person who denies what he knows to be true. He decides to deny the truth of God's existence.

Instead of honoring God as God and giving Him thanks, people have turned to "futile speculations." "Speculations" here is *dialogismos* - reasoning;-- argument. People turned to worthless discussions and debates over truth and divinity and reality. So much human speculation is a total waste of time, such as the evolutionary explanations offered for everything. When you reject the knowledge of God your reasoning becomes futile. Your world view becomes an illusion, your philosophy of life a waste of time.

The knowledge of God brings the light into our hearts, but to turn from God to futile speculation turns the lights off in our hearts. The fool is the man who has said in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). Such foolish hearted men are dark-hearted men as well. Their "knowledge" is not light, but empty blackness.

Though people think that they have become wise and are proud in what they think they know, in reality they have become fools. Paul illustrates their foolishness in pointing to the exchanges that people have made. He mentions three "exchanges" in this passage. People have exchanged God's glory for an image (v. 23). They have exchanged the truth for a lie (v. 25). And they have exchanged the natural for the unnatural (v. 26). In Jeremiah 2:13 God says, "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water." This is basically the same thing that Paul is saying here. Foolish people have traded the glory of the true God who does not change or decay for a picture of man or of animals who do change and decay. It is like trading diamonds and gold for mud, it doesn't make sense.

Along with the three "exchanges" people have made, Paul mentions three ways in which, as a result, God has handed men over to the consequences of their decisions. People have been delivered up to go further into sin.

As a result of exchanging God's glory for an image, God gave people over to impurity. He let their lusts lead them to be defiled. His purpose in doing this was that their bodies might be "dishonored among them." Exchanging God's glory for images of the creation leads to lust, impurity and dishonor. When we let our lusts lead us they will guide us to impurity. We will sacrifice our purity. We will dishonor our bodies. The starting point of all sin is the exchange that we make in turning from God to other things. We must put something first in our lives, and when it is not the true and living God, then something else rushes into the vacuum. When we do this, God lets us go. Like the Father in the Prodigal Son parable, He lets us go our way. He knows that the course of events we will face apart from Him may lead us to come to our senses and we will return.

The second exchange Paul mentions is truth for a lie (v. 25). Given a choice between the truth about God and a lie, men have chosen a lie. They have chosen deceit. They have chosen falsehood. The truth about God was uncomfortable, because it meant that He was right and they were wrong. It meant that they were under the judgment of God and answerable to Him. So, rather than changing their behavior, they invented other gods. They decided to try to do away with God by redefining Him.

As a result of trading the truth of God for a lie, they worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator. Their devotion was switched to unworthy objects. The creation is meant to testify of God and His greatness, but it was never meant to be worshiped. God alone is to be "blessed" forever. God is to always be "eulogized," to be well spoken of. We are to worship and serve Him alone. Over and over God emphasizes this in His word. Exodus 20:3-6 says, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

An important principle to note here is that we serve what we worship. Whatever is the number one thing in our lives is the thing to which we are enslaved. We are controlled by what we worship. This is why worship is so important, and why it is so important to worship the true and living God instead of something or someone else.

Because men exchanged the truth of God for a lie, God gave them over to "degrading passions." Robertson renders this "passions of dishonor." What Paul means is sexual degradation. He explains that the women "exchanged" (this is the third "exchange" mentioned here) the "natural function for that which is unnatural," and likewise the men "abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another." God delivers men over to sexual perversion when they turn away from Him. Harlotry and homosexuality are passions that dishonor us. They are unnatural, against nature. The proper use of sex is between a married man and woman. To burn in desire for the same sex is unnatural. It is against God's created order. Perverted sexuality is degrading, unnatural, indecent and an error, and is a symptom and result of trading the truth of God for a lie.

There is a penalty due for sexual perversions. The penalty is received in "their own persons." God will let men go their way, but they will pay a penalty. There are consequences to our sin and straying, and we will receive them in our own bodies.

Men tested God and decided not to hold on to Him (v. 28). They evaluated Him and decided that He did not pass their test (*dokimazo*, translated "see fit" here). Even so, God gave them up to a mind that was tested and unapproved (*adokimos*, translated "depraved"). They gave God up, and He gave them up to depravity. Corruption and depravity start in our minds. When our minds are corrupted, then our behavior becomes corrupted as well. This is why it is so important to guard your mind, to be careful about what you put into it and about what you think about. Your thoughts and imaginations are powerful determiners of your behavior. Those who think improperly behave improperly. David says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer" (Psalms 19:14). We want to have words and thoughts that are acceptable to God and approved of Him. This must be our prayer as well.

God has not caused improper behavior, He has allowed it. He has given men over to depravity and improper behavior. He has allowed us to go our own way, but He has not caused us to do so. He doesn't approve of evil behavior.

In verses 29 through 31 Paul gives us a list of those things which are "not proper" that are the result of a depraved mind. He first lists the things that fill the hearts of men, unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, deceit, malice and so on. He moves on at the end of 29 through 31 to list specific behaviors that flow out of the fullness of the heart, gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, arrogance, etc. He not only lists the negative traits of men who reject the knowledge of God, but he also lists the positive things that they lack in verse 31. He tells us what they are and what they are not. He says they are without understanding. They are not worthy of trust. They are not loving. They are not merciful. A man with a depraved mind cannot be trusted. He is not capable of understanding the truth, of loving others, nor of mercy. Men of depraved mind look for new ways of doing evil, they "invent" it. You don't want to be this sort of person and you don't want to have to associate with this sort of person.

The depraved man knows that he is, in God's sight, worthy of death (v. 32). They know the ordinance of God regarding these things. Nevertheless they continue doing these things. But they don't stop with merely doing evil, they also encourage others in it! They approve heartily those who do the same! It is one thing to do evil yourself, it is more grave to promote evil in others. The one who causes others to stumble will face the most severe judgment! In Luke 17:1-2 it says, "And He said to His disciples, 'It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.'"

#### Romans 2:1-16

Therefore you are without excuse, every man *of you* who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who

WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God. 12 For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13 for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16 on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

There are those who do not approve the things that Paul has just condemned. There are those who would heartily agree with him and condemn those who practice the things he has just mentioned. The trouble is that they do the same things! In judging others they judge themselves. They will have no excuse before God for their behavior or for their judgment. Jesus talked about such people in these terms:

"Do not judge lest you be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5)

A man with a log in his eye has no business removing specks from the eyes of others. His first order of business is to remove the log from his own eye.

All of us are in the same boat. We are all sinners. In the act of judging others we condemn ourselves. We are all in need of God's grace. The Lord God is the only One qualified to rightly judge. Judgment belongs to Him, and He will judge us as we have judged others.

God's judgment is right (v. 2). God judges rightly. He doesn't make a mistake. He will not condemn the innocent nor will He acquit the guilty. Those who "practice such things" will rightly fall under the judgment of God. We know this. We cannot claim ignorance of this principle. When God judges, there is no arguing with Him. God will judge correctly.

There are two thoughts that the judging man might have, and Paul anticipates them in verses 3 and 4. The first is that the man who passes judgment on others may suppose that he will escape God's judgment. He supposes that he is an exception to the rule. He supposes that he can pass judgment on those who do these things, do them himself, and still somehow escape from God's judgment. There are those who think that they are too clever even for God. They think that even God doesn't know

what they have done. They have concealed their evil from men, and so they think it is concealed from the omniscient God.

The second thought the judging man might have is to, "think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience." This man takes God's kindness, forbearance and patience for granted. What he doesn't know is that the intention of God's kindness is to lead us to repentance. God is so kind to us that He leads us to turn from our sin and back to Him. Men may not perceive this as kindness. They think that if God were kind, He would let them go do their thing and not have to face any consequences. This is not kindness. It is not kind to allow a person to go on down the wide road to destruction in blissful ignorance. Kindness means warning him to get off that road or die. To be led to repentance is a great blessing! In Acts 3:26 Peter says, "For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways." God's grace and kindness toward us is expressed in His efforts to turn us from our sins. We must not think that the fact that God is kind, forbearing and patient means that He is going to let us do evil and get away with it.

Instead of responding to God's kindness with repentance, men have gone on in their stubbornness and unrepentance (v. 5). This was the condition of their hearts. Because of this, they were storing up wrath for themselves. The Jews felt that the day of the Lord would be a day of vindication and triumph for them. But Paul says that if their hearts are stubborn and unrepentant, it would be a day of wrath and judgment. Those who continue to refuse to turn from their sin are stockpiling wrath. On the day of judgment all men will face the consequences of their deeds. No man will escape. No man is exempt.

Some on that day will receive eternal life, who, "by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality" (v. 7). Glory, honor and immortality are sought through doing good. We show what we seek by what we do. We give evidence of what is most important in our lives by our behavior. The drive to do what is right and good is maintained through seeking the right things: glory, honor and immortality. If these are the things we want for ourselves, then we will persevere in doing good. God grants eternal life to those who seek these things and thus persevere in doing good. All of these things are in and through Jesus Christ.

Others on that day will receive God's wrath and indignation (v. 8). They are those who, instead of seeking glory, honor and immortality were selfishly ambitious and did not obey the truth, but obeyed unrighteousness. They did not do what was good, but continued doing what was unrighteous. They sought selfish ends and did not care about eternal things. They did not listen to God.

Tribulation and distress will be the experience of "every soul of man who does evil" (v. 9). The word translated "distress" means "narrowness of space." The judgment of God brings a claustrophobic experience with it. The evil man will feel hemmed in on all sides, unable to move or escape, like being buried alive. "Distress" is a good word for it!

To every man who does good there will be glory, honor and peace (v. 10). The good man will experience God's commendation. God will honor him and say "Well done!" (See Matthew 25:21.) He will experience God's peace and will feel secure. He will not experience tribulation or distress in the judgment.

In both judgment and honor the Jews go first. They go first because they are uniquely privileged in having God's Law and His revelation. God chose them to receive His word, and so they are more greatly responsible. Gentiles who have done evil will be

subject to His judgment also, however. One does not escape because one is a Jew, nor does one escape because one is ignorant. There is no partiality with God. Jews as well as Gentiles will come under His judgment.

The Jews were "under the Law" (v. 12). They knew God's law, but the Gentiles were "without the Law." The Gentiles did not know the Law of God. They had not received God's revelation. Nevertheless, if they sinned they would perish. They would not be judged as those under the Law, but they would be judged for violating the code that they had. The Jews would be judged by the Law. Paul explains that the key thing is not hearing the Law, but doing the Law. We must go beyond just hearing the Law, we must, as James says, be doers of the word. The man who is just in God's sight is the man who is a doer of the Law.

Though the Gentiles do not have the Law of God, still they do the things of the Law instinctively. By nature they observe the Law. Paul says they are a law to themselves (v. 14) and by their behavior they show that the "work of the Law" is written in their hearts (v. 15). The works the Law requires are written into the hearts and consciences of everyone. Everyone has a built-in recognition of the requirements of God. There is no society on earth that does not have a code of behavior. Every culture has a sense of right and wrong. We cannot do away with this no matter how hard we try because it is built into us by God. Our innate sense of right and wrong is a witness from God. It is evidence that He is there.

The conscience is a difficult thing to define, but here Paul tells us what it does. He says our conscience bears witness (v. 15). It testifies about our behavior. It speaks to us through our thoughts about the things we do and either accuses or defends us according to our own internal code. It is a witness either for the prosecution or for the defense in any given circumstance. It may not always be right, however, as the conscience may be defiled (Titus 1:15) or seared (1 Tim. 4:2). We must pay attention to our conscience, though, because if we think a thing is wrong, for us it is wrong. If we violate our conscience we sin.

In verse 16 Paul tells us that according to the gospel, there will be a day when God judges the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. Christ is not only the agent of salvation, He is also the agent of judgment. This is part of the message of the gospel. The gospel tells us of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, but it also tells us of the judgment of Christ on our sins if we do not receive His salvation. All of our secrets will come to light through Christ on that day. Nothing will be hidden any longer. Men who have thought that they have gotten away with things will find them exposed.

The gospel that Paul preached said something about judgment. We must not think that the gospel has nothing to say about judgment. Judgment is at the heart of it. It is good news because Jesus was judged in our place on the cross. He took our condemnation upon Himself there. But if we refuse His salvation, we still face judgment. We will bear our condemnation if we are apart from Christ.

#### Romans 2:17-29

But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, *18* and know *His* will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, *19* and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, *20* a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, *21* you, therefore, who teach another,

do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. 25 For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Now Paul turns to address the Jews. He has just mentioned how Gentiles know and do instinctively the things of the Law. Now he is going to say that though the Jews know the Law, they do not do it.

Note that verses 17 to 21a is one long sentence. It is an "if...then" construction, and is a question. He is asking here, "If you consider yourself a good Jew, then do you nevertheless do the very things that you condemn?"

He starts with characteristics which marked Jews in verses 17-20. He speaks as if he is writing to just one man who is a Jew. He is a man who bears this name. He relies upon the Law, boasts in God, knows His will, approves the things that are essential, and is instructed out of the Law (v. 17,18). The first characteristic is that he is called by the name, "Jew". F.F. Bruce writes,

The word "Jew" means "praise", and the true Jew is the man whose life is praiseworthy by God's standards, the man whose heart is pure in God's sight, whose circumcision is the inward circumcision of the heart. He is the true Jew, I say - the truly praiseworthy man - and his praise is not a matter of human applause, but of divine approval. (Bruce, The Epistle of Paul To The Romans, Tyndale, page 92.)

The Jews felt that they had the approval of God by virtue of their lineage. They were proud of the fact that they were descendents of Abraham, and they trusted in that fact (see Luke 3:8).

Paul says that the Jews "rely upon the Law." They leaned on the Law. They trusted in the Law. Evidently they felt that having and knowing the Law was enough. Simply to be in possession of God's Law made them approved by God. But Paul has pointed out already that the key is doing the Law, not simply having and knowing it. Just having the Bible and reading it, even memorizing and meditating on it, is not enough. Jesus said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:17). Blessing comes not just when we know what the Lord wants us to do, but when we do it, when we put it into practice. We must do His word.

The Jews boasted in God. They knew the only true and living God. All the other nations were idol worshippers, but the Jews had the revelation of the real God, Creator

of heaven and earth. This, they felt, made them better than all the other peoples of earth.

The Jews knew God's will (v. 18). This is why God gave us His Law, so that we would know His will. The will of God is contained in the word of God. There seem to be a lot of Christians who want to know God's will by some special revelation apart from God's word. They want God to speak directly to them to tell them what to do, but they ignore God's written revelation. Most of what we need to know concerning God's will is right there in black and white in His word. We must take the time to become well acquainted with His word so that we will know His will and then be able to do it. If God has a special assignment for us, He is capable of letting us know about it apart from any sweat or strain on our part. But if we ignore what He has already said, it is doubtful that He will give us any special words to correct the deficiency.

Knowing God's will and being instructed out of the Law enabled the Jews to "approve the things that are essential". They were able to test things that differed and to decide what was to be approved and what was to be rejected. They were able to discern between the essential and the non-essential because of their knowledge of God and His Law and His will. The things that were "OK" and not "OK" became evident in the light of God's Law. God's Law will instruct us in what is essential. It tells us what we must do and what we must not do. It tells us what to accept and what to reject. The better we know God's word the better equipped we will be to discern right from wrong, good from bad, truth from falsehood, better from best and essential from non-essential.

The things that the Jews knew about God and His Law gave them confidence in themselves and their ability (v. 19 and 20). Because of what this typical Jew knows, he is confident that he is a "guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature." These are all good things. The blind do need a guide. Those in darkness need someone to bring them light. The foolish need someone to correct them. The immature need teachers. These functions are all essential. The blind will grope about without a guide. Those in darkness will remain there unless someone comes with the light. The foolish will stay on the wrong path unless someone corrects them. The immature will not mature without teaching. So the Jews fancied themselves as guides, as lights, as correctors and teachers, and so God intended them to be. The trouble was that they were not practicing what they preached. They were like the blind leading the blind. Jesus said of the Pharisees, "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14). They were like those who bring broken lamps to those in darkness. They were fools correcting the foolish. They were the immature teaching the immature. They were hypocrites because they were not doing as they taught. Their confidence was misplaced.

Paul now comes in verse 21 to the "then" portion of this "if...then" sentence. He puts the question to this Jew. Here is the upshot of what he has been saying. The question is "If you teach others, do you not teach yourself?" If this typical Jew is characterized by all the things that he has mentioned in verses 17 to 20, then has he applied the truths he knows and teaches in his own life? That is the question.

Note here the repetition in verses 21 to 23. Five times Paul says, "You who...do you...". The implication in these questions is that this Jew was teaching others but not teaching himself. He was preaching against stealing and was practicing stealing. He was saying that one should not commit adultery, but committing adultery. He was saying that idols were abhorrent, but was robbing temples (he was having some sort of

contact with idols rather than shunning them altogether). He was boasting in the Law, but was dishonoring God by breaking the Law. He was a hypocrite, saying one thing and doing the other. He was not following his own teaching. He was not living out his own professed values. Such behavior causes the Gentiles to blaspheme and ridicule the name of God (v. 24).

When believers fail to live out their beliefs and values and do not abide by the principles they profess, it causes dishonor to their God. It causes ridicule among the unbelieving. By the grace of God we must be obedient to the commands that we espouse and teach. We must be consistent.

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between the Lord and Abraham (Genesis 17:10f). It was a token that Abraham belonged to the Lord. Abraham's part in the covenant was to exercise faith and obedience. By accepting circumcision, the Jews were accepting their part in the covenant. They were agreeing to be devoted to the Lord and to obey His laws.

In verses 25 and 26 Paul says that the circumcised man who fails to obey the Law is in effect an uncircumcised man. He has violated the covenant. Circumcision is only of value if you practice the Law. Paul did not teach that circumcision was worthless. Its value is in the demonstration that a man was committed to the Lord and to His Law. But if a circumcised Jew lived a life of habitual disobedience to the Law, his circumcision was without value. Jeremiah 4:4 says, "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My wrath go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds." On the other hand, if an uncircumcised Gentile lived a life of consistent obedience to the Law, his uncircumcision would be regarded as circumcision. He was circumcised in heart.

Outward observances and signs are fine and valuable, but it is the inward man that counts before God. God looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). He evaluates our thoughts, intentions and motives as well as our outward behavior.

Paul points out in verse 27 that the one who is uncircumcised and yet keeps the Law will judge the circumcised Jew who does not keep the Law. The phrase "if he keeps the Law" is *ton nomon telousa*. Robertson points out that *telousa* is the present active participle of *teleo*, to finish, continually fulfilling to the end. That is, Paul is talking about a hypothetical Gentile who continually and completely keeps the Law throughout his lifetime. (Of course, as we shall see, no such person exists.) Such a Gentile would be in a position of being able to judge the Jew who, though having circumcision and the Law and professing to obey the Law, nevertheless is a transgressor.

Paul explains in verses 28 and 29. He says that outward things do not make a man a Jew (one praised by God). He says that circumcision is not an outward thing. By contrast, he says that it is the inward things that make a man a Jew. Circumcision is a matter of the heart and is done by God's Spirit, not by the Law. This is the man who will be praised by God.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes and other Jews because they loved the praise of men rather than the praise of God (see Matthew 6, for example). They did everything they did in order to be seen by men. In fact, the praise of God didn't really matter to them. Therefore, they were not Jews in the true sense of the word. A true Jew is one who really seeks the praise of God. A true Jew is one who really wants to obey the Lord and please Him. If we want God's praise then we will be obedient. We must allow God's Spirit to circumcise our hearts and make us truly His.

### Romans 3:1-8

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT THOU MIGHTEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY WORDS, AND MIGHTEST PREVAIL WHEN THOU ART JUDGED." 5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) 6 May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world? 7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 8 And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.

After hearing that one's Jewish circumcision may really be uncircumcision, and that the uncircumcised man may really in his heart be circumcised to the Lord, the Jew might very well raise the questions in verse 1. Is there any advantage in being a Jew? Is there any benefit to physical circumcision? What good does it do to be a Jew, if a Gentile might be just as good or better than a Jew?

Paul's answer is "Great in every respect". In every respect the advantage the Jew has over the Gentile is great. The benefit of circumcision is great in every respect. And perhaps at this point Paul intended to make a list of the advantages of being a Jew, but he doesn't get beyond the first thing in his list, because it triggers other thoughts.

The first and greatest advantage the Jews had was that they had been "entrusted with the oracles of God." The word "oracles" translates the Greek word *logion*, "a brief utterance, a divine oracle" ([Thayer's Greek Definitions](#)). God had spoken to them and revealed His truth and His Law to them. He had given them His sayings. He had chosen them as His people. To have the word of God and to know His will is a great advantage. We have this same advantage, only now it is greater because we have the New Testament as well as the Old. We can read all about Jesus the Christ and His work on our behalf. We can read God's complete revelation! Our advantage and benefit is great!

Though the Jews had the oracles of God, nevertheless some of them did not believe. They were unfaithful to those oracles (verse 3). They did not believe God's promises nor did they obey His commands. Paul asks, "their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?" His answer is immediate and emphatic, "May it never be!" God is faithful even when men are unfaithful. The unbelief of the Jews did not cancel out or bring to nothing the faithfulness of God. The fact that the Jews still exist today is proof of His faithfulness. God has been faithful to His promises to the Jews. He has upheld His part of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David. He has disciplined them, but He has not destroyed them. He is still true to His word.

Though all men are found to be liars, God will always be found to be true (verse 4). There is no falsehood, no unfaithfulness in Him. He will not renege on His word. Paul quotes from David's confession of his sin in Psalm 51:4 here, "That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged." When God speaks, He speaks justly. When God judges, He is blameless (see Psalm 51:4). In judgment God

prevails. He is never proven wrong in court. It will always be found that God was right and just while men were false and unjust. If you ever go to court against God, you will always lose. He is always in the right, never wrong. His word is always reliable. If there is a problem with the fulfillment of His word, you can be sure that the problem is with us.

Paul anticipates that someone might say that if our unrighteousness brings glory to God because it demonstrates His righteousness, then it is unfair of God to judge us (verses 5,6). In God's court, His righteousness is set in contrast with our unrighteousness. We do not nullify the judgment of a human judge by saying to him, "Hey, since the criminal's evil deeds make you look good by comparison, therefore you shouldn't judge him, you should thank him." Such an argument is ridiculous! The judge must condemn the guilty. It is his duty. To let the man off would be an outrage. God is not unrighteous in His wrath. He is not unjust in His judgment. It is fully just and fair of Him to judge our unrighteousness. Indeed, it is His duty to judge the evil of men. He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7).

The argument continues in verses 7 and 8. Paul switches to the first person here and uses a hypothetical human argument that might be advanced. "But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?" Paul says, "Why don't we go even further with this and say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'?" If our evil brings glory to God by setting His good and righteous character in contrast with our evil nature, then we should actively promote evil. The worse we are, the better God looks and the more glory He gets for His goodness. Some slanderously reported that this is exactly what Paul was teaching. This is an absurd "human" argument, as we have seen. Those who use such excuses are justly condemned.

We must not give in to antinomianism. We must not think that it doesn't matter if we obey the Law or not. The Law is still to be obeyed. We must not think that our freedom in Christ is freedom to plunge into sin. By the grace of God and the power of the Spirit we have the ability now in Christ to obey the Law. Christians have the ability to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).

#### Romans 3:9-20

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; *10* as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; *11* THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; *12* ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." *13* "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; *14* "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; *15* "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, *16* DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, *17* AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN." *18* "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

*19* Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; *20* because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

Paul has said that the Jews have great advantages over the Gentiles, primarily in having the oracles of God (v. 1,2). The Jews were greatly privileged. That does not mean, though, that they were better than the Gentiles. The question comes, "Are we better than they?" in verse 9. Some versions translate this, "Are we Jews better off?" (Contemporary English Version, English Standard Version). The Good News Bible asks, "Well then, are we Jews in any better condition than the Gentiles?" The Greek word is *proechomai* and has to do with advancing ahead of someone else, of surpassing another. And Paul's answer is, "Not at all." The Jews were not at all morally superior to the Gentiles. They had greater advantages and privileges, but they were not better. Paul's charge is that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. All men, whoever they are, are slaves of sin. We all owe a debt we can never repay (Luke 7:40-50). Having God's Law does not necessarily make a man better. It may make him worse. He may become proud of what he knows. He may start to think that he is superior to others, looking down on them and condemning them (see Luke 18:9-14).

To prove his point, Paul quotes a string of verses in verses 10-18. The quotes come from Psalm 14:1-3 (repeated in Psalm 53:1-3), Psalm 5:9, Psalm 140:3, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7f and Psalm 36:1. His first point is that there is "none righteous, not even one." There is not one person who is right with God. There is not one person who has understanding and seeks after God. There is not one person who does good. Everyone is in the same boat. Everyone is a corrupt sinner. No one, in and of themselves, will look for God. Everyone has "turned aside" and "become useless."

Isaiah 53:6 says, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Universal depravity is not just a New Testament idea. It is clear in the Old Testament as well. There is no man or woman on this earth to whom we may point and say, "There is a good person." We are all evil. We must not pretend that we are good, nor must we think that others are sinless. No one but Jesus is to be put on the pedestal of sinlessness.

In verses 13 and 14 Paul cites passages that describe man's speech. He describes their throat, their tongues, their lips and their mouth. He moves from the inward parts out. Jesus emphasized that our corruption, our defilement, moves from our inward thoughts out through our words and deeds (see Matthew 15:17-20). The throat is an open grave, and as such it stinks. There is the smell of death about the speech of man. The tongue is used to deceive. Paul says, "they keep deceiving." It is an ongoing process. Deceit is a way of life for us, a habit pattern. We not only deceive others, but ourselves as well. Man has convinced himself to believe the lie rather than the truth, and actively promotes the lie.

The lips of man are poisonous. They are deadly. Words can kill others. Words can poison our thoughts and attitudes. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. This is what comes out of our inner persons.

In verses 15-17 Paul cites passages about the feet of men and the path that they take. It is a violent path. "Their feet are swift to shed blood." Men quickly move to kill others whom they hate or who get in their way. As a result "destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known." When violence is used to solve problems, the result is destruction and misery. The path taken by men has largely been a violent path. We have not experienced the path of peace. Our world is a world full of misery, pain and destruction because of our violent nature.

The last quote in verse 18 perhaps sums up the whole problem, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Man has not properly respected God and His power and

authority. We have not had a proper fear of God. The fear of God turns us away from evil. Proverbs 8:13 says "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate". If our eyes saw God or a representation of God, we would tremble in great fear. But when there is no vision of God before our eyes, we do not fear Him as we should. The fear of God is a healthy thing for us. It is dangerous to lack a fear of God, just as it is dangerous to lack a fear of busy streets. If we proceed without fear, we will be destroyed.

The Jews have the oracles of God, the Law of God, and Paul touches on the purpose and effect of the Law in verses 19 and 20. The Law speaks to those under the Law in order to close every mouth and make all the world accountable to God. Those who have read God's Law cannot claim that they are ignorant of His requirements. They cannot say that He did not make His will plain. They have no excuses to offer before Him for their disobedience. Their mouths are closed by His Law, their excuses muted.

All the world is accountable before God because of His Law. He has not remained silent. He has communicated His laws, and everyone in the world will be judged by them in His court. Like it or not, all men are accountable to God. We will all give an account of our lives. We will all appear before His bench. The Law makes us accountable.

Paul explains that the effect of the Law is to make men aware of sin. Paul says, "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." The Law was meant to point out our sinfulness. It was not meant to be a means of justification, but a means of condemnation. Paul will expand on this later in the book. The Law was given to convict us and to point out our need for justification. Yes, we are to obey the Law, but because of the sinful nature we are not able to do so. The Law, therefore, condemns us.

#### Romans 3:21-31

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29 Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. 31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Paul has now established that all men are condemned by the Law as transgressors. We have no righteousness before the Law. The Law points out our sin. The Law shows us how far short of God's perfect standards we fall. The words "But now" in verse 21 indicate a turning point. Paul is going to show that God has provided a way for us to be righteous in His sight apart from the Law.

In verses 21 and 22 Paul talks about the "righteousness of God." He is talking about the righteous standing that comes to us from God, the righteousness that God gives to us. In these two verses he says four things about the righteousness of God.

First, he says that it has been "manifested," has been made visible. God has plainly made evident the way that men and women may be righteous in His sight. It is not a great secret or mystery that can only be fathomed by an elite few. The basis of justification in His sight has been made clear.

Second, His righteousness has been manifested "apart from the Law." That is, the means of righteousness before God is not through observance of the Law. There is a way that we may be righteous before God apart from obeying the Law. There is a way that we may be declared "not guilty" even though we all have violated the Law.

Third, the righteousness of God is "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." This is how it was "manifested". The Law and the Prophets testify about God's gift of righteousness. The Scriptures tell us about this means of righteousness. This principle was not Paul's invention. It is a principle clearly revealed in the Old Testament. Paul will demonstrate this as he continues. The Law points us toward the righteousness of God that does not depend on the Law.

Fourth, he defines the righteousness of God as that which is "through faith in Jesus Christ." It is given to all who believe in Him. This is the righteousness he is talking about, the righteousness that comes as a result of faith, not as a result of our attempts to obey the Law. God imparts righteousness to us through faith in Jesus Christ. This is perhaps the cornerstone of Paul's theology and one of the most important principles of the New Testament.

All who believe in Christ receive God's righteousness because "all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God" (verses 22b, 23). There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, between one man and another. Gentiles are saved in the same way that Jews are, through faith in Christ. All people are sinners and all people must receive God's righteousness in the same way, through faith in Christ. We all fall short of God's original intention for us. God created men and women to reflect His glory, to bear His image. But because of sin we fall short of God's desire for us.

All men are justified "as a gift by His grace" (verse 24). God gives us the free gift of justification. We do not earn it nor deserve it. Our justification is due to God's unearned favor. God's declaration that we are "not guilty" in His sight is His gift to us because of His gracious nature, not because of our performance. Gifts are not earned, they are simply accepted. God offers the free gift of justification and we by faith in Christ receive it. Our only part is to receive it and say "Thank you!" While we may receive it, it is also a gift that we may refuse. We may, for whatever reason, reject God's gracious gift. This is the tragedy of those who have heard the gospel and have rejected it. To refuse to receive God's great gift of grace is foolish and even absurd. To insist that we can "make it on our own" or that we don't need God's grace because we are good enough on our own is the height of arrogance and presumption and is a complete misapprehension of the seriousness of our predicament.

This gracious gift of justification comes "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." "Redemption" here is *apolutrosis*, from *apolutro* (to release on payment of ransom); a release effected by payment of ransom. God can give us this gift because Christ has offered Himself as a ransom for us. Jesus Christ in His death paid the price to redeem us, to release us from sin and death. He paid the debt we owed so that we might be set free from our slavery to sin and death.

Christ Jesus was "displayed publicly" by God (verse 25a) "as a propitiation." Jesus' death was a public atonement for sins, provided by God Himself. God took the initiative. God satisfied His own wrath through the offering of His own Son as a sacrifice. To propitiate carries this idea of the satisfaction of wrath, of placating His anger. God's wrath had been revealed against the ungodliness of men (1:18), and that wrath had to be satisfied and somehow turned away. God decided to turn His own wrath aside by the offering of His Son. As the blood of Christ was shed, His life was poured out for the atonement of our sins. Christ is the "Mercy seat" where our sins are covered and God's just wrath is satisfied.

About this context F.F. Bruce writes,

Paul has thus pressed into service the language of the law-court ("justified"), the slave-market ("redemption") and the temple ("mercy-seat") to do justice to the fullness of God's gracious act in Christ. Pardon, liberation, atonement - all are made available to men by His free initiative, and may be appropriated by faith. And faith in this sense is not a kind of work that is specially meritorious in God's sight; it is that simple and open-hearted attitude to God which takes Him at His word and gratefully accepts His grace. (*The Epistle of Paul To The Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, page 107)

The propitiatory aspect of Christ's death is applied to our lives through faith. We are declared righteous, freed from sin and escape the wrath of God through faith in the propitiation that is in Christ. We receive these great gifts from God through faith in Him.

The purpose of God's public display of His Son as a propitiation was to demonstrate His righteousness (verse 25b, 26). Paul explains by saying, "because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed." God overlooked sins committed before the sacrifice of His Son. The question is, "How can God do that and still be just?" A judge who lets the guilty go free is violating justice. To condemn the innocent and acquit the guilty is not just but is unjust. Surely a just God cannot simply overlook sin. This is Paul's whole point. God has not overlooked the "previously committed" sins, but He has justly judged them in the propitiatory sacrifice of His Son. His just and righteous nature is seen in the blood of Christ. In His death, Christ satisfied God's righteous requirement that sin be judged.

The death of Christ also demonstrates God's righteousness in this present age and shows that God can be both just and justifier of those who believe in Jesus. God can justly declare us "not guilty" even though we are sinners, because of the death of Christ. Christ absorbed the judgment of our sins Himself on the cross for the sake of our justification. Because of Christ we may be declared "not guilty" and God's righteous nature is still intact. The Judge of all the earth always does what is right (Genesis 18:25).

If we earn our justification, we may boast of our achievement (verse 27). But if we are justified as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Christ, we have nothing of which to boast. God has done it all and all the glory belongs to Him. Our boasting is excluded "by a law of faith". Paul explains in verse 28. The "law of faith" says that "a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law." This was Paul's position and is the Christian position. This is what sets Christianity apart from virtually every other religion. It is not a religion of self-achievement. It is not a religion that lays out a rulebook or a path that one must follow in order to achieve perfection or enlightenment

or eternal life. Christianity lays out a Savior who did it all for us. It lays before men the free gift of God's grace which they only accept by faith. This is problematic for many people. Many don't want to admit that they can do nothing to earn or merit God's approval. Many feel that receiving a gift is too easy, too simple, that there must be something more that they must do. Many want to have a reason to boast of their achievements. The pride of man keeps him from God's free gift and out of His kingdom.

Since God is one, He is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. He is the God of all men (verses 29,30). He justifies all on the same basis, by faith and through faith. Whether a man is circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile, he must find justification before God in the same way as everyone else. He must believe in Jesus Christ.

So now the question comes, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith?" (Verse 31.) That is, do we abolish the law because of the principle of justification by faith? Do we do away with the Law? Do we bring it to nothing? Paul says, "May it never be!" In fact, Paul says the reality is just the opposite. We establish the Law. We cause the Law to stand. We vindicate the Law by the principle of faith. The Law is not harmed or nullified by the doctrine of justification by faith. The Law, as we have seen, points out our sin and exposes our need for justification by faith.

#### Romans 4

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, 6 just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: 7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. 8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT." 9 Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." 10 How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. 13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. 16 For this reason *it is* by faith, that *it might be* in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the sight of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. 18 In hope against

hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." 19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Paul has said that the Law and the Prophets testify about God's righteousness which is imparted through faith (3:21). Now he must demonstrate that this is so. He does it by pointing to the example of Abraham.

Paul asks, "What has Abraham found?" Has Abraham found justification by works, or something else? If he was justified by works, then he can boast. But Abraham has no basis for boasting before God. The Scripture says clearly that Abraham was reckoned righteous because he believed God. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6. Here is the context of the quote:

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." 2 And Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir." 4 Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." 5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)

Abraham believed in the promise of the Lord. He took God at His word. This is what faith is all about. Faith means taking God at His word. It means accepting what God says. It means trusting the trustworthiness of God. Abraham not only believed what the Lord said, He *believed in the Lord*. He put his faith in God. It wasn't just the words he believed, it was the person who spoke the words whom he believed.

Because of his faith in God, Abraham was reckoned righteous. God declared him righteous on the basis of his faith in Him. Abraham's faith was reckoned as righteousness. His faith was equivalent to righteousness.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul contrasts those who work with those who do not work. To the one who works, his wage is reckoned as what is due him. It is what is owed to him because of his work. His employer is not being gracious to him when he pays him, but is giving him what he rightfully deserves. The worker has a legal and moral right to his wage. His wages are the fair exchange for his labor. By contrast the one who doesn't work doesn't earn a thing. Whatever he receives is given by grace. He relies on the unearned favor of the one in whom he trusts. Instead of working for God's favor, he simply believes in the One who "justifies the ungodly." His "faith is reckoned as

righteousness." The trouble with working to obtain the righteousness of God is that it is impossible. The only wage that we earn from God by our works is death (Romans 6:23). God is not our debtor. He owes us nothing but death because all of us are sinners who fall short of His glory. We are all ungodly. The only way we may obtain a righteous standing with God is to stop working for it and simply believe in Christ for salvation.

David spoke of the same blessing that Abraham received (verses 6-8). Paul cites David's words from Psalm 32:1-2 to point to the blessing upon the man who is reckoned righteous apart from works. He is a man who has committed "lawless deeds", but they have been forgiven. He has sinned, but his sins have been covered. The Lord will not take his sin "into account". Bruce<sup>1</sup> points out that the same Hebrew word occurs in Psalm 32:2 and in Genesis 15:6, the word "reckoned." David says that sin will not be reckoned to the account of the man who is forgiven by the Lord. Moses said that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. The two are equivalent. In order to have righteousness reckoned to him, Abraham's sins had to be forgiven and covered. Instead of having sin reckoned to him, righteousness was reckoned to him. Being justified by faith does not mean that you have not sinned. It means that your sins are forgiven and covered. Because of Christ and His work on the cross, your sins are not taken into account, but His righteousness is imputed to you and your sin was imputed to Him. Our sins and lawless deeds have been dealt with in Christ's death.

Next, Paul asks, (verse 9), "Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also?" The blessing is that of not having one's sins taken into account, of being justified through faith. Paul asks if this blessing is just for the circumcised or if it is available also to those who are uncircumcised. In answering the question, he points again to Abraham. Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. Paul asks (verse 10), "How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?" And he answers, "Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised." Circumcision was the mark of a Jew. It was the symbol of their distinction from the other nations, of their unique relationship to God. But Abraham was justified by faith before he received the covenant of circumcision. The blessing of imputed righteousness did not depend on circumcision. God did not say, "OK, Abraham, you believe in Me. Now get yourself circumcised and I will count you righteous." He was declared righteous through faith before he was circumcised.

Verse 11 tells us that circumcision was a "sign" and a "seal". Circumcision signified that Abraham had been justified by faith and had a special relationship to God. Circumcision was not the means of justification, but the sign of it. It is similar to baptism in this sense. Baptism is not the means of salvation, but a sign of it. Circumcision was a "seal" of the righteousness of faith which Abraham had before he was circumcised. It was God's "stamp" of approval. God put His seal on Abraham to certify that Abraham was righteous in His sight. In Ephesians 1:13 Paul uses the same word and says, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." As Abraham was "sealed" with the sign of circumcision, so now the believer is "sealed" in Christ with the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit and His indwelling presence is the seal and sign that we belong to Christ and that He has accepted us. The Holy Spirit is the sign of the New Covenant as circumcision was the sign of the Old.

1 F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul To The Romans*, Tyndale, page 115.

Since Abraham was reckoned righteous by faith before he was circumcised, he became the father of all who believe without being circumcised. Since he was also the one who received the sign and seal of circumcision, he is also the father of those who are circumcised and follow his example of faith. Righteousness may be reckoned to those who are not circumcised. The uncircumcised are not disqualified from justification by faith. Nor are the circumcised exempt from justification by faith. The circumcised must exercise the same faith Abraham exercised in order to be reckoned righteous. It is faith that makes us children of Abraham. Jews and Gentiles must be reckoned righteous in the same way.

God's promise to Abraham was that "he would be heir of the world" (verse 13). God had said that in Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Later, God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's "seed" (Genesis 22:18). Paul tells us in Galatians 3:16 that the "seed" refers to Christ. In Abraham's descendants and especially through Christ Himself, the world has been blessed. In his greater son Jesus Abraham has inherited the world. Jesus is the Ruler of all. He reigns over heaven and earth. In Christ Abraham inherits the whole world.

This promise that Abraham would inherit the world did not come through the Law. The Law came centuries later. The promise came through the righteousness of faith. This is the "blessing" that comes upon all the earth through Abraham. God did not say that He would bless Abraham and the world through him only if he kept the Law. He blessed Abraham because Abraham believed in Him. Blessing comes through believing. In fact, Abraham obeyed because he believed. Without faith there can be no obedience in our lives. God's promises come to us and are apprehended through faith, not through the Law.

If keeping the Law were necessary in order to become an heir, then faith would be made "void" and the promise would be "nullified" (verse 14). Faith is emptied of any power or significance if God requires us to keep the Law in order to become His heir. His promise is brought to nothing and cannot be fulfilled if lawkeeping is required. Man is unable to perfectly keep the Law, and therefore the promise cannot be fulfilled through our observance of the Law. Paul explains why this is so in verse 15. The Law brings about wrath. The Law condemns us (3:19-20). The Law points out our sin and shows us that we fall short. The Law puts God's wrath into motion. We cannot become heirs of God by trying to observe the Law, but rather we become more and more guilty in His sight. By contrast, where there is no law, there is no violation. Bruce feels that perhaps Paul is quoting some current saying of the time. One cannot violate a law where no law exists.

Since the Law cannot make us heirs of God, the inheritance comes by faith so that it might be "in accordance with grace" (verse 16). When we work, we receive what we've earned, but when we believe, we receive a free gift of God's grace. By faith the promise was "certain" to all the descendants of Abraham. The promise is made firm or secure through faith and is based on God's grace and His power. Abraham secured God's promise through his faith. God is able to give life to the dead and call into being things which do not exist. This was what God did in Abraham's case. Abraham and Sarah were beyond the age of having children, and yet God enabled them to have a child. God promised that Abraham would be a father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-5), yet there was no evidence that this would or could come to pass. Humanly speaking, it could not happen. Nonetheless Abraham believed God's promise and God brought it

about. He "called into being" nations that did not exist and fulfilled His promise to Abraham.

Through faith, then, we may be assured that what God has promised He will fulfill in His time by His grace and power. Abraham and Sarah had to wait many years for God to fulfill His promise. They had to wait until all their efforts were worthless. God's promises are not fulfilled through our efforts, but purely through His grace.

When all hope of really having a child had long expired, Abraham still hoped and still believed. He continued hoping and believing even when it was (humanly speaking) ridiculous to do so. God promised him descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens (Genesis 15:4-5), descendants of one who would come forth from his own body. Abraham believed God's promise. He believed that God could and would bring this promise to pass. He believed that God was a God who keeps His word. Even when he was old and Sarah was well past the age of childbearing, Abraham continued to believe God's promise.

God is not limited by our limitations. What is unreasonable or impossible for us is no problem for Him. He can cause a post-menopausal woman to conceive a child. He can make the infertile fertile. In fact it often seems that God waits until we give up all hope of doing it ourselves before He steps in to fulfill His promises. Abraham and Sarah tried to do it on their own, with disastrous consequences. Strife and heartache with Hagar and Ishmael was the result. Our attempts to fulfill God's promises in the flesh will just result in frustration. Learn to "give up" early on. Say often to God, "I can't do it, but by your grace and power it will be done as You act."

Abraham did not overlook the facts. He "contemplated his own body...and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (verse 19). He was virtually dead. Sarah's womb had never produced a child, and was now certifiably dead. Abraham did not ignore these realities. Faith does not mean ignoring the obstacles or denying that they exist. Faith means looking beyond the obstacles to the One who is able to override them. This is what Abraham did. His faith was not weakened by considering the natural impossibility of God's promise.

Abraham not only contemplated the natural realities, he also contemplated the supernatural reality. God had given a promise (verse 20). Regarding the promise, Abraham did not waver in unbelief. His faith grew stronger, and thus he gave glory to God. Abraham did not waver between believing and doubting. He decided to believe God. He had full assurance that what God had promised He was able to perform (verse 21). Abraham's focus was on God's ability to do what He promises to do. He did not allow himself to be defeated by the physical impossibility of the promise. He did not exclusively look at the reasons why this promise could never come to pass. He factored in the power of the God in Whom he believed. God could bring life out of death. God could create something that had never existed before. Giving a child to Abraham and Sarah would be easy for Him.

Too often we focus on the obstacles instead of the ability of God to override those obstacles. Our faith is stymied by the human impossibilities. We must not ignore the human realities, but we also must not forget the superhuman abilities of our God to do whatever He purposes to do. If God has promised it, it can and will be done. This we must believe without doubting.

This was the kind of faith that was reckoned as righteousness in Abraham's case (verse 22). It was faith that really believed in the Lord. Abraham took God at His word

and believed His promise. He believed that God was trustworthy and was a person of His word. He believed in God's ability to bring life out of death.

The record of Abraham's justification was not written down just for his sake, but for our sake as well (verses 23,24). We are reckoned righteous in the same way that Abraham was. We discover this principle of justification by faith as we read of Abraham. God gave us a book so that we would know how to be right with Him. He gave us His book in order to lead us to faith in Himself and to eternal life.

As Abraham believed in a God who was able to give life to the dead and create that which did not exist, so we believe in a God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. We believe that God delivered Jesus up because of our sin. We believe that it was for our sins that Jesus was crucified. We also believe that because of our justification Jesus was raised from the dead. This is evangelical, saving faith. It is faith that believes in a God who brings life out of death. It is faith in a God who has covered our sins with the blood of His son. It is faith in a God who has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. Our justification is impossible apart from the work of God on our behalf.

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. 6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Because God has justified us by faith, we now are at peace with Him. Peace with God is one of the results of justification by faith which comes to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. We were formerly enemies of God, rebels and foes. But now in Christ we are declared righteous in His sight and are reconciled to Him. We are at peace with Him, no longer at war. We are God's allies. More than that, we are God's children. He is not waging war against us. He is Fathering us. He does not hate us, but He loves us. He does not oppose us, but gives us grace.

Also through Christ we have "obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand" (verse 2). The Greek word translated "introduction" is *prosagōgē*, "a bringing to, access, introduction" (New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance). Through Jesus Christ we are brought to grace and given access to it. Jesus Christ leads us to grace. He is the One who introduces us to God's unearned, undeserved favor. In this grace we stand, we live in it. We are not only saved by it, but we continue to live in it and walk in it. In Christ we are clothed with the grace of God, and apart from

that grace we could not stand before Him. Apart from that grace we would still be lost - we would still be rebels.

Through Christ we "exult in hope of the glory of God." To exult means "To rejoice in or as in triumph; take great delight <sup>2</sup>." We are exultant in the hope of God's glory. We will one day see and share in God's glory. We will be glorified with Christ. We will be like Him. This is our great hope that should make us exultant. We are and will be victorious in Christ. This hope is a source of great joy to us, and we should rejoice in it daily.

We exult not only in the hope of the glory of God, but also in our tribulations (verse 3). A tribulation is any difficulty that puts pressure on the spirit, that burdens us or weighs us down. We are to celebrate and rejoice in our tribulations because we know what they produce in our lives. We do not exult because we enjoy tribulations. Paul does not say we exult *because of* our tribulations, but *in* our tribulations. In the midst of tribulations we exult because we know that tribulation produces perseverance. "Perseverance" is *hupomone*, to "remain under" difficult circumstances. The King James most often translates it "patience". In James 1:3 it is translated "endurance." James writes, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). Problems and difficulties test our faith and increase our ability to trust God in the midst of trouble. They make our faith grow and give us a "stick-to-itiveness" that we need. This is why we rejoice in tribulations.

Tribulations produce perseverance, and perseverance brings about "proven character". As we pass successive trials and grow in perseverance, our character is tested and approved. We are shown to truly have a godly character. We see that our faith survives difficulty. Some people drop their faith when tribulations come along. Jesus illustrated this truth in the parable of the sower:

"And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." (Matthew 13:20-22)

The one who is truly saved, who has truly received and welcomed the word, will persevere and will grow and will be fruitful even in the midst of tribulation.

Proven character produces hope. As we see that our character, through trials and perseverance, is tested and approved, we grow in hope. We see that we really are the children of God and really will inherit His kingdom and promises. This hope, Paul explains, is one that does not disappoint us. We may often hope for something and be disappointed because the one in whom we hoped did not follow through on his or her promise. But our hope in God will not disappoint us because "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." God has poured his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in

2 *Doubleday Dictionary*, page 252.

us that assures us of our hope. We know that our hope will not disappoint because the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God and heirs of His (Romans 8:16,17). God will not let you down. His promises are sure.

In verses 6-8 Paul goes on to explain the nature of the love of God. God's love is such that it is demonstrated in the sacrifice of Christ for those who are ungodly sinners. There may be some men who might be so courageous as to die for a good man, but God's love is seen in giving His Son for undeserving rebellious sinners. Our situation was that "we were still helpless" (verse 6) and "we were yet sinners" (verse 8) when Christ died for us. This passage tells us that "Christ died for *the ungodly*" (verse 6) and that "Christ died for *us*" (verse 8). The point is unmistakable - we are the "ungodly". We did not fall into the category of the "righteous" or the "good" when Christ died for us. We were helpless, ungodly sinners. Christ died for His enemies. This is how God demonstrated His love. The proof of God's love is in the death of Christ. Do you want to know how much God loves you? He loves you so much He gave His Son for you when you hated Him, when you were apathetic about Him. When you were antagonistic toward Him, He made the supreme sacrifice for you.

Having been justified (verse 9) and having been reconciled (verse 10) "we shall be saved" from the wrath of God (verse 9) by the life of Christ (verse 10). Because in the past we were declared righteous by the blood of Christ, in the future we will be saved from God's wrath through Christ. God's wrath does not rest on us any longer if we have been reconciled to Him through the death of Christ. The death of Christ is the basis of our justification and reconciliation to God. His life is the basis of our future deliverance from the wrath of God on the day of judgment. Because He lives, we know that we will be delivered from the wrath to come. Believers in Christ will not face God's wrath. Jesus is the One who took God's wrath upon Himself for us. If we have been justified through faith in Him and reconciled to God, we are exempt from the wrath of God. There is "much more" (verses 9 and 10) than justification and reconciliation. If God reconciled us to Himself while we were enemies, then how much more, now that we are reconciled and are His children and no longer enemies, will we be saved by the life of Christ. We now have the assurance that we will escape God's wrath through Christ.

Once again, in verse 11, Paul says that we "exult". He has said already that we "exult in the hope of the glory of God" (verse 2) and that we also "exult in our tribulations" (verse 3). Now he mentions the whole basis for our exulting. We exult in God Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ. We exult and celebrate because of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Through Christ we have "received the reconciliation". God is always the one who brings about reconciliation. There is no hope for us unless God reconciles us. We cannot do anything to reconcile ourselves to God. God in Christ has done what was necessary for us to be reconciled to Him. We simply receive that reconciliation, and it is something we have "now". Reconciliation to God is not a future thing, but is a present reality. We don't have to wait for reconciliation, but it is an accomplished fact. Paul talks about this some more in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled

to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Romans 5:12-21

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned-- 13 for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 And the gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. 20 And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This passage compares what we are and have in Adam to what we are and have in Christ. Paul says that it was through Adam that sin and death entered the world, but through Christ we receive the gift of righteousness and life.

Through the one man Adam sin entered into the world (verse 12). Through sin death entered the world and "spread to all men, because all sinned." Adam was man in the beginning. He and Eve were all of mankind, and since they disobeyed and sinned, all mankind disobeyed and sinned. We became an errant race in Adam and Eve. We are all born under the sentence of death because our original ancestor sinned. In Adam we all sinned and we all die. This is one of the big ideas of the Christian faith, of the Christian and biblical world view, the doctrine of "original sin." No one can truthfully claim that they are not a sinner. We have all inherited a sinful nature from Adam.

Even before the Law came along in Moses' time, sin was in the world (verse 13). But sin was not charged to men's accounts before the Law came along. That is not to say that men were not guilty sinners before the Law, but that the standards had not yet been revealed to men. It was like the American frontier before any nation ruled over it. There was no legal authority. It was a lawless region. Men were still scoundrels, but there was no authority to hold them accountable. With no published law there could be no published transgression.

Even though sin is not imputed where there is no law, nevertheless death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses (verse 14). Men were still subject to death though they were without the Law. God enforced the penalty that He promised to Adam for his disobedience. We die because Adam sinned. We die even if we do not sin in the same way that he did. Death rules over all mankind throughout all history.

Verse 14 also tells us that Adam is a "type of Him who was to come." That is, Adam is a type of Christ. Adam was the original representative of man in sin and death, and Jesus is the representative of man in obedience and life. Adam was the perfect man who sinned, and Jesus is the perfect man who established righteousness.

In verses 15-19 Paul contrasts that which came through Adam's transgression with that which came through God's free gift of grace in Christ. He says that the free gift is not like the transgression. They are dissimilar in that they had opposite effects. By the transgression of Adam "the many died". Judgment arose from Adam's sin and resulted in condemnation for all. By Adam's transgression death reigned over all mankind. Through Adam's disobedience we were all made sinners. But by contrast the free gift of God's grace in Christ arose from many transgressions and results in justification. Those who receive God's grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through Jesus Christ. Death no longer reigns over those who receive God's free gift of righteousness. Justification resulted through Christ's one act of righteousness and justification results in life. Through the obedience of Christ "the many" are made righteous.

We need to notice here that though the judgment, condemnation and death that come to us through Adam is universal (all are sinners and all die), the free gift of righteousness and life only comes to those who "receive" it (verse 17). Justification of life has the potential of covering everyone if everyone would receive it (verse 18), but many reject God's free gift of righteousness. Those who receive the gift of righteousness are those who will "reign in life", but those who reject it will remain subject to condemnation and death.

Between Adam and Christ came the Law (verses 20 and 21). The Law served to increase transgression. Through the stimulus of the Law, sin grew rather than diminishing. But in contrast, where sin increased, there grace was even more abundant. The grace of God is not only adequate, it is super-abundant. If we have an abundant supply of sin and transgression, we have an even greater supply of God's grace! Those who have the Law should be the first to embrace God's grace, because they understand how far short of God's holy standard they fall. The Law should show a man how sinful he is.

For those who receive it, God's grace reigns over them through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ. Grace rules your life if you are a Christian, not sin, and not the Law. You are subject to God's grace and dependent upon it. Because of God's grace you receive the gift of righteousness and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

#### Romans 6

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is

master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, 13 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! 16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. 20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. 22 But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Having said that when sin increases, grace abounds all the more, Paul now anticipates the question that results in verse 1 of chapter 6. The question comes, "Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?" Should we encourage newly justified and reconciled believers in Christ to continue on sinning in order to cause God's grace to flow all the more? Should we preach and promote the practice of sin from the pulpit so that we may obtain more of the grace of God? After all, we love to sin and God loves to forgive, so it is a perfect arrangement. So the argument might go.

Paul's answer is emphatic, "May it never be!" (verse 2). The rhetorical question that follows gives his thesis for the chapter, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" The thesis is that those who trust in Christ have died to sin. Our sins have been forgiven and covered by the grace of God in Christ, and we have also in Him died to sin. We may no longer live in sin. Sin is no longer the habit pattern of the believer in Christ. It is unheard of that a true Christian should go on in a habitual lifestyle of sin. We are not to "continue in sin". The why and how of that will be discussed in this chapter.

What we need to know is that everyone who has been baptized into Christ has been baptized into His death (verse 3). Paul assumes that his readers know this already. They should be familiar with the symbolism of baptism. Baptism is an identification with Christ, with His death and resurrection. In Galatians 3:27 Paul says, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Believers become members of Christ. By faith we unite ourselves with Christ and His death and resurrection is applied to us.

Through baptism we have been buried with Christ (verse 4) into death, "in order that" we might "walk in newness of life." Before we can be raised from the dead, we must die. Baptism symbolizes our death and resurrection with Christ. As Christ through

the glory of the Father was raised from the dead, so we too are raised from the dead. Dying to ourselves and to our old nature enables us to walk in newness of life. Through our identification with Christ and His death and resurrection, we are given a new life. The old life is dead and gone. Paul will go on to explain this in greater detail here.

Paul explains in verses 5-7 that, having been united with Christ in "the likeness of His death," we will certainly be united also with Him in His resurrection. We can be certain that if we have died with Christ, we will also be raised with Him. In Galatians 2:20 he says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." Our lives have been exchanged for the life of Christ. If we are identified with Christ in death and resurrection, we know that our "old self" has been crucified with Christ for the purpose of doing away with our "body of sin." We should no longer be slaves to sin because our sinful nature has died. When Paul says, "for he who has died is freed from sin," the word translated "freed" is *dedikaiōtai*, "justified." We are declared righteous from sin.

Paul tells us more about the "old self" in Colossians 3:9 and Ephesians 4:22: "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices" (Colossians 3:9). Ephesians 4:22 says, "...that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit." The old self, whom we have laid aside and are to lay aside, is consumed with evil practices. It is being corrupted and controlled by deceitful lusts. The things it desires are evil, and the things it does are evil. Wrong desires lead to wrong practices, and this is what the "old self" is all about. This is the "old self" that has been crucified with Christ. This is what has been done away with at the cross. The death of this "old self" liberates us from slavery to sin. Deceitful lusts and evil practices no longer rule our lives. If we have been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, we need no longer serve sin.

Having died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him (verses 8 and 9). Death comes before resurrection. One cannot be resurrected if one has not died. We have died with Christ to sin and self, and we believe that when the time comes, we will also be raised from the dead. We believe this because we know that the risen Christ is never to die again and that death is no longer master over Him. Jesus has not only conquered and freed us from sin, but he has also conquered and freed us from death. Christ will never die again because the death He died, "He died to sin, once for all" (verse 10). Jesus died once for all sins for all time. Multiple sacrifices are not required. The one sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to cover the sins of all men in all generations. The author of Hebrews says, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:10-14). The sacrifices under the old covenant were insufficient, but the death of Christ is more than sufficient to cover our sins.

His death was a death to sin, but the life Christ now lives, He lives to God (10b). Jesus is dead to sin and alive to God. The potential for sin is no longer operative in Jesus. I suppose that theoretically He could have sinned when He was on earth, but now, having overcome sin and death, sin is no longer even a possibility for Him.

In verse 11 Paul repeats his oft-used verb *logizomai* ("reckon" - see chapter 4) and commands his readers to "consider" or "reckon" themselves to be "dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." As Christ has died to sin and now lives to God, so we are to consider that the same thing has happened to us spiritually. We must think of ourselves as those who are dead to sin. We are, in Christ, no longer subject to sin. Instead, we are subject to God. Previously we were dead to God and alive to sin. But having received God's gift of grace, we are now alive to God and dead to sin. This is only true if we are "in Christ Jesus." It is in Christ Jesus that all the blessings of God come to us. It is in Christ Jesus that we die to sin and live to God.

Paul tells us what we are not to do and what we are to do in verses 12 and 13. We are not to allow sin to continue to reign in our mortal bodies. We are not to continue obeying the lusts of sin. We are not to continue to present the parts of our bodies to sin as tools of unrighteousness. Unbelievers are slaves to sin and its lusts, but by God's grace we who have received God's gift of righteousness in Christ have died to sin and have been raised to newness of life, and have been liberated from sin and its lusts. Therefore, if sin rules in our lives as Christians it is because we are allowing it to happen. If we are controlled by sin it is because we are submitting ourselves to it. Imagine how absurd it would be if a slave, having been set free from a cruel master, went back to submit again to him! We would say to him, "Hey - you're a free man! You don't have to keep putting up with this abuse! This man doesn't own you any more - don't keep putting yourself under his authority!" This is the situation of a sinning Christian. If we sin it is because we have presented the parts of our body to sin as tools (or weapons) of unrighteousness. Paul says, "Don't keep on allowing sin to rule over you!"

Instead of presenting ourselves to sin and allowing it to reign over us, we are to present ourselves to God as those He has raised from the dead. The parts of our bodies are to be presented to God as instruments (tools or weapons) of righteousness. We must allow God to rule over us. We must allow Him to use our bodies for righteous purposes instead of allowing sin to use us for unrighteous purposes. God is our new owner in Christ and we are to submit to His use. Our bodies can be tools of unrighteousness or of righteousness. By our will we decide whether God will have use of our bodies to carry out His will or if sin will use them for its lustful purposes.

Paul explains in verse 14, "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." Grace gives us the power to overthrow the rule of sin. It gives us the ability to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God. Grace liberates us from sin's mastery and frees us to be used by God.

In verse 1, Paul's question was, "Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?" He was asking if we should continue in a sinful habit pattern or lifestyle. Here in verse 15, he asks, "Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace?" The word means to commit occasional acts of sin. This imaginary questioner has given up the idea that we can continue in a lifestyle of sin, but now is asking if we can't occasionally indulge ourselves in a little sin. Paul's answer is the same as it was previously, "May it never be!" Not only does grace deny us permission to continue in constant sin, it also denies us permission to even sin a little bit once in a while. Sin is incompatible with a life lived under the grace of God.

As he asked in verse 3, so he again asks in verse 16, "**Do you not know** that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in

righteousness?" This is an elementary point that surely did not need pointing out. He assumes that they know this. If you offer yourself as a slave to someone, you are their slave. You are bound to obey them. If we offer ourselves to sin we become slaves of sin and it will result in death. If we give ourselves to obedience, we become slaves of obedience which results in righteousness. We cannot have two masters. We cannot both serve sin and God at the same time. Grace liberates us from sin and grace keeps us liberated.

In the past we were slaves of sin (verse 17). But thanks are due God that we became obedient to the form of teaching to which we were committed and were freed from sin and became slaves of righteousness. It is because of God's work in our lives that we became obedient to the teachings of Christ and the apostles. He is to be thanked for our freedom and liberation from sin. We could not free ourselves. He did it for us in Christ.

The obedience we have comes from the heart. It is not just an outward obedience, but it comes from within. In Christ we receive an obedient heart. Someone who is truly saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ will have a desire to obey and to do God's will. Show me someone who doesn't care about obeying the Lord and I'll show you someone who is not really a Christian. The Holy Spirit plants in us the heartfelt desire to obey.

In the past we were slaves of sin, but now, having been freed, we are slaves of righteousness (verse 18). Righteousness now rules in our lives. Slavery to sin is a thing of the past.

Why is Paul speaking this way? It is because of the weakness of our flesh (verse 19). He is stating obvious facts and using simple analogies because our flesh is weak. Our understanding is weak and clouded by our sinful nature. As Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Chapter 7 of Romans will explore this whole problem in detail. Vigilance and prayer is constantly prescribed because of the weakness of our flesh. We want to do what is right in our spirits, but because of the weakness of our sinful nature, we must constantly pray that we might not be tempted.

Again, Paul says that we are to present the parts of our bodies to righteousness as slaves. As we do this, it will result in sanctification. We are made holy as we constantly give ourselves to righteousness instead of impurity and lawlessness. We are to do this "just as" we used to present the parts of our bodies to impurity and lawlessness. As we used to surrender ourselves to sin, now we are to surrender ourselves to righteousness. In the days when we were slaves of sin, we were free from the control of righteousness (verse 20). Righteousness was not in the picture when sin was our master. Now, however, we must see that the situation has been reversed by the grace of God. Sin is out of the picture. Now we are subject to righteousness. Righteousness is our new master.

In verses 21-23 Paul contrasts the benefit and outcome of slavery to sin with the benefit and outcome of slavery to God. He asks, "What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed?" "Benefit" is *karpos* - fruit, or harvest. He is asking about the fruit of those things that we did when we were slaves of sin. Then he points out that the "outcome of those things is death." Death is the fruit of a life of slavery to sin. He restates it in verse 23, "For the wages of sin is death". The payoff of sin is death; physical death and spiritual death. What we earn from serving sin is death. There is no benefit derived from sin. No good fruit comes from sin, and it is the

deception of Satan if we think sin bears any good fruit. The practices of our past slavery to sin are things of which we are ashamed.

On the other hand, there is a great harvest of good fruit from being a slave of God. We "derive" great "benefit" from being freed from sin and enslaved to God. It results in sanctification and the outcome is eternal life. Freedom from sin and subjection to God brings us into the process of sanctification. We are set apart to God and made more holy and more like Him. Our liberation from sin and enslavement to God also frees us from death and brings us into relationship to God which is eternal life (John 17:3). Paul further explains in verse 23 that "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Eternal life is not a wage that we earn, but a free gift given to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our life.

The Christian has no reason to continue on sinning. We have been freed and liberated from sin and death by the grace of God in Christ. By His grace we are now free to live a holy life, set apart for the service of God in righteousness.

Romans 7:1-6

Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Back in chapter 6, verse 14, Paul said, "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." Having said this, he needs to explain more about the connection between sin and the law. The question naturally would come, "Why would being 'under law' necessarily mean that we are slaves to sin?" This is what he will be explaining in chapter 7. The Law arouses sin. It tells us what sin is and actually has the effect of telling us how to sin. The Law itself is not sinful, in fact it prohibits sin and prescribes righteousness and obedience. The weakness is not in the Law, but in our flesh. This is the thrust of chapter 7.

In verses 1-6 Paul gives us an analogy of marriage and points out that husbands and wives are bound to each other by law for as long as they live. In verses 1-3 he gives us the analogy. In verses 4-6 he gives us the application of the analogy. If the husband dies, the wife is free to be joined to another man. But if her husband is still alive, she is an adulteress if she joins herself to another.

First, Paul says that we need to understand a simple principle. He again asks in verse one his rhetorical question, "Do you not know". This is a simple principle he is stating that he assumes that everyone is aware of. The principle is that the law has jurisdiction over a person only while that person is alive. He is writing to people who know the law, and surely they know this simple thing, that only while one lives is he subject to the law. Once you are dead, the law says nothing to you. Dead men are not

under the jurisdiction of the law. Dead men are not prosecuted for their crimes, they are just buried and forgotten.

A married woman is "bound by law to her husband" while he's alive (verse 2). The law ties a married woman to her husband. The same is true of the husband. He is tied by the law to his wife. They are bound together. There is a sense in which married people are in bondage. They are required by God's law to remain together until one spouse dies. In marriage we "cleave" to one another. We are stuck to one another and are tied together by the law. This bondage can be pleasant or unpleasant, depending on the nature and behavior of the people involved, but it is a sort of bondage. Marriage will limit our freedom.

If the husband dies, then the wife "is released from the law concerning the husband." The law no longer can bind her to a dead husband. The cord of the law is cut so that she is released from her husband. But if her husband is alive and she goes to be joined to another man, she will be called an adulteress. She is what she is called. She has broken the cord that bound her to her husband and has violated the law. She has committed adultery. But if her husband is dead, she is free to do the very same thing and be joined to another man, and she does not violate the law. In fact, her union with the second man is blessed as was the first.

God's original intention concerning marriage was that it was to last for a lifetime. Jesus pointed this out in Matthew 19:3-9, "And *some* Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, 'Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any cause at all?' And He answered and said, 'Have you not read, that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, "FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH"? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?' He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'" In marriage we are "joined together" by God. He is the one who ties us together, and it is His intention that we stay together until death. The one who tears apart that bond and goes after someone else becomes an adulterer or adulteress. We must not minimize this in our day. Just because our world is lax about divorce does not mean that the church must be also. We must uphold the standard of Jesus.

Paul turns to the application of this marriage analogy in verses 4-6. In the analogy it is the husband who dies and the wife is free to be joined to another. In Paul's application, it is we who die and are freed from the Law. Paul says, "You also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ." God caused us to die to the Law. We had no part in it. Our death to the Law is something that happened to us when we died with Christ. It is "through the body of Christ" that we were made to die to the Law. The body of Christ was the instrument of our death to the Law. The purpose of our death to the Law was so that we would be "joined to another" and so that "we might bear fruit for God." The one to whom we are now joined is "Him who was raised from the dead". To be joined to Christ we had to be freed from the Law. We are no longer bound to the Law, but instead are bound to the One who fulfilled the Law, the Lord

Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead. As we are bound to Him we are enabled to bear fruit for God.

Paul contrasts the past with the present in verses 5 and 6. In the past the sinful passions of our flesh, stimulated by the Law, worked in the parts of our bodies to bear fruit for death. It is these sinful passions, stimulated by the Law, that lead us into lawlessness and death. But now we are able to "bear fruit for God" (verse 4) because we have been released from the Law and have "died to that by which we were bound." Now we serve God in the "newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." As we are joined to Christ and controlled by the Spirit of Christ, we bear good fruit instead of worthless fruit. We are now under the control of the Spirit and not of the Law. As we abide in Christ, we bear fruit that brings glory to God and we fulfill God's purpose for us (see John 15:1-8).

Our whole purpose as humans is to bear good fruit and so glorify God (John 15:8). Paul tells us here that in order to bear fruit for God we must die to the Law and be joined to Christ. The only fruit we bear apart from Christ is "fruit for death". As we try to obey the Law, we find that it stimulates our sinful desires and does not give us any power to do what is right and good. But as we abide in Christ and walk by the Spirit, we do what is right and bear good fruit.

#### Romans 7:7-13

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. 9 And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. 12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Paul wants to make it very clear that the problem is not with the Law. The Law is not sin. The problem is sin in us, not in the Law. The trouble that Paul had and that we all have is our sinful nature. He asks, "Is the Law sin?" Again he answers, "May it never be!" The Law is holy and righteous and good (verse 12). God's Law is perfect. What the Law does is impart to us the knowledge of sin. Paul uses a personal example. He learned about coveting when he heard that the Law said, "You shall not covet." He may have committed the sin before hearing the command, but the command identified it and defined it.

The commandments of the Law make sin come alive in our lives and cause us to die (verses 8-11). Twice here he says that sin takes "opportunity through the commandment" (verses 8 and 11). The word translated "opportunity" means "a starting place" (Robertson's Word Pictures). Other versions use the word "occasion" (King James, World English Version). Sin finds a starting point, a beachhead or a "base of operations" in our lives through the commandments of the Law. In Paul's case the command, "You shall not covet" was used as a basis for sin to produce in him "coveting

of every kind." Evil desire was stirred up in Paul, as it was in Eve, by the prohibition. The command in Exodus 20:17 says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." There are many different things that we might covet, and Paul says all kinds of coveting was produced in him by sin taking opportunity through the commandment. Without the commandment sin is dead. But when the commandment comes along, sin finds its opportunity and comes alive, and we die. When something is legally prohibited the desire to violate that prohibition comes alive. It is like saying to someone, "Don't think about Disneyland." What will they then be thinking about? Of course, they are now thinking about Disneyland because they were commanded not to think about it! The command suggested the thought, though it commanded the opposite.

Sin is the thing that deceives us and kills us (verse 11). But the commandment gives it the opportunity. Paul's conclusion about the Law is that it is "holy and righteous and good" (verse 12). God's commands are pure and right and good. We will find no fault in the Law, nor in the commands of the Law. The fault is in our flesh, in our sinful nature.

Just as he said that the Law is not sin, so in verse 13 Paul says that the Law is not death. Again, the fault is not with the Law, but with sin working through the Law. It is sin in us that effects our death through the good commands of God's Law. The Law shows how utterly sinful sin is. The commands of the Law reveal sin in us and show us how bad our sin is. If we are unaware of the Law, we may think that we are pretty good people. But once we really see what God requires, we are convicted and are shown to be guilty.

#### Romans 7:14-25

For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. 19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Paul continues his first person testimony about his struggle with sin. We must note that it is a present-tense struggle. He doesn't say, "I was of flesh", but "I am of flesh". Even the man who has been freed from slavery to sin and death still must struggle with the sinful nature, with the flesh. The sinful nature is still present in the man who has been redeemed and given a new nature by Christ. My sinful nature is still a slave to sin. My flesh still is hostile toward God and does not submit to His Law. My new

nature, though, is a slave to God and to righteousness. The new nature desires to keep the Law and to follow the Spirit of God.

The flesh causes us to do the very things that we hate (verse 15). We do not understand what we are doing because we are not doing what we would like to do (obeying God's commands), but we are doing what we hate (disobedience). We must understand this conflict between the flesh and the Spirit because it can lead to confusion, discouragement and frustration. This conflict no doubt has caused many believers to doubt their salvation. We are pulled in two directions. We are pulled toward sin and rebellion by the flesh, and at the same time are pulled toward obedience and faithfulness by God's Spirit.

Paul's desire, his "wish" to do that which the Law requires shows that he inwardly agrees with the Law (verse 16). If he hates the sin that he commits and does not wish to do it, he gives evidence that he agrees with the Law and believes that it is good. He does not commit sin because he disrespects or disagrees with the Law. He is not sinning because he wants to overthrow the Law or trample on God's authority. He commits sin because sin "indwells" him and is a slave to sin and disobedience (verse 17). It is interesting to note that here he says sin "indwells" him, and in Romans 8:11 he says God's Spirit "indwells" us, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who *indwells* you." The word "indwells" is the same word that we have in 7:17. Both the sinful nature and the Spirit of God indwell us at the same time. This is what causes our struggle.

Paul's solution was to disassociate himself from his sinful nature. He says, "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me." He is not the one who does what he does not want to do, but sin indwelling him is the one that does it. With his mind he serves the law of God, with his flesh the law of sin (verse 25). Our sinful nature is an alien. We must see it as being foreign to us now and not our true nature in Christ. We must learn not to associate our identity with sin, but to associate our identity with our new nature in Christ.

The flesh is no good. Paul says, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not" (verse 18). We've already noted that the Christian is indwelt by both sin and the Spirit of God, so Paul is not saying here that nothing good dwells in him anywhere. He specifies that there is no good thing in his flesh. The flesh is completely corrupt and serves the "law of sin". He says that he knows this. He is well aware of the fact that his flesh is no good. This is something that we all need to know. We may expect nothing but sin from our flesh, from our sinful nature. This is why it is futile to try to live in a manner pleasing to God by the energy of the flesh. The flesh cannot do what is good. If we are walking in the flesh, we will not do the good that we wish to do, but we will practice the evil that we do not wish. Every person must make this same confession, "Nothing good dwells in my flesh." When we face up to this truth, we are freed to look to the Spirit of God to liberate us.

Again, Paul says in verse 20 that if he is involved in doing something he does not wish to do, he is no longer the one doing it, but it is sin dwelling in him that is doing it. He discovers the principle that evil is present in him even though he desires to do what is good (verse 21). The struggle we have in wanting to do good and failing to do it uncovers this law that evil dwells in us. The word translated "principle" in verse 21 is *nomos*, law. The presence of evil dwelling in us is a "law". A law is an unbending

principle that applies to everyone everywhere. This law is like the law of gravity, like it or not we are all subject to it and cannot escape it. Evil is present in all of us, and it keeps us from doing what is good. This is an important doctrine. You will never meet anyone on this earth who does not have sin dwelling in them. Many will deny this "law" but they are subject to it nonetheless. An important step in dealing with sin is to admit to it, to confess that we have a sinful nature. If we deny it, we lie. As John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

In verse 22 Paul introduces the "inner man". His "inner man" is the part of him that "joyfully concurs with the law of God". His inner self fully and joyfully agrees with God's law. His inner man loves the law of God and does not question it or despise it, but embraces it. But at the same time he sees that there is a different law "in the members of" his body (verse 23). There is another law that holds sway over what we might call his "outer man", his physical body. This is the law of evil dwelling in us that he has been talking about. This "different law" wages war against the law of his mind, the law that his "inner man" embraces. It not only wages war, but also takes him prisoner. His inner man is imprisoned in a body that is ruled by the law of sin.

As a prisoner of the law of sin, Paul cries, "Wretched man that I am!" He recognizes that he needs a deliverer. He needs someone to come and set him free from his imprisonment (verse 24). The struggle with our flesh should cause all of us to come to this point. It should cause us to see that we need deliverance, and that this deliverance cannot come from ourselves. It can only come from someone on the outside.

The answer to Paul's question, "Who will set me free from the body of this death?" comes to him immediately. So he says, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (verse 25). God is the one who has and who will set him free from his prison through His Son, Jesus Christ. He will elaborate on this liberation in chapter 8. God in Christ is our Deliverer, Liberator and Savior. He is the only one on the outside who can set us free from the body of death.

Paul concludes in verse 25b, "So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." The mind and spirit and inner man serve God's law, but the flesh, the sinful nature, will always serve the law of sin. We will have this struggle until the Lord takes us home.

#### Romans 8:1-17

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10 And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

At the end of chapter 7 Paul was despairing that he was a prisoner of the law of sin in his members. In chapter 7 the conflict he described was a conflict between his "inner man" and his mind on the one side and indwelling sin on the other side. Now in chapter 8 he introduces the Spirit of God, through whom we are liberated from our prison.

Paul starts out chapter 8 by saying that for those who are "in Christ Jesus" there is no condemnation (verse 1). He explains in verse 2 that this is because "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." We were captives of the law of sin, but another law has come into the picture for the Christian. It is a law of the Spirit. It is from the Spirit of God and pertains to the Spirit of God. It is a law of life. It is a law that imparts life in Jesus Christ. When God's Spirit comes into our lives through faith in Christ He imparts to us life and liberty. He is the life of God in us and He sets us free from the law of sin and death.

Because of the presence of God's Spirit in us we are freed from condemnation. God does not now and will not in the future condemn those who believe in Jesus Christ and who belong to Him. He does not say here just that in the future we will not be condemned, but that "now" there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ. We are freed right now from His condemnation. Those in Christ are no longer under His wrath. They are no longer subject to His judgment. They are justified, they are declared "not guilty" and do not face the penalty for their sins. Christ has taken their sins upon Himself. They are not subject to "penal servitude" (Bruce, page 159).

Paul says that what God has condemned is "sin in the flesh" (verse 3). He did this by "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin". The sins of our flesh have been condemned and judged in the offering of the Son of God. The Son of God was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh". He did not have a sinful nature as we do, He just appeared in our likeness. He was a true flesh and blood human, but without sin. In sending His Son, God did for us what the Law could not do for us. The Law was powerless because of the weakness of our flesh. The Law requires something of us that we cannot perform because of sin that dwells in us. But this "law of sin" has been dealt with in Christ and His sacrifice.

Because sin has been condemned and judged in Christ, the requirement of the Law may be fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit (verse 4). The Law itself gives us no power to obey its requirements. It is the indwelling Spirit of God who enables us to fulfill the requirements of the Law. The key to doing what God requires is to walk by the Spirit. In Galatians 5:16 Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you

will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Those who are "in Christ Jesus" are those who do "walk according to the Spirit."

It is interesting that Paul uses the term "requirement", the singular and not the plural. The one requirement of the Law is that of love; love for God and love for man. We might say that the great fruit of the Spirit is love.

There are two kinds of people, Paul points out in verse 5. There are "those who are according to the flesh" and there are "those who are according to the Spirit". There are people who are in accord with the flesh. They agree with the flesh. They think that the flesh is OK; they are in harmony in their mind and in their inner man with the flesh and it's sinful desires. Paul says that they "set their minds on the things of the flesh." The things of the flesh occupy their minds and their thoughts are constantly on sinful themes. What are the "things of the flesh"? Paul gives us a representative list of the "deeds of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." These things and others like them are the things that occupy the minds of those who are "according to the flesh". It is not a good thing necessarily to be at harmony with oneself. There is a war going on within us as Christians. It is a battle between the flesh and the Spirit, between good and evil, and we must not make peace with our flesh.

Paul continues to explain the characteristics of the "mind set on the flesh" in verses 6-8. He says that the mind set on the flesh is death (verse 6a). This is because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, does not and cannot subject itself to God's law, and cannot please God (verses 7 and 8). Those who are according to the flesh and have their minds set on the flesh are at odds with God. They are His enemies. They are hostile toward Him. They do not put themselves under His authority; in fact, they have no power (*dunamis*) or ability to do so. The fleshly mind has no power to obey God's commands. James mentions this hostility also in James 4:4, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." We cannot set our minds on the flesh and expect to be able to obey the Lord at the same time.

There is another possibility though. "The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." Life and peace with God is available to those who set their minds on the Spirit.

True believers in Christ are not those who are "in the flesh". In Verse 9, Paul says that if the Spirit of God dwells in us, we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. If God's Spirit inhabits us, we are "in the Spirit" and not "in the flesh." By contrast, Paul says, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." If you belong to Christ, if you are a Christian, then you have the Spirit of Christ. There is no such thing as a Christian who is not inhabited by the Holy Spirit. If someone claims to belong to Christ but does not have the Spirit of God, then he is a false believer. Everyone who belongs to Christ is inhabited by the Spirit. There are no exceptions. We do not need some sort of special blessing subsequent to believing in Christ to impart the Spirit to us. We do need to learn to follow His leading and to walk by the Spirit, but if you are a Christian, you now have all of the Holy Spirit that you will ever have.

One other thing that we must note before moving on from verse 9 is that here we find that the "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Christ" are equivalent. The Spirit of Christ

is the Spirit of God and vice-versa. Paul is not talking about two spirits here, but one. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. Paul is saying very clearly that Christ is God. As the Holy Spirit dwells in you, it may also be said that God dwells in you and that Christ dwells in you. The fullness of God's presence dwells in the believer in Christ.

If the Holy Spirit dwells in us then Christ dwells in us (verse 10a). The presence of the Spirit is the presence of Christ. And we are told here in 10b that if Christ is in us, though our bodies are dead because of indwelling sin, yet our spirits are alive because of the righteousness of Christ. Christ is our life, and if His Spirit dwells in us, we have eternal life here and now. In John 14:16-20 Jesus says, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you *will* behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." When the Spirit comes to us, Christ comes to us. If the Spirit is in us, Christ is in us, and in Him is life which is the light of men (John 1:4). If we have Christ we have life (1 John 5:11,12).

Not only is the presence of the Spirit in us equivalent to the presence of Christ, it is also equivalent to the presence of the Father, of "Him who raised Jesus from the dead" (verse 11). The Father is the One who raised Jesus from the dead. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the Father as well. They are one. Father, Son and Spirit inhabit the believer in Christ.

The resurrection of our bodies is tied in with the resurrection of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6:14 Paul says, "Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power." In 2 Corinthians 4:14 he writes, "...knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you." And in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 he says, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." Here in Romans, though, we learn that the instrument through whom our mortal bodies will be given life is the Spirit. Our mortal bodies will be given life by the Father through the Holy Spirit if the Spirit lives in us. This is a promise for the future. Our bodies now are dead because of sin (verse 10), but in the future they will be given life through the Spirit. Our redemption is a comprehensive redemption. God gives life to the whole man. Even our bodies will be reclaimed and transformed. They are not discarded forever, but will be raised and changed (see 1 Corinthians 15 for Paul's discussion of this).

We who are indwelt by the Spirit of God are "under obligation" (verse 12), the word means to be a debtor, but not to the flesh. We owe no debt to the flesh. We are not obligated to live according to the flesh. The flesh can no longer require us to do anything. If we are living in accord with the flesh, then we must die (verse 13). To live according to the flesh in a consistent life of habitual sin is to demonstrate that you are devoid of the Spirit and do not truly belong to Christ. We are under obligation to the Spirit of God, to live according to the Spirit. We owe our allegiance and obedience to the Holy Spirit. It is possible for us to put the "deeds of the body" to death by the Spirit. To live according to the flesh means to indulge in the "deeds of the body." To live according to the Spirit means to put to death the things done by and with the body. The flesh holds sway over our bodies (7:5), but it can be put to death by following the leading of the Spirit.

Paul explains further in verse 14, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." The children of God are led moment by moment by the Spirit of God. The present tense here is important. Those who truly are Christians have the Spirit and are in the present moment being led by the Spirit. The leading of the Holy Spirit is there for all believers in Christ, not just a special super-spiritual few. All of God's children are indwelt by His Spirit and are led by His Spirit. Now it is possible for us to refuse to follow the leading of the Spirit and follow our flesh instead. This is clear from the present passage and from Galatians 5:16-25. It is possible for us to quench and to grieve the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19 and Ephesians 4:30). Just as we might refuse to follow the leading of anyone, we may refuse to follow the leading of God's Spirit. But we must be aware that if we do truly belong to Christ, then His Spirit is leading us. The thing we must learn is to follow His leading rather than the inclinations of our flesh.

The Spirit of God is not a Spirit of slavery, not a Spirit of fear (verse 15). Because we have received the Spirit of God, we are sons of God, not slaves. We are no longer slaves to sin, living in fear, but we are sons of God, living in relationship to Him as His beloved children. We are sons because of the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit enables us to cry out "Abba! Father!" This phrase occurs two other times in the New Testament, first in Mark 14:36, "And He was saying, 'Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt.'" The other occurrence is in Galatians 4:6, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" "Abba" is Aramaic, a familiar term that children would use with their fathers, like our "Daddy" or "Papa". This is how the Spirit of the Son of God addresses His Father. This is the way we may address our Father if the Spirit of the Son of God dwells in us. There is a close, intimate relationship there that wasn't there before.

The Spirit of God Himself "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (verse 16). Both our spirits and the Holy Spirit testify to the same reality, that we are God's children. This is where our assurance comes from. The Holy Spirit is the One who tells us who we are in Christ, that we really do belong to Christ. In 1 John 3:24b, John writes, "And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." We know that we are members of God's family because of the testimony of God's Spirit who indwells us. It is important that we recognize that we are not God's slaves, but His children. We are not just God's cheap labor force, but we are His beloved children. This makes all the difference in the way that we relate to Him.

If we are children of God, then we are His heirs as well. We inherit His estate along with Christ (verse 17). What is God's becomes ours in Christ. Christ is the firstborn Son of God, and everything belongs to Him. But in Christ we also inherit all that is His. God passes on all His riches of glory to us through Christ. We inherit with Him if we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. Part of belonging to Christ is to share in His sufferings. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12-16, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God." "Fiery ordeals" will come upon us to test us if we are the children of God. They are part

of belonging to Christ. We will have tribulation in this world (John 16:33), but we will have glory in the next. If we keep our eyes on the glory, it is easier to endure the tribulation.

#### Romans 8:18-30

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

There is glory coming for those who are the children of God. One day it will be revealed to us, as the sons of God are revealed to all creation. It will happen at the moment of our full adoption as sons when our bodies are redeemed. It is the hope that we are eagerly awaiting. It is for this glory that God has foreknown us, predestined us, called us and justified us.

First, Paul says that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (verse 18). This is Paul's consideration in the midst of all of his sufferings. In 2 Corinthians 4:17 he says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." The affliction we face now is "momentary," it does not last, but quickly passes away. It is "light," not heavy, not unbearable. This affliction, though, produces a heavy weight of glory that far outweighs the affliction. As we suffer, we do well to do as Paul did and consider the weight of glory that is produced by our sufferings.

All creation is filled with "anxious longing" and is "waiting eagerly" for the revelation of the sons of God (verse 19). There is a longing and an eagerness in the creation that things be set right. This will happen in it's fullness when the sons of God are revealed.

Paul explains in verses 20 and 21 that "the creation was subjected to futility." This is something that was done to the creation. The verb "subjected" here is passive. God put the creation under the authority of "futility", of vanity. This was done "not of it's own will". The creation had no choice in the matter. In the fall of man all creation also

fell and was subjected to slavery to vain things. After Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, God said to Adam in Genesis 3:17-19, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." The earth and its plants and animals are under a curse because of the sin of man. The future of creation is tied to the future of man because the earth was created for man, and not man for the earth. When man fell, all creation fell with him.

The hope of man and of all creation is that we will be set free from our slavery to corruption (verse 21). The creation as well as mankind is in slavery to "corruption," to destruction, death and decay. But when the sons of God are revealed and glorified, then they and all creation will be set free from this subjection to vanity and corruption and will know the freedom of their glorification. Full freedom from sin and death is coming! God assures us that there will be no sin, no corruption, no weeping, no suffering, no pain, in the new heaven and earth that He will create. In Revelation 21:3-4 we read, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.'"

The whole creation is suffering and groaning (verse 22). Nature as we see it is not normal; things are not the way that they should be, as God originally created them. Things are corrupted because of our sin. The whole earth and everything in it is suffering because of our rebellion. But the suffering and groaning are pains of childbirth. They are pains that anticipate a greater joy when the children are revealed, and so they are hopeful and productive pains. The pain of creation will give way to the joy of birth. This corrupt age will give birth to a new age where righteousness rules. The pain and groaning will be forgotten in the glory that is to come.

As the creation groans, we also "groan within ourselves" (verse 23) as we await our full adoption as sons. We groan because we have the "first fruits of the Spirit." The indwelling Spirit produces His fruit in us and causes us to long eagerly for our full redemption. The presence of the Holy Spirit is like a down-payment put on a much desired item on lay-away. When it is fully paid for, we receive the item. Until that time we look forward with eager anticipation to the day that the item will be fully possessed. On the day that we made the down-payment, the item was set aside for us, but it was not fully ours until the day that the bill was paid in full. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul says, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory." And in Ephesians 4:30, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." The fruit of fellowship with the Holy Spirit is just a taste of the glory we will experience when our bodies are redeemed.

As the creation is "waiting eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (verse 19), so we are also said to be "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons." The same term is used in verses 19 and 23. Looking around at Christians today I wonder how true

this is of us. Most Christians would seem to prefer life on earth to life in heaven! Many don't seem very "eager" for their adoption and redemption. But our struggles with sin and corruption and pain should have this effect. We should be enthusiastic for our redemption. We should be eager to go home and be done with the groaning and pain!

We have been saved in hope of the redemption of our bodies (verse 24). But by definition hope is something that we do not see. Hope is fulfilled in the future. If it is something we see now and have now, it is not hope. I don't hope to graduate if I have already graduated. I do not hope to marry if I am already married. Our bodies are not yet redeemed. We haven't yet "seen" our full redemption. In 2 Corinthians 4:18, he says, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Since this hope is in the future and is now unseen, we must wait for its fulfillment (verse 25). Paul says that we wait eagerly and we wait with perseverance. The redemption of our bodies will come, but in the meantime we must persevere through many trials, through pain and groaning. But this hope is such a great hope that we may be eager and excited about it. One of the important keys to enduring hardship in this life is to keep our eyes on the unseen eternal things that lay ahead. If we fix our hope on our eventual redemption and glorification we will gain strength to endure the tribulations of the present age.

Paul turns to the help of the Spirit in prayer in verses 25 and 26. In the same way that hope helps us in persevering through our sufferings, so the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Jesus said that He would send us "another Helper," who would be the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:16,17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). The word used for "helps" here in Romans 8 is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Luke 10:40, "But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up *to Him*, and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to **help** me.'" We are weak and overwhelmed in our sufferings in this life, and we need help. God has not left us alone to struggle with our sufferings, but He has given us the Holy Spirit as our Helper. He comes alongside to provide the assistance we need to deal with the problems we face.

Paul explains that our weakness is in the fact that "we do not know how to pray as we should." We do not know how to pray, and we do not know what to pray. There is a way that we should pray, but we don't know how to do it. Especially when we are suffering and going through trials, we often do not know what to ask for. This is where the Holy Spirit steps in to help by interceding for us. He knows how we should pray, and His intercession is in accord with the will of God. John says in 1 John 5:14 - 15, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." If we want to receive the things that we ask for, we must ask according to God's will. If our requests are in accord with God's will, we may be confident that they will be granted. But when we don't know what God's will is, the Holy Spirit does. He will ask according to God's will on our behalf.

Another thing that we know, or should know anyway, is that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (verse 28). It is not true for everyone that God causes all things to work together for good. It is true only for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. If we love Him and are called in accord with His purpose, we may know that He is making everything that happens to us work for ultimate good. God

is orchestrating our lives. Nothing happens to us that causes Him to say, "Oops! That wasn't supposed to happen! Now what do I do?" He is working behind the scenes in our lives in everything for our ultimate good. It is important to say "ultimate" because the things that happen to us often seem to have no good immediate result. We tend to look at the near-term results, while God is looking at the long-term.

Those who love God and are called according to His purpose are those whom He foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified (verses 29 and 30). God's knowledge of us extends to before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:4 tells us, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him." He knew us before we existed, and knowing us, He chose us and predestined us.

Conformity to the image of His Son is the destiny God has for us. In Luke 6:40 Jesus says, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." God wants those He has chosen to be like His Son. This is His purpose for us, that we be conformed to the image of Christ. One day we will be like Him. This is the purpose for which we have been called. This is the "ultimate good" toward which God is working in our lives. God is causing all things to work together for the "good" of our conformity to the image of His Son. Verse 29 begins with the word "for", meaning that Paul is explaining what he just said. The ultimate good that God has in mind for us is that we be "conformed to the image of His Son." He wants us to be like Christ, and often part of the process is suffering. Being molded into the image of Christ means getting rid of our selfishness, pride and other things that are contrary to the nature of Christ. This means that we must face God's discipline in our lives. Becoming like Christ also means that we will be persecuted and opposed by the world.

In being conformed to the image of His Son, God makes us His sons as well. Jesus is to be "the first-born among many brethren." Jesus is the first of the Sons of God. Colossians 1:15-18 points out that Christ is the "first-born of all creation" (not saying that He was created, but that He was the creator), and that He is the "first born from the dead." Jesus was the first to be permanently raised from the dead. There were other previous physical resurrections from the dead, even in the Old Testament, but all of those people died again. Jesus was the first to be truly "born" from the dead into a new and permanent state of life. As we are conformed to the image of Christ as sons of God we are among the "many brethren" of His. Jesus is, in this sense, our older brother. This raises us to a very high estate! We will one day actually take a place alongside Jesus Christ, be called His brothers, and rule with Him! We will, of course, not be "lords" or "kings" because there is only one Lord and one King, Jesus Himself. But we will be like princes and princesses in His kingdom. We will be heirs with Christ of our Father's household!

Those foreknown of God and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son are then called by God (verse 30). The term "called" carries the sense of "invited" or "summoned." Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Jesus summons sinners to Himself for the purpose of being conformed to His image. When we are called of God we then have the opportunity to respond in faith and repentance. No one comes to faith in Christ without having been called by God. No one repents without having been called. In John 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." And in John 6:65 it says, "And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the

Father." The effectual call and "drawing" of the Father is necessary before men and women can come to Christ. We are incapable of coming to Christ on our own, apart from the call of the Father. If we have come to Christ, we know that it is because we have been invited and summoned by God Himself. He always takes the initiative in our lives.

Once we are foreknown and predestined and called, then we are justified. Having been called and having responded in faith and repentance, we then at that point are declared not guilty. We are forgiven. We are saved. We must note that all of this is God's doing. *He* foreknew us. *He* predestined us. *He* called us. *He* justified us. *He* glorified us. This should give us a great sense of security because none of it depends on us. Neither our call nor our justification nor our glorification depends on us or our performance. God is doing to us and for us what we could not and would not do for ourselves.

The final step is glorification. F. F. Bruce says, "The glorifying of the people of God is their ultimate and complete conformity 'to the image of his Son'." In Colossians 3:4 Paul says, "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." The revelation of the glory of Christ will be the revelation of the glory of those who belong to Him as well. We will be like Him and we will share His glory. John says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2). Our glory is to be just like Christ in fullness. Though this glorification is yet in the future for us, Paul speaks as if it is an accomplished fact. He does the same thing when he talks about our resurrection in Colossians 3. As far as God is concerned, we have already been glorified. There is nothing now that can keep us from being glorified if we God has foreknown, predestined, called and justified us. We can be sure that we will be glorified as well!

#### Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Having pointed out that we are now children of God because His Spirit dwells in us, that the Spirit helps us in our weakness by interceding for us, that God is causing all things to work together for our ultimate good, and that God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and will glorify us, Paul now asks, "What shall we say to these things?" How shall we respond to these truths? In verses 31-35 Paul asks a string of rhetorical

questions to point out that nothing and no one can condemn us or separate us from God's love. We respond to these truths with assurance and confidence.

First, Paul asks, "If God is for us, who is against us?" The implication of this verse is, of course, that God is "for us". He has done everything for us. He is not against us. If we belong to Him, He does not oppose us, but is our Father. Fathers are not against their children, but are behind them. Fathers are in their children's corner, cheering them on. Fathers do discipline their children, but it is for their own good. Discipline shows that our Father loves us, not that He opposes us. If God weren't "for us" then He would not have chosen us or called us or justified us or glorified us. Realize that God is rooting for you. He is for you and not against you.

The ultimate proof that God is for us is seen in the fact that He didn't spare his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (verse 32). He has already given the most precious and valuable thing He had to give for us - His own Son. If He gave His Son for us, why would He withhold lesser things? Won't He give with His Son all other things that we need? Matthew 6:33 indicates that if we seek His kingdom and righteousness first, then all the other things we tend to worry about (food, clothing, etc.) will be added to us. God will freely in Christ give us all things.

The next question is in verse 33, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" Satan is the accuser, but in God's court his accusations get nowhere against those whom God has chosen. God is the one who justifies, and He is the ultimate Judge. There is no higher court than God's, and if He declares a man not guilty, no one else can come along and condemn the man. If we have been justified by God, there is no one who can convict and condemn us. Justification is an accomplished fact for those who know Christ. Paul told us at the beginning of chapter 8 that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no condemnation now nor in the future. As the ultimate Judge, God has chosen us and justified us. Before His court we stand in Christ uncondemned.

Paul gives us four facts about Christ in verse 34b. First, Christ is the One who died. He is the one who died for our sins and laid down His life for us. Second, Christ is the One who was raised from the dead, victorious over sin and death. Third, Christ is the One who is at the right hand of God, exalted to the highest position in all creation. Fourth and finally, Christ is the One who intercedes for us. He is the one who speaks on our behalf. He is our defense attorney, our advocate. John says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*" (1 John 2:1-2). No one can condemn us because in Christ we are justified. He is the One who took our sins upon Himself on the cross, who rose from the dead and was exalted to the highest place. With such a defender, we cannot lose. He is better than Perry Mason.

The next question is, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (verse 35). Christ died for us and is the one who intercedes for us before the Father. He is for us and not against us. No one shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ. "Separate" here is in the future tense. Having been united to the love of Christ, there is no one who in the future will be able to come along and remove us from it nor it from us. The love of Christ is ours for all eternity. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand"

(John 10:27-29). There is no one who has the ability to separate us from the grasp of Jesus. If we are truly His sheep, we cannot be taken out of His fold. We can be sure that we are safe from the predators who would like to separate us from Christ.

Rather than listing individuals who might try to separate us from Christ's love, Paul lists the means whereby they might try to separate us. He lists tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and the sword (verse 35b). We might add cancer, unemployment, financial difficulties, rebellious children, and a host of other things to Paul's list. Through affliction, Satan tried to drive a wedge between Job and the Lord, and he might try to do the same things to us. But no matter what Satan or men might do to us, they cannot separate us from the love of Christ.

Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 in verse 36 to show that we will suffer. The persecution and tribulation that come to us are not unusual, but they are to be expected. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered by the world and the devil. We will be abused and maybe even killed because of our relationship to Christ. We should expect this. Suffering will be part of our earthly lives in varying degrees. But by contrast, in verse 37, Paul says that "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." We are "super conquerors" through Christ in the midst of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword. Jesus said the same thing in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Jesus has gained the victory over the world and Satan, and in His victory we can take courage in the midst of tribulation. We will emerge victorious because of Christ. We will not be defeated.

Paul concludes this argument in verse 38 and 39. He says that he stands convinced that nothing will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Paul is convinced and his mind will not be changed concerning this. We must be convinced of this truth as well, because we will all face many trials and dangers and perils in this life. If we are not convinced of our security in the love of the Lord, then we will have no end of anxiety.

Paul gives us another list of things that are unable to sever us from the love of God. He lists things that we all fear; death and life, supernatural powers, things in the present and the future, things above or below. Just to make sure nothing is left out, he includes, "nor any other created thing." No thing, no person, no power no experience can cut us off from God's love. In and through all our suffering God is there and He loves us. He has proven His love and imparts His love through Jesus Christ the Lord.

#### Romans 9:1-5

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Starting at this point and continuing through chapter 11, Paul deals with the unbelief of Israel. In large part, the Jews had rejected their Messiah, but many Gentiles had embraced Him. Paul was concerned that the Gentile believers understand that God

had not turned away from Israel. He wanted them to also understand the reasons for the unbelief of Israel.

It was a great grief to Paul that His Jewish brethren had rejected the gospel of Christ (verses 1 and 2). He wants to establish this fact very firmly, so he swears that he is telling the truth, is not lying, and that his conscience is bearing him witness in the Holy Spirit. His sorrow and grief over his brothers is "great" and "unceasing". He had not become the "apostle to the Gentiles" because he hated his Jewish brothers. God had called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. But Paul's practice was to always go first to the synagogue to share the message with the Jews.

Paul had two sets of "brothers"; one set being Christian believers, both Jew and Gentile, and another set being "kinsmen according to the flesh," unbelieving Jews. He calls them "brethren" and "kinsmen according to the flesh" and "Israelites" (verses 3 and 4a). Paul says that he is on the point of wishing that he were accursed and separated from Christ himself if it would mean that his brethren might be saved. Their unbelief so grieved him, that he might have given up his salvation if by doing so he might save them. What he says is reminiscent of the request of Moses in Exodus 32:31-33, "Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, 'Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin-- and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!' And the LORD said to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.'" Both Moses and Paul were men of such compassion that they were willing to be cut off from the Lord for the sake of the people they cared for. To lay down one's life for another is the greatest sort of love (John 15:13).

Back in chapter 3, Paul began to enumerate the "advantages" of the Jews. He got as far as mentioning the "oracles of God" which were entrusted to the Jews, and then his train of thought headed in another direction. Here in chapter 9, though, he does mention some of the great and unique benefits that the Jews enjoyed. The Israelites are owners of "the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises" (verse 4). God adopted Israel as His son. In Hosea 11:1 He says, "When Israel was a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son." Of all the nations of the earth, Israel was chosen to have this special familial relationship to God. As sons of God they were privileged to see the glory of God. God manifested His glory to them by His works and by the presence of His shekinah glory in the temple. God communicated His will to them in His Law. He showed them how to deal with their sin and how to worship Him by giving them the temple service. He assured them of their future and gave them security by His promises.

To Israel also belonged "the fathers" (verse 5a). Paul is talking about the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These men and the covenants God made with these men belonged to Israel. Not only these, but also the Christ Himself comes from Israel (verse 5b), at least "according to the flesh". Throughout their history, God had promised that the Messiah would come through Israel in order to bless the whole world.

Paul says two important things about Christ at the end of verse 5. First, he says that Christ is "over all." Christ has authority over everything and everyone. He said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." He has been exalted above all other authorities. Ephesians 1:19-23 says, "*These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the

heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." And in Philippians 2:9-11 he says, "Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." There is no one in heaven or on earth except God the Father who is not under the authority of Jesus Christ. Everyone must one day recognize Christ's authority.

The second thing that Paul says about Christ is that He is "God blessed forever". This is a statement of Christ's deity. Jesus Christ is God, and as God He is eternally blessed. In Colossians 2:9 he writes, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Though Paul usually uses the title "Lord" in reference to Christ, it is nonetheless clear that Paul considered Christ to be fully God.

#### Romans 9:6-29

But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; 7 neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." 8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. 9 For this is a word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON." 10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to *His* choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." 13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." 16 So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? 21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And *He did so* in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. 25 As He says also in Hosea, "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.'" 26 "AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO

THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD." 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED; 28 FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD UPON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY." 29 And just as Isaiah foretold, "EXCEPT THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME AS SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

Paul denies (verse 6) that the word of God has failed. He denies that God has not fulfilled His promises to Israel. God has been faithful to Israel. His word does not fail. He keeps His promises. He has fulfilled His word to them. The trouble is that not all those who are physically descended from Israel are really "Israel" in a spiritual sense. They are not all children of God because they are descendants of Abraham. Those who are really God's children are those who are "the children of promise." This is the thesis of this passage.

The question at hand in this passage is, "Who are the true children of God?" This comes out in verse 8. Paul's answer is, "Not all those who are physical descendants of Israel, nor those who are Abraham's descendants, but the children of the promise." The "children of promise" are contrasted in verse 8 with the "children of the flesh." The true descendants of Abraham would be named through Isaac and not through Ishmael. The quote in verse 7 comes from Genesis 21:12 where God makes it clear that Ishmael was not to be Abraham's legal or spiritual heir, though Ishmael was also blessed because he was the son of Abraham. Isaac was the true legal and spiritual heir of Abraham, because he was the child born of a promise of God. He was the one born of Sarah, born of the barren woman who was past childbearing age. The promise is quoted from Genesis 18:10, "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son."

The true children of God are not those born of the flesh, but of the Spirit. Isaac was born not because of the efforts of Abraham and Sarah, but because God worked and caused him to be born. Obviously Abraham and Sarah had a role in his birth, but God supernaturally intervened to grant Sarah the gift of conception. The true children of God are those who are "born again" as a result of God's working and not as a result of their own efforts. John makes this point in John 1:12-13, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." God must give us birth if we are to be His children. There is nothing that we can do to bring it about.

Not only did God make a distinction between Isaac and Ishmael, but he also made a distinction between Jacob and Esau, who were twins, both children of Isaac and Rebekah. Before they were born and before they had done anything good or bad, God made a choice between them (verses 10-13). He chose Jacob to be the spiritual heir of Abraham and Isaac, even though Esau was the legal firstborn. It is important to note that the passages Paul quotes from the Old Testament emphasize the nations that sprang from Jacob and Esau rather than the individuals themselves. Genesis 25:23 says, "And the LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples shall be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger.'" Jacob and Esau were the first members of two nations that would spring from them, Israel from Jacob and Edom from Esau. The passage in Malachi 1:2-3 which talks about God loving Jacob and hating Esau says, "I have loved

you,' says the LORD. But you say, 'How hast Thou loved us?' 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the LORD. 'Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation, and *appointed* his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.'" God chose and called and loved the nation of Israel, but hated and rejected the nation of Edom.

God's choice and calling do not depend on the works of men. This is Paul's point. God could just as easily have chosen Esau over Jacob, and then the Edomites would have been known as His people. God does not choose a man based on what the man has done. His choice is based on His own sovereign will and purpose. If we are chosen we may not congratulate ourselves, because we have done nothing to deserve it. If we are not chosen, we may not complain, because God has a right to do as He wills with us.

In verse 14, Paul again asks, "What shall we say then?" What is to be our response to this truth that God chooses and calls whom He will without regard to their works? Is there injustice with God? Was it unjust of God to choose Jacob and reject Esau? Again he says, "May it never be!" That God is unjust is unthinkable! Injustice is impossible with God because He is just at the root of His character. This was the concern of Abraham in Genesis 18 when he talked with the Lord about Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham said, "Far be it from Thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are *treated* alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Genesis 18:25.) In this dialogue we find God responding that no, He will not sweep away the righteous with the wicked. He will deal justly. He will make a distinction between the righteous and wicked. God is not and cannot be unjust. He will not condemn the innocent and acquit the guilty. He will not punish the righteous along with the wicked. He will judge with pure justice.

Paul explains that God's mercy and compassion depend on His will, quoting God's statement to Moses in Exodus 33:13, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." God's compassion and mercy are bestowed on the basis of His will and not on the basis of our worthiness or our performance. He concludes, "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (verse 16). It is neither our desire nor our performance that gains for us God's favor. He bestows His grace on whomever He wills.

The explanation continues in verse 17 as Paul points to Pharaoh as an example of a man whom God raised up and preserved for a specific purpose. Note that first Paul says, "For the scripture says to Pharaoh..." and then he quotes from Exodus 9:16 where God is speaking through Moses to Pharaoh. The words of scripture are equated with the words of God. What scripture says is what God says. The Old and New Testament scriptures are truly the word of God. They are "God breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible carries the authority of God. What it commands, God commands. What it promises, God promises.

God says that He raised up Pharaoh for two purposes; first, to demonstrate His power, and second, that His name might be proclaimed throughout the earth. In the context in Exodus 9:15-16 God says, "For *if by* now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth." God had not only raised up Pharaoh for these purposes, but He had also patiently "allowed" him to

remain. He had refrained from cutting him off from the earth so that His power might be further demonstrated and His name honored and feared. Pharaoh had seen Moses' staff turn into a snake and swallow up the snakes that his magicians made. He had seen the Nile turned to blood. He had seen frogs, gnats and insects infest his land. He had seen the pestilence that killed the Egyptian livestock. Yet through all of this Pharaoh had hardened his heart and refused to listen to the Lord or obey Him. God's power was demonstrated in ever-increasing degrees until the firstborn of all the Egyptians were killed by the angel of death. In fact, it even extended beyond this to the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Because Pharaoh's heart was hardened, God's power was demonstrated.

As a result of His demonstration of His power in Egypt, God's name was proclaimed and feared throughout the neighboring nations. God was going before Israel to prepare the land for them. In Joshua 2:9-11, Rahab says to the Israelite spies, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." In Joshua 9:9-10, the Gibeonites said, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroath." The Philistines said in 1 Samuel 4:8, "Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all *kinds of* plagues in the wilderness." God's name had been exalted because of what He had done to Egypt and the other nations as He led Israel out of Egypt.

God demonstrates His power to bring glory to His name. He does not do it to satisfy our curiosity or to make us feel good. When God does something, He does it for the sake of His name. In Pharaoh's hardness of heart God demonstrated not only His power, but also His patience. He demonstrated that He will be longsuffering toward those who disobey Him, and even give them many chances to repent and obey.

Paul's conclusion on this subject is in verse 18, "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." God's desire determines who receives mercy and who is hardened. Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he and his people were judged. On the other hand, God softened the heart of the king of Nineveh and he received mercy (Jonah 3:6). Mercy is not earned nor deserved. We are all by nature "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). We all need God's mercy or there is no hope for any of us.

This raises a question, though, and Paul anticipates it, "You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" (verse 19). If all men become what God has determined that they become, then why does He fault us? If I am "hardened" rather than shown mercy, then why does God still fault me for being what He has made me? We cannot resist His will. If He makes us what we are, then why does He hold us accountable for what we are? This is perhaps the most difficult question we have to deal with when it comes to the subject of God's election. If God

has already determined what we are, then what does that do to human responsibility? How can He condemn people for being what He has made them to be?

Paul's answer to this question is to point out that God is not answerable to man, any more than a potter is answerable to his pots. Paul's potter-pot analogy probably comes from Isaiah 29:16, "You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made should say to its maker, 'He did not make me'; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?" As Creator, God has a right to do with us as He will. We belong to Him and are answerable to Him, not vice-versa. We do not judge Him, He judges us. Men are not equal with God that they should evaluate Him and His deeds. The thing that is molded does not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this?" (verse 20b). One potter might question the work of another, but in this case there is no other "potter," no other Creator. The artist or craftsman exercises his will over his work, and forms it as he pleases.

A potter makes all sorts of vessels, drawing from the same lump or mixture of clay (verse 21). Some vessels are made for "honorable" uses, and others for "common" uses. The fact that all these vessels come from the same lump is an important point. All of us come from the same stock. Different vessels are made from the same raw material. God does not use "premium" clay for the honorable vessels and "common" clay for the common vessels. The clay is all the same. We all start at the same point. We are all lost. We are all sinners. We are all in need of God's mercy. Mankind is one big "lump" out of which come some vessels for honor and some for common use.

In verses 22 and following, Paul may be speaking hypothetically, as he says, "What if...". Verse 22 says, "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" He is saying, "What if it works this way...?" It may be that Paul is not sure that he is describing things as they are, but if this is the way that God works, He certainly has the right to do it.

It may be that God, instead of demonstrating His wrath and revealing His power against men who are "vessels of wrath", endures their evil with much patience. It is clear that God restrains His wrath, as He did with Pharaoh. Peter reveals in 2 Peter 3:9 that the purpose of God's patience is to give people time to repent, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." For the sake of the elect, God is restraining His wrath and power upon vessels of wrath. He is willing to demonstrate His wrath. God is not a wimp. But for our sake He has and is holding it back, being patient with mankind while He waits for more people to repent. God has shown us in the past that He is willing to exercise His wrath. He demonstrated His wrath in the flood and in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But also, throughout our history, He has demonstrated His great patience and longsuffering.

Paul suggests that God has prepared two types of "vessels". Some are "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction," and others are "vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory." We must note that everyone begins as a "vessel of wrath." Ephesians 2:3 tells us that we all "were by nature children of wrath" just like everyone else. Because of our sinful nature we all are objects of God's wrath until God makes us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:4f). Every "vessel of wrath" has been prepared for destruction. It's purpose is to be destroyed. Jesus stated that most people are on the wide road to destruction (Matthew 7:13,14). We start out on this road and few find the exit that leads to life.

Some do become "vessels of mercy." They are vessels which are under God's mercy rather than under His wrath. They are prepared beforehand by God, not for destruction, but for glory. They will not be cast out and destroyed, but lifted up and preserved and given a glorious position. They are those who are called by God (8:28f) from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles as well (verse 24). Some of us are objects of God's mercy, called out from among the objects of wrath. We may not congratulate ourselves for this, because it is all God's doing dependent on His will and desire.

To demonstrate that God's purpose was to call Gentiles to Himself as "vessels of mercy," Paul cites Hosea 2:23 in verses 25 and 26. Those who formerly were not His people God will call His people. Those who formerly were not beloved will be called His beloved. Instead of being rejected as God's people they would be called God's sons. In Hosea the words are applied to the unfaithful people of Israel. God was going to heal their idolatry and love them again. But here Paul applies these words to those who were coming to Christ from among the Gentiles. Gentiles were once not considered to be God's people, but now they are through faith in Christ. They may even be considered to be the children of God.

Paul turns his attention to passages that deal with Israel in verses 27-29. The Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ, were being called God's "beloved" and "sons of the living God," but what about Israel? Paul first cites Isaiah 10:22, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved." Isaiah was talking about the "remnant" that would return from exile into Assyria. Though the number of the children of Israel would be great, only a small minority would return. Paul applies this truth to the number of Israelites who would be saved by the grace of God in Christ. This truth might also be applied to all humanity. A remnant of mankind as a whole will be saved, will be preserved and spared from God's judgment.

Paul explains as he continues to quote Isaiah in verse 28, "For the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly and quickly." God's sentence will be carried out upon the earth, and it will be done thoroughly and quickly. God's judgment will be complete and comprehensive. He will not overlook anything or anyone. It will be done quickly. When the time comes, He will not delay, and people will have no time to prepare any longer.

Isaiah further says in Isaiah 1:9, "Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, we would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah." Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly wiped out because of their wickedness. Only Lot and his family were rescued. Isaiah foretold that Israel would resemble Sodom and Gomorrah if it weren't for the fact that God left them "a posterity" (literally, a "seed" - the Greek term is *sperma*). If God hadn't been gracious to them by preserving a remnant of Israel, then they would have been totally wiped out like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is only by the grace of God that Israel still exists at all, that any of us exist at all!

The title, "Lord of Sabaoth" occurs only twice in the New Testament, here and in James 5:4. But in the Old Testament the title is used frequently, 239 times in 229 verses. "Sabaoth" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *tsaba*, meaning "hosts" or armies. The title seems to emphasize the power and authority of the Lord over all the "hosts" of heaven and earth. In 1 Samuel 17:45 David said to Goliath the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted." God is

commander of the most powerful army ever imagined. No one can stand against Him. No one can resist His forces. Sodom and Gomorrah show us that the forces of the Lord are more powerful than we can imagine. The point is that God has refrained from completely destroying Israel, not because He did not have the power to do it, but because He was being gracious and merciful to Israel.

Romans 9:30-33

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. 32 Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Paul turns here from considering the election of God to the responsibility of man. He tackles the question, "What went wrong with the Jews?" What did they do wrong? Why did they miss the righteousness of God?

In verses 31 and 32 Paul contrasts the Gentiles with Israel. The Gentiles "did not pursue righteousness." Righteousness before God was not a concern, in general, for the Gentile nations. They did not know about God and did not care about being in a right relationship with Him. They were pursuing other things. Jesus said that the Gentiles "eagerly seek" things like food and drink and clothing (Matthew 6:31,32). They were concerned with the basic sustenance of life.

Even though they did not pursue righteousness, nevertheless they attained it. They laid hold of righteousness even though they weren't seeking it. How was this possible? Paul explains that they attained righteousness by faith. The Gentiles found something they were not looking for, a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. They attained the righteousness that they were not pursuing.

Israel, on the other hand, was pursuing righteousness, but by the wrong means. They pursued a "law of righteousness." They thought that they could establish their own righteousness by obedience to the Law. But in all their attempts to establish their own righteousness through law keeping they "did not arrive" at righteousness. The path they followed did not end in their desired destination. They did not find righteousness through trying to keep the Law. Indeed, Paul has already said that no one will be declared righteous on the basis of the works of the Law (Romans 3:19-28). Righteousness cannot be found through the Law. Only condemnation is found there because of the corruption of our flesh. Our sinful nature is inherently incapable of obeying the Law. Righteousness is only attained through faith in Christ, and may only be pursued by faith.

In their pursuit of a righteousness which comes through law, Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone, that is, Christ. Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16 and combines it with part of Isaiah 8:14. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul says that Christ Jesus Himself is the corner stone of the temple that God is building. We must be related to Him by faith in order to be part of God's temple and family. This is a point of stumbling for many. The doctrine that Jesus is the only way is offensive to many. But those who believe in Him will not be disappointed. Christ will not disappoint those who trust in Him.

### Romans 10:1-13

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. 5 For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. 6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down), 7 or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"-- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Righteousness and salvation come to us on the basis of faith in Christ, and not on the basis of the Law. Paul discusses this again here. The problem with Israel is stated in verse 3, "For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."

Righteousness, true righteousness, is based on faith.

Paul says that his heart's desire and prayer is for the salvation of Israel (verse 1). His greatest pleasure would be to see his nation trust in Christ. Since this was the great desire of his heart, it was also a dominant theme in his prayers. Paul petitioned God to save Israel because of his great love and concern for them. This points up a simple principle about prayer. We should be praying about the desires of our hearts. We should be petitioning God regarding the great passions of our lives. The things that we desire most we should be praying about the most. And if our lives are in tune with the Lord, the things we desire the most will be related to the salvation of others we care about. We should be passionately asking for the salvation of those we love.

Paul could testify about Israel, that they were zealous for God, but it was an ignorant zeal (verse 2). In fact, Paul, in his zeal for God, had been a persecutor of the church (Philippians 3:6). He says that in doing this he was acting "ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:13). Israel's zeal for God is an uninformed zeal. It is a zeal that is "not in accordance with knowledge." They do not know about God's righteousness. They are ignorant about the true source of God's righteousness (verse 3) and have sought to establish their own. This same thing might be said about not only the Jews, but many other groups today, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. They may have some measure of zeal for God, but that zeal is an ignorant zeal. Their ignorance may cause them to persecute those who have come to know the truth about God's righteousness, as Paul did.

When a person in ignorance seeks to establish his own righteousness, he will not subject himself to the righteousness of God (verse 3b). Pride is the problem. As long as I think that I am good enough to establish my own righteousness, I am not likely

to see the need to submit to God's righteousness. Not only is such a person ignorant of God's righteousness, they are also ignorant of their own unrighteousness. This was the trouble with the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders.

In Luke 18:9-14 we read, "And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.'"

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable exemplifies the man who is ignorant not only of the righteousness of God, but also of his own unrighteousness. He has convinced himself that he is righteous, and he looks down his nose at others who are less righteous than he. As long as we think that we are good enough to make it on our own, we will not find the true righteousness of God. We must see that we have no righteousness of our own, and by faith accept the righteousness of God imputed to us in Christ.

Christ puts an end to the attempt to attain righteousness through keeping the law (verse 4). The law never could impart righteousness to us. It was meant to lead us to Christ. In Galatians 3:24 and 25 Paul says, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." Christ is the terminus of the law. For those who believe, Christ is our righteousness, not the law. The law has been terminated as a means of obtaining righteousness.

Moses wrote that a man will live if he keeps God's law (verse 5). Paul is referring to Leviticus 18:5, "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD." If a man fully keeps God's statutes and judgments flawlessly throughout his lifetime, then he is righteous and will have life. The problem, as we've already seen, is that we are not able to keep the law because our flesh is sinful by nature. We all fall short of this perfect standard (Romans 3:23). We are not righteous and cannot establish a righteousness of our own.

The righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" What it tells us is, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." Though in the original context in Deuteronomy 30:11-14 Moses is talking about keeping God's commandments and statutes as a means of living, Paul here applies these words to the righteousness of faith. The righteousness based on faith tells us that we do not need to strive to ascend to heaven to bring Christ (God's righteousness) down. He has already come down. He was sent by His Father. He became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The righteousness based on faith also says that we do not need to descend into the "abyss", the place of the dead, to bring Christ up from the dead. He has already risen. We must not think that there is anything that we can do to attain or obtain God's righteousness. God has sent His Son and has raised Him from the dead. He has done for us what we could not ever do for ourselves. Therefore His righteousness is very close to us, in fact it is in our mouths and in our hearts.

The "word" that is "near" us is the "word of faith which we are preaching" (verse 8b). The content of that word is "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." The message we preach is a message about faith. It is a message about faith in Jesus Christ. It is a message that says, "Believe in the risen Christ and confess Him as Lord and you will be saved." This is our part in our salvation - to believe that God raised Christ from the dead and to confess Jesus as Lord.

Paul continues explaining in verse 10, "...for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." Believing with the heart comes first, and yields righteousness for the one who believes. God justifies the one who believes in Christ and grants him a right standing in His sight. Having believed, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). Confession with the mouth yields salvation. This confession has been associated with baptism. Through this confession we demonstrate that we have been saved and have appropriated the grace of God through faith in Christ for ourselves.

Again, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 in verse 11. He quoted it previously in 9:33, but here he adds the word "whoever". This promise is open to all who believe. In the context he is talking about the fact that Greeks as well as Jews may believe in and confess Jesus. All may call upon Him. All may believe in Him. No one who believes in Him will be disappointed by Him. Disappointment comes when our expectations are not met. We expect that someone will do something that they said they would do, they fail to do it and we are disappointed. But Jesus will do what He has said He would do. He will be faithful to His promise of justification and salvation. If we feel He has let us down, it is probably because we are expecting something He never promised. He did not promise wealth and health and prosperity in this life. He did not promise a nice new car in every garage and a chicken in every pot. Perhaps our expectations need to be adjusted. Ultimately you will not be disappointed that you put your faith in Christ.

When it comes to salvation there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (verse 12). Both Jews and Greeks may believe in Christ and receive His salvation. The reason for this is that "the same Lord is Lord of all". Some Jews have recently decided that yes, Jesus was a Messiah, but a Messiah for the Gentiles. He was not the Messiah for the Jews. They believe that they still need to wait for their Messiah and redeemer. But no, Paul says the same Lord is Lord of all. God does not make a distinction between Jew and Gentile. He has not sent one Christ for the Gentiles and another for the Jews.

This one Lord abounds in riches for all who call upon Him. The riches of the Lord are available to Greeks and Jews alike if they will call upon Him. Paul cites Joel 2:32 in verse 13 to prove his point. Salvation is available to everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord. It doesn't say that this offer is limited to Jews only. It doesn't matter who you are or where you live, God's riches are available to you if you put your faith in Christ.

#### Romans 10:14-21

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!" 16 However, they did not all heed the glad tidings; for Isaiah says,

"LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" 17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. 18 But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD." 19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU." 20 And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO SOUGHT ME NOT, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME." 21 But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

The problem with Israel was not that they hadn't heard, but that they failed to believe what they had heard. They heard, but did not heed. This is the gist of this passage.

In order to receive righteousness and be saved one must believe in Christ and call upon Him. Paul has already made this point. But a man will not call upon Christ if he has not believed in Him, and a man cannot believe in Him if he has not heard of Him, and he cannot hear unless someone brings the message to him, and no one can bring the message to him unless he is sent. Paul uses questions to make these points in verses 14 and 15. Each question builds on a verb from the previous sentence, "How shall they **call**...? How shall they **believe**...? How shall they **hear**...? How shall they **preach**...?" Believing depends upon hearing. Hearing depends upon the act of preaching. Preaching depends upon the act of sending. Preaching and sending is the responsibility of the Church. We are here to make sure that all men hear of and have the opportunity to believe in and call upon the Lord. We find in Acts 13 that preachers are sent out both by the Church and by the Holy Spirit, "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13:1-4).

Paul cites Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" In the context in Isaiah the reference is to those who brought the good news to Israel of release from captivity in Babylon. But here Paul applies these words to those who take the good news of salvation in Christ to those who have not heard. The message we bring to the world is a message bearing "glad tidings of good things." In fact, no news could be better! No words are more welcome to a drowning man than to hear someone pull up alongside him in a boat and say, "Just relax, we are here to save you!" That is the role of one sent with the gospel of Christ. We bring the best news in the world to those who are lost and perishing.

Once the "glad tidings" have been delivered, it is up to those who hear to heed. Paul points out in verse 16 that not everyone who hears the good news will heed it. He quotes Isaiah 53:1, "Lord, who has believed our report?" John also quotes Isaiah 53:1 to explain the unbelief of the Jews who saw Jesus' miraculous signs (John 12:38). In Isaiah 52 and 53 we read prophecies of Christ and His role as the "suffering Servant" of God. The passage is a crucial Old Testament testimony to the purpose of the Messiah.

We find the good news there that He bore our sins; that He suffered and died to pay for the transgressions of His people. But most of His people did not believe the message. They heard it but did not heed it.

Faith comes from hearing (verse 17). Hearing comes by the word of Christ. The message that the preacher puts forth is "the word of Christ." Christ is the subject of the message of the gospel. As people hear about Him, they have the opportunity to put their faith in Him and believe. To be effective, the word that is heard must be mixed with faith in those who hear. Hebrews 4:2 says, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." We must act upon the word we hear (Matthew 7:24-27).

The message we are to proclaim is not a message about ourselves or the church or the Ten Commandments or the Sabbath or rules and regulations. The message we proclaim is about Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. It is about His death and resurrection. It is about the good news that He has borne our sins in His body on the cross and has been raised from the dead and has ascended into glory at the Father's right hand. We will only lead people to faith in Christ as we talk about Him, as we share the message of the gospel with them.

Paul imagines two objections to his line of reasoning in verses 18-21. First, someone might say of the Jews, "Surely they have never heard, have they?" (verse 18). Someone might offer the excuse that the Jews have not believed in Jesus Christ because they have never heard about Him. But Paul says, "Indeed they have." He cites Psalm 19:4, "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." In Psalm 19 the reference is to the "heavens" which tell of the glory of God. But here Paul applies these words to the proclamation of the gospel of Christ by the apostles. He tells us in Colossians 1:6 and 23 that the gospel had been "proclaimed in all creation under heaven". The gospel had been so thoroughly preached in that part of the world that few could truly claim ignorance of it. The Jews especially had heard the message. In fact, if you were in Jerusalem at the time it would have been virtually impossible to have been ignorant of the facts about Jesus. In Luke 24 we read this exchange between Cleopas and the risen Christ,

And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him" (Luke 24:18-20).

It seemed absurd to Cleopas that anyone could have been in Jerusalem and not heard about Jesus.

We must remember that it is still the intention of Christ that the gospel be heard in all the earth and to the ends of the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). There are still parts of the world where people have not heard about Jesus. Few in our nation can claim ignorance, but there are still many in parts of the world who are truly ignorant of Christ and what He has done for them. That is why preachers still must be sent out. Christ wants His message to be heard everywhere.

The second objection someone might offer says, "Surely Israel did not know, did they?" (verse 19). OK, maybe they did hear, but they didn't understand, right? Maybe Israel didn't really perceive the truth of what they heard about Christ. But Paul points to the words of the Lord spoken in the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21. God says, "I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you." God's point in Deuteronomy is that Israel had turned away from Him and made Him jealous with gods that are really "no-gods", and consequently He is going to make them jealous with nations that are "no-nations." Israel was a nation with understanding. They were not ignorant of the Lord. They were the one nation on earth that did know Him and to whom He revealed Himself. They could not claim to be without understanding. But since they have rejected the Christ, God has allowed the Gentiles to know Him in order to make the Jews jealous.

Paul also quotes Isaiah, "I was found by those who sought me not, I became manifest to those who did not ask for me" (Isaiah 65:1). The Gentiles, who did not seek God, found Him. He allowed Himself to be found by those who did not seek Him. He manifested Himself to those who were not asking for Him. We do not find the Lord unless He allows us to. God always takes the initiative in establishing a relationship with us. If we have "found" the Lord, it is only because He has first manifested Himself to us.

Paul applies Isaiah 65:2 to Israel, "All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." God reached out to Israel constantly. He kept pursuing them and they kept turning away from Him. They stubbornly refused to obey Him and to submit to Him. Israel is a living demonstration of the patience and mercy of God. God is persistent and does not easily give us up. Thankfully, He keeps after us even when we turn from Him and disobey Him. He gives us many more chances than we deserve. He forgives, not seven times, but seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22).

#### Romans 11:1-16

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." 4 But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. 7 What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 8 just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." 9 And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. 10 "LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER." 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I

am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 And if the first piece of *dough* be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too.

Though Israel is a "disobedient and obstinate people," God is not finished with them yet. God has not given up on them. He still has a purpose for them. He has graciously reserved for Himself a remnant of Jewish believers.

Paul first asks, "God has not rejected His people, has He?" These words echo God's promises in 1 Samuel 12:22 and Psalm 94:14. God had said, "For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself" (1 Samuel 12:22). Paul again says, "May it never be!" This is the 9th of 10 times that he uses this phrase in Romans. It is unthinkable that God should violate His promises and reject His people. God is irrevocably committed to Israel. He has not and will not thrust them away. They have not been replaced by the Church. There is yet a future for Israel.

Paul points out that he himself is an Israelite. He is a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. He is living proof that God has not abandoned Israel. God has not rejected His people. They are still His people. He "foreknew" them and chose them to be His. He knew their character before He chose them. He knew what they would do before He called them to Himself. That is why He gives them such explicit warnings in His word about idolatry and unfaithfulness.

To prove his point, Paul cites the dialog between Elijah and God in 1 Kings 19:14-18. Elijah was fleeing from the wrath of Jezebel after his encounter with the prophets of Baal. Elijah's perception was that he was the last person in all Israel who was still faithful to the Lord, and that they were trying to kill him. But God's perspective was very different. God says, "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Elijah did not understand that God had set apart 7,000 men who were faithful to Him. In our fear and confusion, we are not able to see things the way they are. We have a distorted picture of the truth. But God always has things in hand.

In Elijah's day there was a faithful remnant, and Paul says, "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." In His grace, God has chosen a remnant from Israel. There are a few among Israel who have believed in Jesus as their Messiah. Paul was one of them, and so were the other apostles.

"Gracious choice" is the basis for the existence of the remnant. It is the unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor of God that is responsible for our salvation. God's choice of some is by grace, not on the basis of works, not on the basis of a man's performance. If the basis of God's choice were our works, then grace would no longer be grace, because we would be earning it (verse 6). Grace is not a wage, but a gift.

Israel has not obtained that for which it is seeking. Only the chosen remnant obtained it, and the rest were hardened (verse 7). Because of their unbelief, God hardened their hearts so that they could not perceive the truth. Unbelieving men and women are hardened by God. He gives them a "spirit of stupor." He makes them unable to see and unable to hear. In fact, none of us could see or hear unless God enabled us to do so. Our eyes and ears must be opened by the grace of God.

In Matthew 13:10:-17 we read, "And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' And He answered and said to them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall *more* be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM." But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.'" Those who are chosen and given the ability to truly "see" and "hear" what Jesus has to say are privileged. They are "blessed." Those who refuse to hear and have stopped up their ears from the truth are denied further light. The "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" are only disclosed to those who have been chosen. They are only disclosed to the citizens of the kingdom.

The quote from David in verse 9 comes from Psalm 69:22. Psalm 69 is quoted or alluded to several times in the New Testament as a Psalm referring to the sufferings of Christ (see John 2:17, John 15:25, Romans 15:3, Matthew 27:48 and Acts 1:20). The wish is expressed here that the very table of those who rejected and persecuted Christ should become to them a snare and a stumbling block and a retribution. To understand this we must read Psalm 69:21, which says, "They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." This verse is alluded to in Matthew 27:48. "Gall" is a bitter and poisonous herb. The food and drink offered to Christ on the cross was inedible and undrinkable. So the wish is expressed here that the persecutors should also be paid back with retribution through their "table", that is, through their food and drink. The desire is that what they have done should be done to them.

The theme of unseeing eyes comes out again in the quote from Psalm 69:23 in verse 10, "Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever." God has fulfilled this verse in those of Israel who have rejected Christ. Their eyes have been darkened so that they cannot see the truth. They will go into eternal exile. This is true of everyone, Jew or Gentile, who rejects Christ.

Paul asks another of his rhetorical questions that anticipates a negative answer in verse 11a, "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" Again his answer is, "May it never be!" This is the tenth and last time he uses this denial in Romans. He makes a distinction here between stumbling (*ptaio*) and falling (*pipto*). Israel as a whole had stumbled, but had not fallen. They had tripped, but they had not fallen to their doom, never to rise again. They have not completely and irretrievably fallen from the grace of God. There is still a future for Israel. It is a mistake to think that God is finished with Israel. It is a mistake to think that they have fallen forever.

The transgression, the "misstep" of Israel, has caused salvation to come to the Gentiles, and has made the Jews jealous. When the Jews rejected the gospel of Christ, Paul turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:45ff; 28:28). He had seen how the Jews were

jealous of the response he was getting from the Gentiles, and he tried to use that jealousy to get them to listen to the gospel.

The transgression of Israel means riches for the world and their failure means riches for the Gentiles (verse 12). The rejection of Israel means the reconciliation of the world (verse 15). The riches that were rightfully theirs have been passed on to other nations because of their transgression and failure and rejection of Christ. But the fulfillment of the Jews will mean "much more" (verse 12). Their acceptance will mean "life from the dead" (verse 15). F.F. Bruce suggests that Paul is talking about the large-scale conversion of the Jews which will follow the large-scale conversion of the Gentiles, and which "will be the immediate precursor of the resurrection, to coincide with Christ's parousia". (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle Of Paul to the Romans*, Tyndale, page 216.) It may be that the conversion of all Israel will be one of the signs of the imminence of Christ's return.

When among his countrymen, Paul magnified his ministry to the Gentiles in hopes that he might move them to jealousy and so save some of them (verses 13 and 14). He hoped that his Jewish brethren would see that they were missing out on the blessings of their Messiah and had forfeited them to the Gentiles. The fact that he was ministering to Gentiles was a point of contention with the Jews. In Acts 22, the Jews in Jerusalem listened to Paul's defense of himself up to the point that he mentioned that Jesus would send him off to minister to the Gentiles, then they began demanding his death. They indeed were jealous of the Gentiles!

Paul realized that he could not save everyone, but he was determined to do what he could to "save some". In 1 Corinthians 9:22 he says, "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." Not everyone will be saved, but some will be. We must do whatever we can and use whatever legitimate means we can to save whoever we can.

The holiness of the greater "lump" of dough depends upon the holiness of the first part of the dough. The holiness of the branches depends upon the holiness of the root. This is Paul's picture in verse 16. The first to believe in Christ were men who were Jews, but the greater body of people who are disciples are Gentiles. The Gentiles are holy because the first believers were holy.

#### Romans 11:17-24

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, *18* do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. *19* You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." *20* Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; *21* for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. *22* Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. *23* And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. *24* For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree?

From his picture of roots and branches in verse 16, Paul moves into this parable of olive trees and branches in verses 17 to 24. The cultivated olive tree represents Israel, and the wild olive represents the Gentile world. Branches from the wild olive have been grafted onto the cultivated olive tree where branches from the cultivated olive were broken off. Because of their unbelief and unfruitfulness, some "branches" in Israel were cut off and replaced by wild "branches" from the Gentile world.

The warning here to those who have been "grafted" into the cultivated olive tree is that they are not to be arrogant toward the Jewish "branches". Paul commands, "do not be arrogant" (verse 18), and "do not be conceited" (verse 20). The thing that must be remembered in order to avoid arrogance and conceit is that it is not the branch that supports the root, but the root that supports the branch. Using the figure of a temple in Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul says, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." We must never forget that the Gentile church has a Jewish root system, a Jewish foundation. We must never be arrogant toward the Jews. Our salvation has come to us through them.

Arrogance says, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in" (verse 19). Paul allows that the statement is true, but then he quickly points out the reason that they were broken off in verse 20. They were broken off for their unbelief. Unbelief cuts a man off from God. We remain in relationship with God through faith. It is by faith that we abide in Christ. It is by faith that we walk with Him. It is by continuing, by persevering in faith that we stay in a right relationship with Him and "continue in His kindness" (verse 22). For this reason, Paul says, we should fear, because "if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you" (verse 21). And in verse 22 he says that if we do not continue in the kindness of God, we will be cut off. If the Gentiles do not continue in faith, they will be cut off as well.

Faith is not a one-time event. We do not believe in Christ at one point in life for salvation and then stop believing afterwards. Those who are truly related to Him continue in that relationship. They continue to "walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7) in Him. True, saving faith is faith that continues. It is faith that produces good fruit in our lives (see John 15:1-8 and the "Parable of the Sower" in Matthew 13:3-23).

In this parable of two olive trees we see both the kindness and the severity of God (verse 22). We see His kindness in grafting in those who had been cut off from Him. We see His severity in breaking off those who were unbelieving and unfruitful. In order to have a balanced view of God, we must recognize both of these attributes. Many want to deny the severity of God. They say, "God is too loving to send anyone to hell." But this denies the plain teaching of God's word. Yes, God is loving and kind, but He is also holy and cannot tolerate sin and unbelief. He will deal severely with those who do not repent and believe in Christ.

Further, if the Jews do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted back in again. God is able to do what a farmer could not and would not do. He can graft in branches that He previously cut off. God will welcome the Jews back gladly. They belong in relationship with Him. Jesus is their Messiah. They should believe in Him and should not be hindered from doing so.

#### Romans 11:25-29

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here Paul reveals that all Israel will be redeemed once the full complement of Gentiles comes to salvation. Until then, there is a partial hardening upon Israel. Because of God's promises to the patriarchs, He will one day save all of Israel. Until then it is the day of the Gentiles.

Paul wants the Gentiles to understand this mystery to prevent them from being "wise in your own estimation" (verse 25). It is not because of the great wisdom that the Gentiles possess and the Jews lack, that the Gentiles have accepted the gospel while the Jews have rejected it. The Jews have rejected the gospel because they have been partially hardened. Their understanding has been darkened. The Gentiles have received the gospel only because of God's gracious choice, because God has enlightened them. We must not think that we have come to faith in Christ because we are so much wiser than other men. No, it is only because God has worked in our hearts and opened our eyes to the truth.

Once the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, the result will be that all Israel will be saved (verse 26). Salvation will come to the nation of Israel as a whole. Paul cites Isaiah 59:20 and Jeremiah 31:33f to prove his point. The promise had been made to Israel through the prophets that the deliverer would come and would remove ungodliness from Jacob (remember that Jacob = Israel). God's covenant promise was that He would take away their sins. This is what Jesus came to do. In 1 John 3:5 it says, "And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin." When John the Baptist saw Jesus he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Once the sins of the world have been dealt with, then the sins of Israel will also be removed.

For the sake of the Gentiles the Jews have become enemies of the gospel (verse 28a). Their rejection of the gospel provided the occasion for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles. But at the same time, from the viewpoint of God's choice, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (verse 28b). You might say that they are God's beloved enemies. Paul explains, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (verse 29). God chose Israel as His own people, His own nation. That choice has never been nullified. His calling and His gifts will not be revoked. He will not abandon His commitment to Israel because of the promises to the patriarchs.

#### Romans 11:30-36

For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. 33 Oh, the depth

of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? 35 Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

Paul further explains that as the Gentiles were once disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of the disobedience of the Jews, so the Jews are now disobedient so that they may be shown mercy in the same way. All men have been "shut up... in disobedience" so that God might show mercy to all (verses 30-32). All have been convicted and sentenced so that they might see their need for mercy. All are under the condemnation of God and must cast themselves upon His mercy for forgiveness and salvation. Jesus said in Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Since everyone is a sinner and is disobedient (Romans 3:23), we are all candidates for mercy.

The doxology in verses 33-36 brings the doctrinal portion of Romans to a close. It is a conclusion to the whole of chapters 1 through 11.

God is rich both in wisdom and in knowledge. The depth of His riches cannot be measured. The way that He has dealt with us reveals His wisdom and knowledge. His judgments are unsearchable. What God decides, the rulings He makes, are beyond our ability to evaluate. We are not in a position to rule on God's judgments. They go beyond our understanding. God's ways as a whole are unfathomable. We cannot "track out" God's ways. The paths that He takes and the ways in which He works are beyond our comprehension.

Paul points to two rhetorical questions from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11 in verses 34 and 35. God is asking these questions in these passages and is pointing out that there is no one like Him. To each question the answer is, "No one." "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" No one. "Who became His counselor?" No one. "Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?" No one. No one can know the mind of the Lord. His ways and thoughts are above our ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8,9). No one can counsel the Lord. He does not need nor does He seek our advice. We have no insight or wisdom that He lacks. The Lord is no one's debtor. God owes us nothing. We have nothing that He needs. We have no resources that He lacks.

Paul sums up this doctrinal portion of Romans in verse 36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen." All things come from the Lord and have their origin in Him. All things come through the Lord and owe their existence to Him. All things belong to the Lord and He can do with them as He pleases. All things are to forever give Him glory.

#### Romans 12:1-2

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Having completed the doctrinal portion of his epistle, Paul now turns to practical matters. He turns from doctrine to the ethical implications of that doctrine. He turns from instruction to exhortation. He follows a similar pattern in his other epistles. Right behavior is built on right doctrine. Doctrine is important because it is the basis for our beliefs and for our behavior. We must never set doctrine against practice, because doctrine is the basis of our faith and practice.

That Paul is now turning to exhortation is clearly seen in verse 1a, "I urge you therefore, brethren...". The term "urge" is *parakaleo* in the Greek. It means to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage. Paul is now calling the brethren to action. The word "therefore" shows that he is building on the truths presented in chapters 1 through 11. The actions he is urging upon the brethren are built upon the truths he has taught previously in the epistle.

Paul's exhortation here in verse one is based on the "mercies of God." He has just mentioned in 11:30-32 that God's purpose in shutting everyone up under disobedience was to show mercy to all. In view of this great mercy, we are exhorted to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. We are to give ourselves to God not as a means of obtaining His mercy, but because we already have received His mercy. In view of the mercy He has shown us, Paul exhorts us to offer ourselves to Him.

The action that Paul is urging upon his readers is that they "present" their bodies to God. The word translated "present" is *paristaymi*, to place beside, to present, stand by, appear. He has used the word previously in 6:13,16 and 19.

And do not go on *presenting* the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but *present* yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Romans 6:13)

Do you not know that when you *present* yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? (Romans 6:16)

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you *presented* your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now *present* your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. (Romans 6:19)

It is clear from these passages that when we present our bodies, we are presenting ourselves. When the body is given, the whole personality is given. So the call here in Romans 12 is that we present our entire person to God. There is to be no thought of a distinction between body, soul and spirit; as if we might present our bodies, but reserve our souls or spirits. This is a call to yield the complete personality to God.

The presentation of our bodies to God is our means of sacrifice. By the offering of Himself, Christ fulfilled and rendered obsolete the Old Testament sacrifices. The sacrifice of Christ was the final and truly sufficient sacrifice that removes our sin for all time. Therefore Christians are no longer commanded to offer animal sacrifices, but to trust in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. This is pointed out clearly in Hebrews 10:10-18:

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. *11* And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; *12* but He, having offered one

sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND UPON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," He then says, 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.

Since the sacrifice of Christ has purchased our forgiveness, the offering of ourselves as a sacrifice to God is not a sacrifice for sins, but rather a thank offering. Again, we do this not to obtain our salvation, but because we have already obtained it through the sacrifice of Christ.

Paul says four things here about the presentation of our bodies as sacrifices. First, he says that they are living sacrifices; second, that they are holy sacrifices; third, that they are acceptable sacrifices, and fourth, that such offerings constitute our spiritual service of worship.

In contrast to the Old Testament animal sacrifices, the sacrifice of ourselves is to be a living sacrifice. We offer our bodies to God for His use as living bodies, not dead ones. As someone has said, "The trouble with living sacrifices is that they keep jumping off the altar." Having offered our bodies as living sacrifices, we must remember subsequently that we belong to the Lord and not to ourselves. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."

Our sacrifice is a holy sacrifice. It is "set apart for God." It is holy because of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul says, "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." Peter mentions the "sanctifying work of the Spirit" in 1 Peter 1:2. As those who have been made holy by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, the offering of our bodies is holy and not profane.

Since our bodies are offered as a holy sacrifice, they are acceptable to God. The word means "well-pleasing." God is well-pleased when we offer up ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. This is what He wants. He wants us to yield ourselves to Him. He wants us to submit our lives to Him. If we want to please Him, this is the way to do it. We must offer up ourselves to Him.

Often in the evangelical church our emphasis is on people accepting the Lord. But we need at least an equal emphasis on the Lord accepting us. This is the important thing. God is the one who passes judgment on us, not we on Him. He does not exist to please us, but we exist to please Him. The only thing we have to give to Him is ourselves. If He has us, he has all we have. By His mercy He has made us acceptable in Christ.

This offering of ourselves to God is our "spiritual service of worship." I am not sure why the translators of the NAS decided to use the word "spiritual" here, because the Greek term is *logikos*, from which we get our word "logical." It means "reasonable" or "rational", not "spiritual." Robertson says, "The phrase means here 'worship rendered by the reason (or soul).'" (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV,

page 402.) Offering our bodies as living sacrifices to God is the response of our reason to His great mercies. It makes sense to offer ourselves to Him in view of His mercy and compassion toward us. We owe Him everything and can never repay His grace, therefore it makes sense to give ourselves to Him.

This is Christian worship. Under the Old Covenant, the center of worship was the offering of an animal sacrifice. Under the New Covenant in Christ, the offering of our bodies to God is at the center of our worship. Our service of worship is to present our bodies to God. If you want to worship the Lord, then give yourself to Him. This is the reasonable worship you offer Him.

In verse 2, Paul commands that we no longer be conformed to this world, but that we be transformed by the renewing of our minds. One or the other will happen with us. Either we will conform to this present world or "age" or we will be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing our minds.

The present age is marked by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, and is passing away (1 John 2:15-17). It is a foolish age (1 Corinthians 1:20). It is an evil age from which God has delivered us (Galatians 1:4). It is an age of worry (Matthew 13:22). It is an age when the wicked are mixed in with the righteous (Matthew 13:37-43). It is an age ruled by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4). It is also an age of lawlessness, selfishness, greed, violence, perversity, immorality, etc. It is an age that will be succeeded by the "age to come" (Matthew 12:32; Hebrews 6:5). The values, beliefs and practices of this age must not be adopted by those who belong to Christ. If our lives are marked by the same things that mark the age, then we have been conformed to it.

Unfortunately today it seems that as we look at the culture we see little difference between the values and practices of those who belong to the world and those who belong to Christ. Christians appear, for the most part, to be as materialistic and self-absorbed as those who are in the world. Of course there are exceptions, but they are too rare. Christians should be marked by radically different values, beliefs and practices from those in the world.

Instead of allowing ourselves to be conformed to the present age, we are to allow ourselves to be "transformed by the renewing our your mind." The term "transformed" is the Greek word *metamorphoo*. Our word metamorphosis comes from this word. It means "to change into another form" (*Vines Expository Dictionary*). It is the term used to describe Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17:2 and in Mark 9:2. Here in Romans 12 it is a present passive imperative, that is, it is a present-tense verb. We are to be continuously allowing ourselves to be transformed. It is passive, meaning that it is not something we do, but it is something that is done to us which we allow. It is imperative, meaning that it is a command, not a suggestion or a request.

Paul uses the term one other time, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being *transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." This passage tells us that as we look at the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into His image by the Spirit of God. God is transforming believers from the image of the world into the image of His Son. This work is done by His Holy Spirit. We cannot transform ourselves, we must be transformed by the Spirit of God Himself.

The Spirit does His transforming work in us by renewing our minds. Our minds need to be made new. Our thought patterns need to be redirected into new and godly channels. God needs to take our fleshly, depraved minds and renew them. Jesus said

that all of our sinful deeds come from out of our hearts, out of our sinful thoughts (Matthew 15:16-20). If we are cleaned up on the inside, in the realm of our hearts and minds, we will be clean on the outside. This is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and is not accomplished once for all time in a moment, but is a day-by-day process. In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." If our hearts and minds are not renewed and transformed by the Spirit, there is little value in trying to reform our behavior. A man may be able to quit smoking and drinking, to break a drug habit or whatever, but without the thorough transformation brought about by the renewing work of the Spirit, he is still an ungodly man. He is still lost and still has a depraved mind.

The reason that we are to allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our minds is so that, "you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The word "prove" is *dokimazo*, from *dokimos*, to test and then to approve. As our minds are renewed and we are transformed by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to test and then approve the will of God. The one who is conformed to the world and whose mind is not transformed is not able to discern the will of God. It is the one who is being transformed and whose mind is being renewed who is able to discern God's will. God's desires are only understood by those whose minds are being renewed. As we allow the Spirit to transform us, we can see what God wants of us; we are given spiritual discernment. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:11-16, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ."

God's will has to do with those things that are "good and acceptable and perfect." To discern God's will is to discover that which is good. The person with a renewed mind knows good from evil. Our world is very confused over what is good and what is evil. Often that which is good is seen as evil and vice-versa. Many in our nation today want us to accept all kinds of sexual practices, but reject prayer in public schools and crosses displayed in public. They are tolerant of all kinds of sin and perversion, but intolerant of Christian expression. The one who has been transformed by the renewing of his mind is not confused over what is good and what is not. He knows the difference between good and evil.

God's will is that which is acceptable, that which is "well-pleasing". This is the same word he used in verse 1 to describe the offering of our bodies as living and holy sacrifices to the Lord. If we know God's will, we know what is well-pleasing to Him. We know what is acceptable in His sight in all aspects of our lives.

God's will is perfect. The word is *teleios*, having reached its end, i.e. complete. It is sometimes translated "mature". There is no flaw in the will of God, nor does it need to develop further. It doesn't need any embellishment or alteration.

### Romans 12:3-8

For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul now turns to the subject of the "grace given to us" as individual members of the body of Christ (verses 3 and 6). He is talking here about the grace gifts given to us that we are to use in serving one another. The discussion is brief and very similar to his more lengthy discussion of the subject in 1 Corinthians 12.

First, in verse 3, he exhorts "every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment." This exhortation comes "through the grace given to me." As God had gifted Paul as an apostle by His grace, so Paul uses that authority to command each believer to right thinking about himself. Every individual in the body of Christ is to think of himself and his role in the body properly. We are not to be proud and think too highly of ourselves. Instead, we are to "think so as to have sound judgment." We are to think of ourselves, but we are to think properly of ourselves.

Spiritual gifts can be a point of pride in our lives, especially if they are spectacular sign gifts that manifest the power of God. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul mentions two improper ways of thinking of ourselves and others when it comes to spiritual gifts and our function in the body. The first is the person who says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body" (1 Corinthians 12:15). This is the person who devalues himself and his function in the body of Christ and looks with envy on the gift and function of another. This is just as bad as thinking too highly of ourselves. We will not function as we should if our opinion of ourselves is too low. The second thought or attitude is that which says, "I have no need of you" (1 Corinthians 12:21). This is the person who thinks too highly of himself and looks down on the gifts and functions of others in the body. He is the proud person, the person who does not see that he is dependent on the contributions of others in the body. Both of these extremes must be avoided.

What we are to recognize about ourselves and others in the body is that God "has allotted to each a measure of faith." Each member in the body has been given some faith. God is the one who measures out the faith we receive. He apportions it out as He sees fit. This means that where one is weak, another is strong. Where one has a lack, another has a surplus. Where one is unable, another is able. God has seen to it that we need one another in the church.

Paul continues explaining this in verses 4 and 5 as he mentions the analogy of the body, " For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." As our bodies have many parts with different functions, so the church also has many parts that constitute one body in Christ. Though there is a diversity of functions, there is to be unity in the body. We are "members one of

another." Since we belong to Christ we also all belong to one another. This is a truth we must recognize. Too many Christians refuse to recognize that other members are vital to them and that they are vital to others. We wouldn't want to live without a part of our body, and yet we often insist on trying to live without being involved with other members of the body of Christ.

Different members in the body have different gifts and therefore different functions (verse 6). The differences are due to the grace given to us and the proportion of our faith. God has allotted to each a measure of faith (verse 3b) and this accounts for the differences in our gifts. The Holy Spirit has distributed the gifts as He sees fit. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:11, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." Each one has a grace gift from the Spirit and a measure of faith with which to employ it. But we do not all have the same gift. The differences in our gifts have nothing to do with one member being favored over another, or one member being more worthy than another. They have to do with God's sovereign purposes.

The gift we have been given determines our function in the body. If we have the gift of prophecy, we are to exercise that gift in proportion to our faith (verse 6b). If we have a serving gift, then we are to serve. If we have the gift of teaching, then we are to teach. Exhorters are to exhort. Givers are to give liberally. Leaders are to lead diligently. Those with the gift of mercy are to be merciful with cheerfulness.

#### Romans 12:9-21

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. 20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This passage has been titled "The Law Of Christ" because of its affinities with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Paul gives us a string of short exhortations that deal both with our relationships with other believers and our relationships with unbelievers as well. In fact, he even tells us how we are to respond to those who persecute us.

First, he says, "Let love be without hypocrisy" (verse 9a). One of the problems with love is that it can be faked. We can and often do pretend at love in order to get what we want. Paul calls us to unhypocritical love, to genuine love. This love only comes from the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22). Pretend love is no love at all. We need real love with no hidden agendas or tainted motives.

Next, he says, "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." These are both present active participles. We are to be constantly abhorring evil and clinging to good. To abhor is to have a strong hatred for something. Anything that is bad or evil is to be strongly hated and despised by those who belong to Christ. This is one of our problems today. We tolerate evil. We are told by our culture that we must tolerate evil. We are told that we must accept adultery, fornication, homosexuality, abortion, pornography, falsehood, dishonesty, violence and a host of other evils in the name of being tolerant and inoffensive. Rather, we must decide that we will abhor these things. We will love the sinner, but we will vigorously hate his (and our) sin.

The thing that we cling to, that we embrace and attach ourselves to, is that which is good. Anything that is truly good is to be embraced. We do not hold to evil, we hold to what is good. This is to be a distinctive of believers in Christ. Evil is rejected; good is welcomed.

The string of participles continues in verse 10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor." The word "devoted" here is *philostorgos*, from *philos*, beloved, dear, friendly, and *storg* (family affection); tenderly loving:-- devoted. It only occurs here in the New Testament. The church is to be characterized by a familial affection for one another. We are to be devoted to each other as family members are devoted to each other. This means that if we have disagreements or personality clashes we do not resign from the fellowship of believers any more than we would resign from our families. In a family, you are stuck with the people God gives you. In the church it is the same. It is not a club we may join and then quit. As believers in Christ we are born into His family. We may not disinherit the other members nor may we drop out of the family. Instead, we are to devote ourselves to every member in the body in brotherly love. We are there for them and they are there for us.

Everyone has a desire to be honored - to be valued and esteemed by others. Paul says, "give preference to one another in honor." Paul is telling us here to give preferential treatment to one another when it comes to honor and esteem. When you prefer someone, you let them go first, you give them the best place, you put them ahead of yourself. Instead of advancing ourselves, we are to advance others ahead of ourselves. Instead of seeking honor, we are to honor others. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

Paul continues in verse 11, "not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord". The words "lagging behind" translate *oknayros*, shrinking, hesitation, hence slothful. The word is translated "lazy" in Matthew 25:26 as the master in Jesus' parable describes the slave who hid his talent in the ground rather than investing it. The word "diligence" is *spouday*, haste, diligence. There is an urgency in our service for the Lord. The investment of the gifts He has entrusted to us for His profit requires "stick-to-itiveness" and vigorous application. We are not to set His interests aside in order to do our thing. We are not to be lazy about His work.

In spirit we are to be "fervent". The word means "to boil, to be hot". The term is used to describe Apollos in Acts 18:24-26, "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the

synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." The result of the fervent spirit of Apollos was that he spoke and taught about Jesus. A fervent spirit will motivate us and give us boldness to talk about Jesus.

We are to be serving the Lord. The role of a servant is to serve, not to be served. Christ purchased us with the price of His blood and we are now His servants. Our purpose now is to do as He says. We are to recognize that we are slaves of Christ and that it is Him we serve.

Verse 12 gives us three more present active participles, "rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer." Hope is a positive expectation and anticipation of future good. The hope of a believer in Christ is rooted in His promises. He has promised that He would go prepare a place for us and then return and receive us to Himself (see John 14:1-3). Our hope is that one day we will be fully redeemed and fully restored to the beings that God intends us to be in His presence. We look forward to the full coming of Christ's kingdom and the restoration of all things. In this hope we find joy. We have a reason to celebrate.

In the midst of tribulation we need perseverance. The word is *hupomenō*, to stay behind, to await, endure. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33). James said, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2-3). Trials and tribulations are inevitable and unavoidable. Christians face a double dose of tribulations because we face both the natural troubles of a fallen world that everyone is subject to (disease, disaster, difficulty), plus we face the hatred and persecution of the world. In the face of all kinds of tribulation we must hold on to our faith in Christ. We must persevere and endure in our trust in Him. We must not abandon our confidence and our hope.

We also need to be "devoted to prayer." The word translated "devoted" here means to attend constantly. The word is used in Acts 1:14, "These all with one mind were *continually devoting themselves* to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." It is translated the same way in Acts 2:42, "And they were *continually devoting themselves* to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." It is a continual, constant devotion that is needed. Our commitment to prayer is a commitment that must be renewed constantly. It is no good to make a one-time decision that we are going to pray. Prayer requires a continual commitment. Our communication with the Lord must be renewed daily, hourly, moment-by-moment.

Verse 13 gives us two exhortations, "contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality." Seeing and meeting needs is one of the main aspects of *agape* love. John pointed this out in 1 John 3:16-18, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth." Love means not only being aware of needs, but doing what one can to help meet those needs. We must remember that our brothers and sisters in Christ are "saints," holy ones who belong to Christ. In Christ we all belong to one another and are responsible for each other.

Hospitality is *philoxenia*, the love of strangers. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels

without knowing it." Strangers are to be welcomed and cared for without charge. This is to be an ongoing practice among believers.

We are told to bless those who persecute us in verse 14. Instead of cursing our persecutors, we are to bless them. Jesus says the same thing in Luke 6:28. The word "bless" is *eulogeō*, to speak well of, praise. Our word "eulogy" comes from this term. Our natural fleshly inclination is to speak evil of those who persecute us, but the Lord holds us to a higher standard. This is only possible as we are controlled by the Spirit of God.

Since we are members of one another in Christ, we are to share in each others joys and sorrows. So Paul says in verse 15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." If one member has a victory or a blessing, all of us should join in the celebration. If one has a grief or sorrow, all should join in the weeping. There are appropriate times for both.

The next verse deals with our thinking toward one another as he says in verse 16, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation." He is not saying here that we must all think alike and have the same opinions and views about everything. He is saying that we are to have a humble attitude toward one another. We are to be mindful of the fact that we are all "members of one another". Paul discussed this same subject in Philipians 2:1-11,

If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"Being of the same mind" toward one another means having the attitude of Christ toward one another. It means humbling ourselves to become servants of one another. It means associating with the lowly. The word "associate" in Romans 12:16 is *sunapago*, to lead away with, fig. to be carried away with. We are to be "carried away" with the lowly. Two negatives in this verse tell us that we are not to be "haughty" or conceited, and we are not to think that we are "wise". We are not to view ourselves as having more wisdom or more capability than others. Whatever we have is a gift from the Lord.

Taking revenge is prohibited in verse 17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone," Paul says. This is a universal prohibition. There is no exception allowed. No matter what the circumstances are, at no time are we free to repay evil for evil. No

matter who we are dealing with, we are never free to pay back evil for evil. No matter how great the evil that is done against us, we are not to strike back. Paul will explain this more in verses 19-21.

Also in verse 17 he says, "Respect what is right in the sight of all men." All people have a moral sense. God has put an ethical system within each one of us. In 2 Corinthians Paul talks about the administration of the financial gift he was collecting from the Gentile churches for the church in Jerusalem. He says in 2 Corinthians 8:20-21, "taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Paul had "regard" or "respect" for that which was right and honorable among men. He wanted to make sure that there was no appearance of fraud or embezzlement as he handled the money that was given.

Verse 18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." The present active participle here is "be at peace". There are two qualifiers added here. First, we are to be at peace with all men if it is possible. This condition implies that it may not always be possible to be at peace with all men. The word "possible" is *dunatos*, meaning to have ability, to have power or might. Sometimes, under some circumstances, we may not be able to maintain a peaceful relationship with all men. Second, we are to be at peace with all men in so far as it depends on us. Some will oppose us and will be our enemies no matter what we do. But as far as we are concerned, we are to seek peace with all. When we have wronged someone, we must seek their forgiveness. We must not provoke others. We must be peacemakers and peace seekers.

Paul continues with this emphasis in verses 19-21. He has said, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone" in verse 17. Again, he says, "Never take your own revenge" in verse 19. Revenge is never to be an option for the believer. Instead, he says, we must "leave room for the wrath of God." He explains this by quoting two passages from the Old Testament. The first, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," comes from Deuteronomy 32:35. Vengeance and repayment for evil belong to the Lord, not to us. He is the Judge. He knows perfectly the truth of what everyone has done. He is the only one who can justly judge everyone. Our judgment and our revenge is tainted by our own sin and evil. God's wrath is pure wrath, holy wrath, with no evil in it.

The second quote, "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head," is from Proverbs 25:21-22. Instead of taking revenge, we are to treat our enemies with kindness and meet whatever needs they have. We are not doing so in order to heap the burning coals on their heads, but in order to "overcome evil with good." If possible, we are to seek to make friends of those who are our enemies. If we take revenge, we have been overcome by evil. We are behaving as our enemies behave. But if we respond with kindness, we respond as Christ would respond, and we overcome evil.

#### Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if

you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. 5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Having dealt with relationships among believers in chapter 12, here Paul turns to the relationship of the believer with the state. He issues a call, not to rebellion, but to submission to the civil authorities. He does not discuss what we are to do if the state oversteps its bounds and contradicts the commands of the Lord. The example of the apostles in Acts 5:29 provides us a guideline when the state commands something God forbids or forbids something God commands. In such cases we must say with Peter, "We must obey God rather than men."

The requirement of subjection to the government applies to "every person" (verse 1). All believers must put themselves under the authority of the government. No Christian may be an outlaw. There is no room here for a believer to join an anti-government militia or to refuse to pay taxes. Paul gives the reason for this in verse 1b and 2, "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves." God is the source of civil authority. The existing authorities have been established or appointed by Him. If we resist the authorities He has established, we are resisting His "ordinance," His established institutions. God is the ultimate authority behind every earthly authority.

Three times in verse 2, Paul uses the word *anthistēmi*. Once it is translated "resists" and twice "opposed". It means to stand against or withstand. This is the opposite of subjection to authority. Those who stand against the civil government stand against God's ordinance and will receive condemnation.

Paul further explains in verses 3 and 4 that the state is "a minister of God" and its purpose is to "bring wrath upon the one who practices evil." It is God's agent on earth to restrain evil and protect those who do what is right. The church does not have this authority. The church is not an "avenger" and does not "bear the sword". God has given those functions to the government. Believers are called to do what is good and thus avoid any fear of authority.

Avoiding wrath is not the only reason to be in subjection to authority. Paul says that we are to do it also "for conscience' sake" (verse 5). In order to keep a clear conscience before God we must submit ourselves to the government. If we resist the rulers, we violate God's will and defile our consciences.

Again in verse 6 Paul tells us that rulers are "servants of God." We pay taxes because the government serves God in maintaining order in this world and in punishing evildoers and protecting those who do what is right. Rulers are devoted to this. No ruler wants to see anarchy and unrest in his kingdom, lest he be overthrown. So every ruler is dedicated to maintaining peace and administering justice at least at a minimal level in order to preserve his own authority.

Since rulers are servants of God, we are to render to them what is due, "tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (verse 7). While we are to render what is due the government, we are not called upon to render any more than what is due. We also have a higher obligation to God. Jesus

said, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25). All things come from Him and are owed to Him. Ultimately, we submit to the government because we submit to God. Subjection to the rulers is part of our subjection to Him. That is what Paul is saying here.

#### Romans 13:8-10

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul turns from our relationship to the government to our relationship with our neighbors. Here he is talking about our relationship to our unbelieving "neighbors," and not necessarily our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The first principle here is "Owe nothing to anyone." We are to be debt-free. We are not to be indebted to unbelievers. We become the servants or slaves of those to whom we are indebted. If we owe something to someone they have power over us, and only Christ is to be our Master.

The only exception to this principle is that we owe love to everyone. Paul explains that the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The prohibitions in the law against committing adultery, murder, stealing and coveting are summed up in the requirement that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Paul quotes these examples from the ten commandments as instances of what the law requires. He adds, "and if there is any other commandment." Any command that requires us to behave in a certain way toward our neighbors is summed up in the requirement that we love our neighbors. Paul concludes in verse 10, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law."

This principle of loving one's neighbor and thus fulfilling the law is also taught by Jesus and by James. Jesus said, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). James writes, "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,' you are doing well" (James 2:8). Paul also repeats the principle in Galatians 5:14, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" We must cultivate the realization that love is an obligation, a debt, that we owe to everyone. It is a debt that God expects us to pay.

#### Romans 13:11-14

And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and

drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, factoring in the time (the age or the season) in which we live, and knowing that the time is near for our full redemption. It is right now the hour to awaken from sleep. We are like people who are asleep in the darkness who need to wake up. We must rouse ourselves. Our salvation, our full redemption, is near and we are to live with this redemption in view. The salvation he mentions in verse 11 is not our salvation from sin, but our eventual resurrection and salvation from this present evil age, accomplished when Christ returns. That day is ever coming nearer.

In view of the fact that "the night is almost gone, and the day is at hand," Paul exhorts us to "lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." He exhorts us to "behave properly as in the day." In the darkness we are to behave as if we were in the light. The world is a dark place, full of evil, rebellion and sin. But, as John tells us, "the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8). The kingdom of light is replacing forever the kingdom of darkness. And believers in Christ are those who have been delivered by the Father from the "domain of darkness" and transferred into the "kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). Since we are citizens of the kingdom of light we are to behave as such. We do not behave as those who still walk in the darkness, but as those who have the light of life in Christ. (See John 8:12.)

The exhortation he outlines in verse 12b is spelled out more specifically in verses 13 and 14. The "deeds of darkness" have to do with carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife and jealousy. These are the kinds of things that we are to "lay aside." Having put these things aside, we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Ultimately, this is what it means to "put on the armor of light." It is to put on Jesus Christ Himself. It means to live in the power of His indwelling presence so that we behave as He behaves. We replace the evil of the world, our flesh and Satan with the goodness of Christ. And, at the same time, we are to "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." The word "provision" here is *pronoia*, foresight, forethought. We are not to think about fulfilling the evil desires of our flesh. We are not to plan out how we are going to gratify our flesh. As we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we forget about our flesh and its desires.

#### Romans 14:1-12

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2 One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies

for himself; 8 for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." 12 So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

While many believers are too lax in their behavior and accept things that should be rejected, the opposite is also true. Many believers are too scrupulous in their behavior, and limit themselves in ways that they don't necessarily need to. These believers are called "weak in the faith" here. In chapter 14 Paul discusses the relationship between those who are strong in faith and those who are weak in faith, between those who limit themselves in matters of food and the observance of days, and those who do not. To the strong in faith, he says, "Do not despise the weak." To the weak he says, "Do not judge the strong."

The weakness discussed here is a weakness of faith. It is a weakness in a man's beliefs. Some Christians sincerely believe that they must not eat meat, and so they eat only vegetables (verse 2). Other Christians, who are stronger in faith, believe that any and all foods are acceptable (verses 2 and 14). Mark makes the comment in Mark 7:19 that Jesus, in discussing what defiles a man, declared all foods clean. Jesus said that what defiles us is not that which comes into us from the outside, but that which comes out from the evil of our hearts. Some Christians do not understand this principle, and so believe that they will somehow violate God's will if they eat certain forbidden foods.

It is the responsibility of those who are stronger in the faith to accept the weak (verse 1). There is to be a tolerance among those who are more mature for the scruples of those who are less mature and weaker in their faith. This acceptance is not to serve the purpose of passing judgment on the weak man's opinions. The weaker person's thoughts and arguments about the subject are not to be judged. With time, study and growth their opinions will be modified to a more mature position. The man who eats all foods is not to "regard with contempt him who does not eat" (verse 3). He is not to despise the weaker brother and look down on him.

The one who believes he may not eat meat is exhorted not to judge the one who eats (verse 3b). Paul explains, "for God has accepted him." The basis of the man's acceptance before the Lord is his faith in Jesus, not what kind of food he eats. This is a very important point because we tend to do just this. We tend to judge each other on the basis of behavior that really makes little difference in our relationship to the Lord. One who believes eating meat is wrong will be inclined to conclude that those who do eat meat are not really Christians. Someone who believes that certain days are greater than other days may question the salvation of those who do not hold that conviction. Those who speak in tongues question the salvation of those who do not. Those who baptize by immersion aren't sure that those who are sprinkled are really saved. Faith in Christ is the basis of our salvation. Those who are truly saved will exhibit transformations in their values and behavior, but many of our judgments are based on differences of opinion rather than absolutes from God's word.

In verse 4 Paul says to the vegetarian, "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to

make him stand." It is the master's prerogative to judge his servant. That duty does not fall to his other servants. In matters of Christian freedom, we do not have the right to judge one another. Jesus said, "Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-2). When it comes to what we eat or drink or what day we observe, we are not to judge one another. The Lord is able to make the meat-eater stand, and he will stand; he will not fall as the vegetarian may think he will. One's diet is not a basis for a fall. In 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 Paul writes, "But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." The Lord will examine all of us. We do not examine one another.

The other example Paul gives here besides the issue of what one ought to eat is the observance of days. "One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike" (verse 5). We must note that the word "alike" is not in the Greek text. Some people believe that certain days are holier than other days, others believe that all days are equally holy. This is not to be a point of argument between believers. Each man is to be "fully convinced in his own mind." Neither is called on to abandon his position. We are not to go to war against the Seventh Day Adventists over their insistence on the Saturday Sabbath observance. They are fully convinced of their position and probably would win the debate anyway. There is to be peace and tolerance among believers on these types of issues.

The reason that we are all to be fully convinced in our own minds is that we observe our convictions "for the Lord" (verse 6). The man who observes special days does it "for the Lord." The one who eats "does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God." The one who avoids meat does so for the sake of his relationship with the Lord. Whether we are exercising our liberty or observing our scruples, we are doing it before the Lord according to our conscience.

Paul continues explaining this in verses 7 and 8, "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." This principle is true for every Christian whether he acknowledges it or not. There is no Christian who "lives for himself," nor is there any Christian who "dies for himself." We belong to the Lord and whether we live or die, we do it for Him. Our behavior is to be governed by this realization of the Lord's presence and control over our lives. Everything we do is to be done for Him in submission to His Lordship. When we must decide what we are going to do, the question is not simply, "What do I want to do?" We ask, "What does the Lord want me to do?"

The purpose for which Christ died and rose again was so that He might be Lord of the dead and the living (verse 9). His death made Him Lord of the dead. His resurrection made Him Lord of the living. Peter proclaimed this fact as he preached about the resurrection in Acts 2:36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified." The resurrection was proof that Jesus was made Lord and Christ. Philippians 2:5-11 tells us that because of His humility and obedience, submitting Himself even to death

on a cross, God has highly exalted Jesus and given Him a name above every name, "that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Jesus has been made Lord of all, whether they are alive or dead, because of His death and resurrection. Everyone must and will acknowledge His Lordship.

Paul challenges the weak and the strong in verse 10, "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt?" He points out that we all shall stand before God's tribunal to give an account of ourselves to Him. Therefore, our behavior as well as our brother's behavior will be judged by God. I am not to despise the scrupulous and I am not to judge those who don't observe my scruples in areas where scripture does not give a clear command. Paul quotes from Isaiah 45:23, the same passage cited in Philippians 2, to prove his point, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." No one stands outside this truth. Each one will give an account to God. Everyone faces an evaluation at His judgment seat.

#### Romans 14:13-23

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Since the Lord is going to judge each one of us, we are exhorted not to judge one another any longer. Instead, we are to walk according to love and determine that we are not going to put a stumbling block in any brother's path. Paul calls us to avoid exercising our liberty in such a way that it might hurt our brother. As we enjoy our liberty of conscience, we must keep the scruples of others in view. Love calls us to voluntarily limit the exercise of our freedom in order to avoid hurting someone else.

When it comes to food and drink, Paul says that he is convinced that nothing is unclean in itself in the Lord (verse 14). Even though he was a strict Jew and a Pharisee, he had come to be persuaded that no foods are "unclean" under the new covenant in Christ. As we have noted, Christ declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). Paul was probably more sensitive to the scruples of Jewish believers than the Gentile Christians were, because he had struggled with this issue himself. It could not have been easy for him to let go of these traditions.

However, Paul goes on to say that if someone has a true conviction that something is unclean, to him it is unclean. If he thinks that pork is unclean and in an awkward social setting ends up eating pork, he has violated his conscience and in doing so has sinned.

Exercising our liberty to eat whatever we want is not so important that in doing so we cause harm to our brothers. We violate the law of love if we cause a weaker brother to stumble in the exercise of our liberty (verse 15), and so we sin as well. Love demands that we be conscious of the scruples of others and limit our behavior in such a way as to keep from causing them to stumble. In Ephesians 5:1,2 Paul says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." Love is to be the guiding principle in our lives, not liberty. Liberty is to be governed by God's love. Even Jesus, though free as the Son of God from the duty to pay the temple tax, voluntarily paid it so as not to give offense (see Matthew 17:24-27).

Paul continues in verses 16 and 17, "Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." If I know and am convinced that nothing in itself is unclean, and that I can eat any food with a clear conscience, that is a "good thing" for me. But in the exercise of that liberty I must not allow my liberty to become something that is described by others as something evil. If I know that someone in my sphere of acquaintance would think that my behavior was wrong, then I should limit my behavior out of love for their sake. Paul explains that eating and drinking are not what the kingdom of God is all about. The government of God is concerned with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What we eat and what we drink is of very little consequence, except as it impacts the righteousness, peace and joy the Holy Spirit produces in us and among us. These are the big issues. God is concerned that we relate rightly to Himself and to others. He is concerned that we be at peace with Him and among ourselves. He is concerned that we experience His joy. If we are quibbling about food and drink, these things are destroyed. The stronger have a responsibility to see that food and drink and similar issues do not wipe out our fellowship.

Voluntarily limiting our liberty for the sake of a weaker brother is a means of serving Christ (verse 18). The way that we treat our brothers in Christ is the way that we treat Christ. In Matthew 25:40 Jesus says, "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'" We serve Christ as we serve one another, and as we do so we find ourselves "acceptable to God and approved by men". The term "acceptable" means "well-pleasing." It is the same term that Paul used in 12:1 when he talked about giving our bodies as living sacrifices that are "acceptable" to God. Men approve us as well when we voluntarily limit our liberty for their sake.

What is to be pursued is not food and drink, not the exercise of our liberty, but "the things which make for peace and the building up of one another" (verse 19). Paul exhorts us to run after peace and edification. Knowing that eating certain foods may cause strife among believers, we must avoid those foods so that peace may prevail. Knowing that eating things that a weaker brother believes are forbidden may cause him to stumble and sin against his conscience, we must not eat those things so that he will be built up. Where believers are arguing over what may or may not be eaten there is no

edification taking place. Too many believers have separated from one another over trivial matters.

In verse 20a Paul adds, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food." To "tear down" is the opposite of the "building up" in verse 19. Every believer is a "work of God." Ephesians 2:10 tells us, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God is building us up into the people He wants to be, conformed to the image of Christ. If we make a brother stumble along that process, then some of God's work is destroyed, is "torn down." Our freedom is not worth that cost.

Paul repeats the fact that all things are clean in verse 20b. However, he says, "they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense." If in eating we cause another to stumble, our eating has become evil. He is not talking here about offending someone in the modern sense. He is talking about being a cause of stumbling for a brother or sister. If we represent Christ faithfully we cannot help but offend some people who would rather not hear about their need for a Savior.

That this principle applies to more than just food and drink is seen in verse 21, "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, *or to do anything* by which your brother stumbles." It is the responsibility of the stronger brother to voluntarily limit his freedom for the sake of his weaker brother. This is a good thing to do. We must avoid doing anything that might cause a weaker brother or sister to stumble.

The key principle here is that of faith (verses 22 and 23). The stronger brother has faith that "he may eat all things" (verse 2), that all things are clean and may be used, consumed and enjoyed without hesitation or remorse. The weaker brother believes that certain foods must be avoided because they are unclean and forbidden. Paul encourages the stronger brother to keep his faith to himself as his own conviction before God. These things are not to be flaunted publicly. We are not to demonstrate our freedom publicly, waving it like a flag before the weaker brothers. If we do not condemn ourselves in the things we approve we are happy. We are to enjoy our liberty before God privately.

But if one who doubts goes ahead and eats something he believes to be forbidden, he is condemned by his own conscience. The condemnation here is self-condemnation. Whatever we do that is not from faith is sin. This is to be our guiding principle. If I don't have a clear conviction that what I am doing is right, then I must not do it. If I can't do something and give thanks to God for it at the same time, knowing that it is alright for me, then I had better not do it. This is the principle we must observe if we are not sure about a certain activity. If we have doubts about going to movies or the theater, then it is best not to go. If we have doubts about drinking wine, then it is best to abstain. "If in doubt, don't" is a good maxim to observe.

#### Romans 15:1-6

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED THEE FELL UPON ME." 4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same

mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul here concludes his words regarding the relationship of the strong in faith to the weak in faith with an exhortation to the strong to behave as Christ behaved. The strong are to follow the example of Christ so that there might be oneness in the Body of Christ.

First, he says, "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves." Paul recognizes that he is "strong," and that probably most of his readers in Rome are "strong." If one is stronger in faith than others, one must recognize his strength. If we are more mature than others around us in the Church, we must recognize that maturity and the responsibility that it carries with it. It does not mean that we are superior, just that we are further down the road than others. Being strong means that you have a responsibility to look out for and help the weak. The word "ought" here points to a debt that the strong owe to the weak. Being strong means that we have a duty to bear the weaknesses of the weak. It is interesting that Paul does not call on the weak to recognize their weaknesses and to avoid burdening others with them. Rather, the duty falls to the strong to bear their weaknesses. The weak are like children who do not have the maturity to see that their immaturity imposes burdens on the mature. The strong are to be like parents who understand this and gladly bear the immaturity of their children.

The strong in faith are to do this instead of pleasing themselves. (The word "just" in verse one is supplied by the translators.) We are not to use our liberty of conscience to bring ourselves pleasure with no regard for how it might affect others. Instead, Paul says, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification" (verse 2). The strong in faith must learn to ask themselves the questions, "What will please my neighbor?" and, "What will build up my neighbor?" We live in a culture where pleasing oneself is paramount. Self reigns on the throne of most people in our nation, and serving oneself is the top priority for most people. Mature Christians must demonstrate a different value and priority.

No one was "stronger" than Christ Himself. No one had more freedom of conscience to do as He pleased. Being one with the Father, whatever He did would have pleased His Father. But Christ did not please Himself. He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He served us in His suffering and death. Paul quotes Psalm 69:8 to make his point, "The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon me." He was reproached for the sake of His father. Instead of His own pleasure, Christ chose the reproach of the cross. He laid down His freedom and His power and even His own will to serve us by dying for us.

In explaining his quote from Psalm 69, Paul gives us a statement about the purpose of Scripture in verse 4. He says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." He is talking, of course, about the Old Testament Scriptures. They are written for our instruction, to teach us the things that we need to know. They are also written for our encouragement. The word for "encouragement" here is *paraklysis*, a calling to one's aid, i.e. encouragement, comfort. The Scriptures provide many examples of those who laid aside their own pleasure and freedom to serve others and to obey the Lord's will. There is comfort for us in seeing the blessings

that God has bestowed upon those who were faithful and obedient. There is encouragement in seeing that God has been faithful to His people and to His promises throughout history. As we persevere through hardship and trials and are encouraged by the Scriptures, our hope is maintained. We see that there is a reward from God for doing what is right and good, even when doing those things is costly to us.

The perseverance and encouragement we need has its source in God Himself. He is the one who "gives perseverance and encouragement." The Scriptures are the tool of God in imparting these vital things to us.

Paul pronounces a blessing in verses 5 and 6. The blessing indicates his longing and desire for them in regard to the unity of their fellowship. He wants God to grant that they will "be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." They may disagree when it comes to matters of food and drink, but when it comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, he wants them to be of one mind. They are to be united in understanding who Christ is and what He has done. They are to worship Him with one accord and with one voice. Oneness in Christ does not require that we always agree about everything. There is room to disagree about what foods or drinks are permissible. We must be united about Christ.

#### Romans 15:7-13

Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, "THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO THEE AMONG THE GENTILES, AND I WILL SING TO THY NAME." 10 And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE." 11 And again, "PRAISE THE LORD ALL YOU GENTILES, AND LET ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE HIM." 12 And again Isaiah says, "THERE SHALL COME THE ROOT OF JESSE, AND HE WHO ARISES TO RULE OVER THE GENTILES, IN HIM SHALL THE GENTILES HOPE." 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Gentile believers did not have many of the scruples of conscience that the Jewish believers had, and so Paul admonishes both groups to accept one another as Christ has accepted them. As you read the book of Acts, it becomes clear that the Jewish apostles had a difficult time accepting the fact that the gospel of Christ was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews and that God had, in Christ, accepted the Gentiles. This was God's whole point in Peter's dream and his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10. God showed Peter that He had accepted the Gentiles by pouring out His Spirit on them as He had poured out His Spirit on the Jews.

If Christ has accepted us, we must accept one another. By virtue of His acceptance of us, we are all related to one another in Him. We are all brothers and sisters, even if some of the brothers and sisters do not see everything as we do. We may not reject one another. In 1 Corinthians 12:20 and 21 Paul says, "But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" God is glorified when we accept one another.

Christ became a servant to both the Jews and the Gentiles (verses 8 and 9). He Himself said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He humbled Himself to the point of serving His creatures, and even to the point of dying for them (see Philippians 2:5-11). He served the circumcision (the Jews) "on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers." The truthfulness of God had to be upheld, so in becoming a servant, Christ was acting on the behalf of the truth of God. His purpose in doing this was to confirm or to make certain the promises God gave to the fathers. Christ fulfilled the promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Christ, God demonstrated that He is truthful and that He is faithful to His promises.

Christ also served the Gentiles so that the Gentiles would "glorify God for His mercy." The promise of God to Israel also included mercy for the Gentiles. Back in Genesis 12, God said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3). This promise to Abram includes the promise that in him all the families of the earth will be blessed. All the nations, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through Abram's posterity. This promise is ultimately fulfilled in Christ Himself.

Paul goes on to cite four Old Testament passages that demonstrate that God's blessings would come to the Gentiles. The first is Psalm 18:49, "Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Thy name." In the Psalm David depicts the nations as being subject to him. As Christ was the promised King in the line of David, all nations will be subject to Him and among them He will praise the Father and sing to His name. All nations one day will submit themselves to Christ.

The second quotation is from the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:43, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people." In this last verse of his song, Moses goes on to give the reason that the Gentiles are to rejoice with His people. He says, "For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land and His people." The exhortation is to join the people of God rather than be their adversaries, because their adversaries will face the vengeance of God, but God's land and people will receive His grace and mercy. Moses is telling the Gentiles to join them in praise of God rather than opposing them. If we oppose the people of God we will find ourselves facing God's wrath rather than His mercy.

The third quotation is from Psalm 117:1, "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him." The Psalmist goes on to give the reason for this in verse 2, "For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!" Verse one is a parallelism that says the same thing in two different ways. All the nations, all the peoples, are to praise the Lord because of His great lovingkindness and His everlasting truth.

Isaiah 11:10 is the fourth passage quoted, "There shall come the root of Jesse, and He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles hope." Isaiah 11 deals with the reign of the Messiah, the "root of Jesse" who would come. We know that Jesus is this "root of Jesse." He rules not only over Israel, but over all the nations as well. He is the hope not only of Israel, but also of all the Gentiles. It has always been God's intention to include Gentiles in His kingdom.

The mention of hope in the quote from Isaiah leads Paul to pronounce the blessing in verse 13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." He had pronounced a blessing in verses 5 and 6 and now he has another. He calls God the "God of hope." He is the origin of hope and the giver of hope. There is real hope in God and He wants us to have this hope. Apart from God's gift, there is no true hope, only false hope. Paul expresses the desire that God might fill us with "all joy and peace in believing." Joy and peace depend upon believing. If we lack God's joy, peace and hope it indicates that there is something wrong with our believing. We are not fully trusting the Lord in the way that we should. As we believe, as we trust in the God of hope, He is able to fill us with joy and peace, which causes us to "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." If we want abundant, overflowing hope, we must work on our trust in the Lord. As we trust Him, the Holy Spirit fills us with joy and peace, and hope becomes abundant.

Romans 15:14-33

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. 18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation; 21 but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

22 For this reason I have often been hindered from coming to you; 23 but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24 whenever I go to Spain-- for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while-- 25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. 29 And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.

30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; 32 so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Evidently Paul felt it was necessary to explain the reason that he had written such a long and detailed letter so full of basic doctrine. Some in Rome may have been offended that he felt they needed to be told so many basic things. Therefore Paul explains in this paragraph that he is writing as a reminder to them. Though he had not planted the Roman church, nonetheless he was Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, and felt a responsibility to them and for them. He wants to make sure that they understand how he feels about them. He does not see them as immature and wayward believers. He sees them as well-instructed and mature.

Verse 14 explains how Paul perceived the believers in Rome, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another." When it comes to the Roman believers, Paul says he has confidence that three things are true of them. First, that they are "full of goodness." Galatians 5:22 includes goodness as part of the fruit of the Spirit, and Ephesians 5:9 mentions it along with righteousness and truth as part of the "fruit of the light." Goodness, for us, is not an inherent quality, but is derived from our relationship with the Lord. It grows out of our fellowship with the Spirit of God. In Mark 10:18 Jesus pointed out to the man who had called Him "good Teacher" that no one is good except God alone. Therefore, if we are "full of goodness" it must be because God's good Spirit lives in us.

The second thing that Paul knows is true of the Roman believers is that they are "filled with all knowledge." It is likely that he hasn't told them anything new in this epistle. They know these doctrinal facts that he has spelled out in the letter. They are mature believers and are familiar with the Word of God and the doctrines of the apostles.

The third thing Paul mentions is that they are "able also to admonish one another." This third aspect depends on the first two. To properly admonish one another we must have a good intent in mind, and we must have the proper knowledge to impart. The word "able" is *dunamai*, power or ability. We might use the word "empowered" here, and say that when we are full of goodness and filled with all knowledge then we are empowered to admonish one another. The word "admonish" comes from the Greek term *noutheteo*, to admonish, exhort. The word is a compound of *nous*, meaning "mind" and *tithaymi*, to place, lay, set. The Roman believers were able to instruct one another. They were teachers and were able to properly direct the minds of their brothers.

Though Paul knows that the believers in Rome are mature and are able to teach, nevertheless he has written to them "very boldly on some points." His letter has been written with authority. He has given them direct commands regarding how to conduct their lives. Some in Rome may have questioned his authority since he had not planted the Roman church. So here in verses 15 and 16 he explains that he has written so boldly because of the grace of God in making him the apostle to the Gentiles. He has not written in order to instruct them for the first time, but in order to remind them again of the things they already know. He was responsible for the Roman church and had authority over them in Christ because Christ had given him that authority over all the Gentiles.

There are several important things that Paul says about his ministry in verses 15 and 16 that we should note. First, he was a minister by virtue of the grace of God. One is not made a minister because of his education or other qualifications. One becomes a minister by God's gracious choice and gift. The Lord was gracious to Paul in confronting

him on the road to Damascus and in giving him the opportunity to believe and to become an apostle of Christ.

Second, the word translated "minister" here is *leitourgos*, a public servant, a minister, a servant. The word is a compound of *laos*, the people, and *ergon*, to do work. A minister is one who works for the people. His role is to serve others. When we think of ministry, we must learn to think of service to others. This is the essence of ministry. Ministry does not have to do with occupying some lofty, exalted ecclesiastical position, but rather has to do with humble service to others.

The third thing is that Paul was a "minister of Christ Jesus." He ministered on behalf of Christ as a representative of Christ. His ministry came from Christ and was about Christ. The message that Paul brought to the Gentiles was a message from Christ about Christ. Jesus Christ was at the center of Paul's ministry and should be at the center of ours. The knowledge of Christ is the most important thing that we have to give to others. Everything else is insignificant by comparison.

Fourth, Paul was the "minister to the Gentiles." When Jesus confronted him on the Damascus road He told Paul that he would be sent to the Gentiles. Paul quotes His words in Acts 26:16-18, "But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." From the beginning of his relationship with Christ, Paul understood that he would be sent to tell the Gentile nations about the grace of God in Christ. In Galatians 2 he talks about his ministry to the Gentiles and points out that the other apostles agreed that he and Barnabas should take the gospel to the Gentiles, and that they would minister to the Jews. (See especially Galatians 2:9.) Paul's authority in Gentile churches came from this direct command of Christ.

A fifth thing to note is that Paul says he was "ministering as a priest." There was a priestly or sacred quality to his ministry. He represented Christ to the Gentiles and the Gentiles to Christ. The "gospel of God" was the message that he handled as a priest. The gospel is the sacred thing that he was to convey. One of the main functions of a priest was to present the offerings of the people in the temple. Paul's offering was the Gentiles themselves. As he preached the gospel of God and the Gentiles believed, they were added to God's kingdom and God's family. They became Paul's "offering" to the Lord.

Paul ministered in this way so that his offering of the Gentiles might be "acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit". "Acceptable" here means "well-received." In order to be acceptable, the Gentiles had to be sanctified, they had to be made holy. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are not naturally holy or acceptable to God in our fallen state. We are unacceptable and unholy. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit in us makes us acceptable. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives as we believe the gospel of God.

Since the Lord had given him grace and authority as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul goes on to engage in a little "boasting" about his ministry. In verse 17 he says, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God." He is not boasting, as many do, about his own greatness. He is boasting about what the Lord has done through him (verse 18). The only reasons he has for boasting are

found in Christ Jesus. The only things he can boast about are things "pertaining to God." Many of us tend to boast about our children, our homes and possessions, our jobs or our hobbies. Paul only boasted about Christ and what Christ did through his ministry.

As Christ worked through Paul in the preaching of the gospel, the result was that the Gentiles became obedient "by word and deed" (verse 18b). The Gentiles obeyed the gospel in their words and they obeyed it in their deeds. Their words revealed their faith, and their deeds revealed their faith. If we have saving faith, this will be true of us as well. We will confess Christ with our lips and we will obey him in our deeds. The gospel will transform our speech and behavior.

The ministry that Christ carried out through Paul was carried out "in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit" (verse 19a). Signs and wonders are mentioned both in the Old Testament and in the New. In the Old Testament they are most often related to the signs and wonders that God displayed as He delivered Israel from Egypt (Deut. 4:34, 6:22, 26:8, 29:2,3, 34:10,11; Neh. 9:10; Ps. 135:9). In the New Testament, signs and wonders are performed through the apostles to confirm their word. In Acts 4:29, 30 they prayed, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus." In Acts 5:12 we read, "And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico." Speaking of Paul and Barnabas, Acts 14:3 says, "Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands." In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul defends his apostleship by saying, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." The author of Hebrews also points out that God bears witness to His word by signs and wonders, "God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Hebrews 2:4). The signs and wonders were granted to the apostles at times in order to demonstrate the truth of their proclamation, that God was behind it.

Paul's ministry was carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit. There really is no valid ministry for us except that which is carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the one who gives us the ability to minister in the name of Christ. Jesus said to His apostles, "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit is given to us to enable us to be Christ's witnesses. We have no such ability or power of our own. If we are going to be effective witnesses of Christ, we must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Gentiles were brought into obedience to Christ through Paul's preaching of the gospel. Paul says that he had "fully preached" the gospel starting from Jerusalem "and round about as far as Illyricum" (verse 19b). The word translated "fully preached" is *plarao*, to make full, complete. He had fulfilled the gospel in all the areas between Jerusalem and Illyricum. This does not mean that he had preached the gospel to every individual in that entire region, but it does mean that he had preached the gospel in every province between Jerusalem and Illyricum. The result was that there was "no further place for" him in those areas (verse 23). He had planted churches throughout the area which would carry out the task of further reaching the individuals in the area.

Paul's aspiration was to preach in places where people had never heard of Christ (verse 20). He was a pioneer missionary. He was a foundation layer. He did not want to build on "another man's foundation." He cites Isaiah 52:15 as justification for this purpose, "They who had no news of Him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand." This is not to say that Paul would never preach where the foundation had already been laid. In fact, he says in Romans 1:15 that he is eager to preach the gospel in Rome, and the foundation had been laid there. What he is saying is that his desire and aspiration was to preach in places where no one had yet heard of Christ. Of course he would preach to anyone anytime anywhere. But his main purpose was to reach the unreached and to lay the foundation of the knowledge of Christ in new areas.

Since his purpose was to preach the gospel in new areas where Christ was not named, he had "often been hindered" from coming to Rome (Verse 22). He had wanted to go to Rome for years (verse 23), but the church was planted there and so he had work to do elsewhere. Paul's desires were set aside for the sake of the work to which Christ had called him. There were probably many places he wanted to go and many things he wanted to do that had to be postponed or set aside for the sake of his ministry. This will be true for all of us who purpose to do what the Lord wants us to do. Often what we want will have to be put aside for a greater good, for the purpose of fulfilling our ministry.

In verses 23 and 24 Paul gives us three reasons that now he will be able to come to Rome for a visit. First, he says that there is "no further place for me in these regions." He had completed his work between Jerusalem and Illyricum. His work there was no longer a hindrance to a trip to Rome. The second reason that he has planned now to visit Rome is that he has had a longing to do so for many years. He had a "great desire" (KJV) to visit the Roman believers. A third reason is that Rome was on the way to Spain, and the Romans could even help him on his way to a new region where the gospel had not yet penetrated. Rome then became a part of his continuing strategy to preach where Christ was not named.

Paul's plan was to see Rome "in passing". He was not intending to settle down there or to retire there. He was on his way to Spain. He would stay "for a while" and then expected that they would help him on his way to Spain. In the immediate future, his plan was to go to Jerusalem with the contribution that Macedonia and Achaia had raised for the church there.

I think that we should note here the fact that Paul made plans. It is not ungodly or unspiritual to plan. We should have our course mapped out and our plans laid. Of course, we must be open to the leading of God's Spirit and to the possibility that God may have other plans and interruptions for us.

Paul wrote this letter while he was on his way to Jerusalem with the contribution raised from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia (verse 25). This was evidently a very important thing for Paul, as he talks about it in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Both here and in 2 Corinthians 9:1 he speaks of this mission as a "ministry to the saints." This contribution was a practical service to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Paul explains this contribution in verses 26 and 27, "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things." The churches of Macedonia and Achaia were "pleased" to make this

contribution. Paul uses this term twice here. They did not give "grudgingly or under compulsion," but cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). In fact, in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul says that they were, "begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints" (verse 4). They saw it as a privilege to help support the saints in Jerusalem. Paul didn't have to twist their arms, coerce or cajole them to get them to give. In fact, as you read 2 Corinthians 8, it sounds as if the opposite is true, that the believers in Macedonia had to twist Paul's arm to get him to take as much as they were willing to give! How different this attitude is from the attitude that we find most often in the church today!

One of the reasons that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia were so pleased to give is that they recognized the debt they owed to the believers in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the mother church. The Gentiles had shared in "their spiritual things" and were therefore "indebted to minister to them also in material things." They gave out of a grateful recognition of the great debt they owed the Jerusalem church because of the spiritual blessings they shared in Christ. It was a debt that could never be fully repaid. If we have a difficulty with giving, perhaps it is because we are not grateful enough for our spiritual blessings. Perhaps we need to "count our blessings" and recognize how great is our debt to the Lord and to others who have shared with us.

Paul felt that he had to personally take the Gentile contribution to Jerusalem in order to put his "seal" on the gift (verse 28). He still wanted to demonstrate that the grace of God was upon the Gentiles and how they had responded. The gift was the "fruit" of God's grace among the Gentiles. It was a tangible demonstration that the Gentiles were now a part of the family of God along with the Jews. The delivery of this gift was the last hindrance to a visit to Rome. Once accomplished, he could go on by way of Rome to Spain.

Paul expresses confidence that he will succeed in coming to Rome and that he will be a blessing there in verse 29. While in Jerusalem under Roman custody, the Lord assured Paul that he would go to Rome, "But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, 'Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also'" (Acts 23:11). He knew that the blessing of Christ was on the visit and that he was doing what the Lord wanted him to do.

In verses 30-32 Paul urges the Romans to pray for him. He urges this upon them "by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit." Their commitment to Christ and the love of the Spirit for Paul in their hearts should impel them to pray for him. And the prayers are to be fervent. He asks them to "strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." The term translated "strive together with me" is *sunagonizomai*, to strive with, to struggle with. The word was used of athletes struggling together for a prize. I don't suppose that we often see prayer as a struggle or a contest, but this is the picture Paul gives us here. Jesus struggled in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane before He came to the point of submitting His will to that of the Father. In fact, in Luke 22:44 Jesus' prayer is described this way, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground." The word "agony" comes from the Greek term *agonia*, meaning a contest or a struggle. Sometimes the struggle we face in prayer is exactly what Christ faced, the struggle of submitting ourselves to the will of God when we don't want to. Sometimes the struggle is to find a sense of peace and assurance that God is going to look after us in the way that we are going. This is probably the struggle that Paul was having. The Holy Spirit

told him all along the way that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem. In Acts 20:22-23 he says, "And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Knowing this, Paul urged a struggle of prayer on his behalf.

He wants them to pray for two things for him. First, "that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea," and second, "that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints" (verse 31). There were two types of Jews in Jerusalem, the "disobedient," who did not believe in Jesus, and the "saints," who did trust in Christ. Paul needed deliverance from the former and acceptance by the latter, so he urges prayer for these two things. As we read in Acts 22 and 23, we discover that the first request was granted. Paul was delivered from the disobedient Jews in Jerusalem. We see the Lord working in that the Romans protected him and that Paul's nephew heard about the plot to kill him and alerted him and the Roman commander. The second request was granted as well. Acts 21:17 indicates that Paul was warmly received by the believers in Jerusalem. Things may not have gone as smoothly as Paul had wished, but he was delivered and his gift was accepted and the Lord did answer his requests.

A principle we ought to note here before moving on is that those who hear the gospel of Christ and refuse to believe are disobedient. God expects everyone to repent and believe in His Son. Those who refuse to do so are continuing in rebellion and disobedience. We should not present the gospel as one option people may choose out of many, but as the only way that God has established to be reconciled to Him and brought into His family. We must say, as Paul said in Acts 17:30-31, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." All men everywhere have an obligation to repent and trust in Christ. If they refuse to do so, they will face the consequences of disobedience in the judgment.

Paul hopes that the result of their prayers will be that he will be able to come to them in joy and find rest with them (verse 32). Before he can come to Rome, he needs to be delivered from the disobedient and accepted by the saints. As that happens, he will come in joy.

Paul believed that it was the will of God for him to go to Rome on his way to Spain, but he also was convinced that it was the will of God that he go to Jerusalem first. We read this in Acts 21:10-14, "And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!'" Paul knew what was ahead in Jerusalem, but he was still convinced that he was on the course that the Lord wanted him to take.

What Paul looked forward to in Rome was rest. He expected to be able to cease from his labors for a while in Rome. He expected that his time in Rome would be a refreshment to him.

Paul concludes this personal narrative with the words, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." He repeats this phrase "the God of peace" in 16:20 where he says, "And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." God is the source of true peace and peace is part of His character. Peace originates with Him. He is the one who took the initiative to establish peace with us. Through Jesus Christ, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1) and the peace of God.

#### Romans 16:1-16

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. 3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; 5 also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. 12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Paul had a large circle of friends and acquaintances, even in Rome, where he had never visited. Paul here mentions 27 people by name.

Phoebe was probably traveling to Rome, and was the carrier of Paul's letter to them. In fact, her trip may have occasioned the letter. Since she was going to Rome, perhaps Paul decided to write this letter to the church there and send it with her. Paul urges the believers in Rome to "receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints." He describes Phoebe as "our sister," reminding them of the family relationship we all have in Christ. He says that she is "a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea." The word "servant" is *diakonos*, a "deaconess." She held an official position as a deaconess in Cenchrea. She was also "a helper of many, and of myself as well." So Phoebe was a sister, a servant, a saint and a helper, and therefore she is to be welcomed and helped herself by the Romans.

The first people in Rome that Paul thinks to greet are Prisca and Aquila (verses 3-5a). Paul had first met them in Corinth and had stayed with them because they were tent makers, as he was (Acts 18:1-3). They accompanied him from Corinth to Ephesus. In Ephesus Prisca and Aquila encountered Apollos and gave him more accurate

instruction about the gospel (Acts 18:26). So Paul considered them "fellow workers" with him in Christ. He mentions that at some point they had "risked their own necks" for his life. Somehow at some point they had stood up for him and had risked their own lives to rescue him. Paul thanks them and expresses thanks also on behalf of all the Gentile churches. Though they were Jewish believers, they had heartily joined Paul in his ministry to the Gentiles. It was evidently characteristic of them to host a church in their home. (See also 1 Corinthians 16:19.)

Epaenetus is the next to be greeted. Paul recalls him as the "first convert to Christ from Asia". He was the "firstfruit" of Paul's ministry in the province of Achaia, and so was especially beloved of Paul.

In verse 6 a woman named Mary is greeted, who "has worked hard for you."

In greeting Andronicus and Junias in verse 7, Paul tells us four things about them. First, they were his "kinsmen". He means at least that they were Jews, and possibly that they were Benjamites as he was. Second, they were his "fellow prisoners." Evidently they had been imprisoned with him at some point, though we know nothing more about it. Third, they are "outstanding among the apostles." They were apostles, representatives of Christ in a broad sense, and were noteworthy as such. Fourth, they were "in Christ" before Paul. They had believed in Christ at some point before Paul. They may have even seen Christ themselves. Humanly speaking, the spread of the gospel was not exclusively due to the ministry of the original apostles, but also to the ministry of many like Andronicus and Junias and many others who are not mentioned in Scripture. Obscure, unsung people are vital to God's plan on earth. It's not just the great and the well-known who are important.

Urbanus, like Prisca and Aquila, was a "fellow worker," a *sunergos*, with Paul (verse 9). Paul often uses this term in speaking of those who worked alongside him. Stachys (verse 9b) and Ampliatus (verse 8) are "beloved". Apelles is "the approved in Christ (verse 10a). In some way Apelles had been tested and approved. He had probably come through some great trial or persecution or other test of his faith and had withstood the test. There could be no question of Apelles' commitment to Christ because he had been so tested.

The household of Aristobulus held several believers Paul was acquainted with. Herodian was another "kinsman," probably a fellow Jew (verse 11a). Those of the household of Narcissus were "in the Lord" (verse 11b), that is, they were believers. Tryphaena and Tryphosa were "workers in the Lord" and Persis had "worked hard in the Lord" (verse 12). These were not simply hard workers, but they worked hard in the Lord's business, in preaching and teaching and in the church.

Rufus is called "a choice man in the Lord" (verse 13). This may be the same Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21 who was the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ. Paul greets his mother also and refers to her as his mother. Somehow she had had a motherly influence in Paul's life.

Paul mentions more individuals in verses 14 and 15, and then says in 16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." Paul gives the same directive in 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:26. It was customary in that day to greet friends with a ceremonial kiss on the cheek. Our handshake is a similar custom. It was a *holy* kiss, nothing sexual or erotic about it.

Romans 16:17-20
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Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. 19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil. 20 And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

This final exhortation in Romans is a call to stay away from those who would cause "dissensions and hindrances" in the church. There will be those in the church who will deliberately try to cause disagreements among believers and even to cause them to stumble. (The word "hindrances" here is the Greek term *skandalon*, a stumbling block.) Paul urges them to do two things; first, to "keep your eye" on such people. They are to be alert for people who would come to them and try to contradict the teaching they had already learned from the apostles. It is likely that there were people in Rome at that time who were teaching antinomian doctrine that went against the things that Paul taught. Second, they are to "turn away from them." He does not tell them to argue with them or reason with them or to try to turn them around. He just says to stay away from them. They are not to listen to them or pay attention to them.

Paul gives a couple of reasons that the Roman believers should turn away from these men in verse 18. He says that they are slaves of their own appetites and not slaves of Christ. The word "appetites" is *koilia*, meaning the belly or stomach or womb. Paul uses the same term in Philippians 3:19 when he talks about those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. He says that their "end is destruction, whose god is their *appetite*, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things." They follow the dictates of their sinful desires and not those of the Lord. This would indicate the antinomian character of their teachings.

Second, Paul says that their purpose is deception. They use "smooth and flattering speech" in order to deceive those who are unsuspecting. They are good talkers with persuasive arguments. This is why it is best to turn away from them. They are usually well trained and well versed in their arguments. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it. We need also to be well versed in our position so that we can successfully defend the truth.

Paul knows that the Roman believers have not been taken in by the deceivers. Everyone has heard of the obedience of the Roman believers (verse 19). They have been obedient to the gospel and obedient to the truth, and this was a cause of rejoicing for Paul. Jesus told us that when one sinner repents, it causes joy and celebration in heaven among the angels (Luke 15:10). So the repentance and obedience of the Romans caused Paul to rejoice. John said that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children were walking in the truth (3 John 1:4). Our greatest source of joy and rejoicing should be to see that those we care about are being faithful and obedient to the Lord.

Paul adds in verse 19, "but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil." This is perhaps an echo of Jesus' words in Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves." The word translated "innocent" is *akeraios*, meaning unmixed or pure. Paul wants the believers in Rome to be free from any mixture of evil with the good. This is

purity. Traces of evil are to be eradicated from our lives. As gold is refined to remove the impurities, so God refines us in order to remove the evil that contaminates our lives.

Paul promises that one day the "God of peace" will crush Satan under the feet of believers (verse 20). He used the phrase "God of peace" previously in his benediction in 15:33. This God of peace will thoroughly and finally defeat the adversary under the feet of His people. We will trample on the enemy of our souls because God will crush him. Paul is probably thinking of Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." It is not inconsistent for the God of peace to crush the adversary. The adversary is the one who destroys peace. He must be destroyed in order to establish peace.

Romans 16:21-24

Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. 22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. [24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.]

Paul here adds greetings from those who were with him in Corinth as he wrote the letter. Timothy, his "fellow worker," was with him. Lucius and Jason and Sosipater are "kinsmen," fellow Jews. Tertius, Paul's amanuensis, adds his own greeting. Gaius, like Prisca and Aquila, is a host to the whole church in Corinth, as well as being Paul's host. Erastus is the city treasurer, a Christian holding an important civic position. Quartus is not just "a brother," but "*the* brother." Evidently Quartus was a well-known and well-loved Christian brother to many.

Verse 24 is bracketed because it may not be original to the text.

Romans 16:25-27

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.

In this conclusion to the epistle to the Romans, Paul repeats some of the themes that he began with in chapter 1. He mentions the gospel and the "Scriptures of the prophets" as he did in 1:1 and 2. He mentions again the "obedience of faith" that is required of all the nations, as he did in 1:5. He also uses again in verse 25 a term that he used in 1:11 when he said, "For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established." Here he says that God "is able to establish you." To "establish" means to firmly fix or to strengthen. This establishment of believers is accomplished by God through the gospel and through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Christ reveals a mystery that was "kept secret for long ages past." This mystery has now been "manifested," made visible, and has been "made known" to all the nations (verses 25b, 26). This mystery has come to light "by the Scriptures of the

prophets." The prophetic Old Testament Scriptures in many places made no sense until Christ came and carried out His work on the cross. For example, Isaiah 53 is a mystery until we see it in the light of the death of Christ. Then it makes perfect sense. In turn, Isaiah 53 interprets to us the meaning of Christ's death and tells us that it was a sacrifice and an atonement for our sins.

The purpose of the disclosure of the mystery was to lead all nations to the "obedience of faith." Again, he's talking about obedience produced by faith (see our notes on 1:5). Jesus has been revealed as the Christ. The Scriptures clearly point to Him. Now all people everywhere are called to repent and believe in Him and to submit themselves to Him.

The eternal God was the one who commanded that the mystery be made known to all the nations. God Himself is the initiator of the revelation. If He had not acted, we would all be lost. We know and believe in Christ only because God has acted first. We must not think that we have sought Him out and found Him. He has sought and found us in Christ.

This God, who is able to establish us, who is eternal, who commanded that the mystery of Christ be revealed, this "only wise God" is to receive glory forever through Jesus Christ. He is to be eternally praised, and this praise is to be offered through Christ.